**MECS PRESS RELEASE TEMPLATE**

**Optical practices open for new, free NHS eye check-up**

Patients suffering minor eye problems in [insert area] will be able to receive a free NHS eye check up in a local optical practice when a new service launches on [insert date].

People with eye problems, such as red eye, sore eye or visual disturbance will be among those who will benefit from the new Minor Eye Conditions Service (MECS) delivered by local optometrists.

Launching the service, Chair of the Local Optical Committee, [insert name], said: “I am delighted that Optical practices across [insert area] will now be the first port of call for anyone with an eye problem. We have the skills, equipment and qualified staff to ensure that patients are quickly assessed and treated or referred to hospital if there is a more serious problem. This will be more convenient for patients and reduce pressure on the NHS.”

[insert name] added that around 70% will be seen within 24 hours in the convenience of their local high street without the need to make a GP appointment or wait for hours in A&E for minor treatment.

Around 4.5 million GP appointments and 270,000 A&E visits are taken up every year for eye-related problems that are better assessed by a community optometrist.

The new NHS services, provided by [insert number] optical practices and funded by [insert CCG area] will help reduce GP and A&E visits. The eye check-ups – separate and different from a sight test ­– allow all patient with minor eye conditions to visit participating optical practices for diagnosis and help.

All major high-street optical chains and many independent optical practices in the [insert area] have joined together to offer patients the free NHS service as part of a national eyecare company. Patients will be able to visit any participating local practice for the free service.

It’s part of an NHS blueprint to take services out of hospitals and provide make them more effective by carrying out routine monitoring in community settings, such as high street optical practices.

For more information about the eye health services and participating practices, visit the Primary Eyecare [insert name] website: www.[insert PEC link].org.uk. Local GP surgeries, pharmacies and other health professional can visit the site and access posters and leaflets to explain the services to patients suffering eye health problems.

[ends]

**MEDIA ENQUIRIES**

Contact, Communications Officer, Primary Eyecare….

**NOTES TO EDITORS**

**Minor Eye Conditions Service (MECS)**

What is a Minor Eye Conditions Service (MECS)?

Conditions that can be seen under the service include:

* Red eye or eyelids
* Dry eye, or gritty and uncomfortable eyes
* Irritation and inflammation of the eye
* Significant recent sticky discharge from the eye or watery eye
* Recently occurring flashes or floaters
* Ingrowing eyelashes
* Recent and sudden loss of vision
* Foreign body in the eye

If you have a major eye condition that is being regularly monitored by your optometrist or hospital eye service, this will not be covered by this service; for example, cataracts, diabetic retinopathy or glaucoma. The MECS service is different service from a sight test.

**Local Optical Committee**

The [insert name] Local Optical Committee (LOC) is a statutory body formed to represent NHS ophthalmic contractors and performers within its local area. The LOC is an independent and representative group with statutory rights, recognised and specifically referred to in NHS legislation. For more information, visit the [insert LOC website link].

**Primary Eyecare [insert name]**

The Minor Eye Conditions Service [or name of service] is managed by [insert Primary Eyecare Company name]. [insert PEC name] is a not-for-profit company incorporated by the [insert LOC name] whose remit is to act as the prime contractor on behalf of all optical practices in [insert area].

For more details and a full list of directors, visit [www.primaryeyecare.co.uk](http://www.primaryeyecare.co.uk).

**Opticians and Optometrists**

Optical practices employ optometrists and dispensing opticians. An optometrist is the professional who conducts your eye examination or sight test. During a sight test they will examine the health of your eyes and test your vision, prescribing glasses or contact lenses where necessary.

If you need glasses, and the practice has a dispensing optician, they are trained to provide and supply the most comfortable fitting and aesthetically appealing spectacles taking account of your personal, visual and vocational needs. They are also skilled in the assessment and management of the visually impaired and some will specialize in the fitting and supply of contact lenses.

**LOCSU**

The Local Optical Committee Support Unit (LOCSU) works with the Optical Confederation to support Local Optical Committees (LOCs) across England in developing local eye health services. LOCSU helps community optometrists and opticians work with local commissioners to make community eye services accessible for patients and cost effective for the NHS. LOCs represent the interests of Optometrists, Dispensing Opticians and Contractors of Ophthalmic services in local areas. For information about eye health services visit the Local Optical Committee Support Unit website: <http://www.locsu.co.uk/community-services-pathways/> or contact info@locsu.co.uk.