



**FIGHT  
FOR  
SIGHT**



**A WORLD  
EVERYONE  
CAN SEE**

**Restoring sight through  
revolutionary science**

Research Strategy 2017 - 2022

# **Fight for Sight**

## **Research Strategy 2017 - 2022**

### **Background**

It is estimated that there are two million people in the UK living with sight loss<sup>1</sup> that affects their daily lives. For half of these people, their sight loss is avoidable, primarily by getting an eye test and a prescription for glasses or contact lenses. For the other half it is not so straightforward. There are many different eye diseases and conditions that we cannot currently prevent, treat or reverse the sight loss that they cause.

### **Our Vision and our Goals**

Fight for Sight's vision is simple. We believe in a future everyone can see. We want to stop sight loss.

To meet our aim of stopping sight loss, our goals are to:

- 1) Increase understanding of how eye diseases and conditions start and develop;
- 2) Prevent eye diseases and conditions;
- 3) Enable eye diseases and conditions to be detected earlier;
- 4) Develop new and improved treatments for eye diseases and conditions;
- 5) Improve the public's understanding of how to reduce the risk of sight loss; and
- 6) Provide information to people affected by sight loss.

### **Delivering Our Goals**

Fight for Sight's primary way of delivering its goals is through funding the highest quality medical research.

We enhance our impact by considering new and innovative solutions for patients, providing information, influencing opinion and shaping policy. Where possible, we work collaboratively to develop innovative partnerships to maximise opportunities to meet our long term goals.

### **The Eye Research Landscape**

Eye disease is a significantly under-funded area of research in the UK. A report on UK Health Research Analysis in 2014 by the UK Clinical Research Collaboration showed that of the total £2.0bn spent on health research projects in the UK in 2014 only £22.7m (1%) was spent on eye research.

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<sup>1</sup>Deloitte Access economics. Incidence and risk of sight loss and blindness in the UK, (2017)

Even across sight loss charities, eye research is significantly underfunded. In 2016/17 the largest 15 sight loss charities operating in the UK had an income of over £410m yet spent only £10.0m on eye research.

## **Fight for Sight Research Strategy**

### **a) Which Eye Diseases and Conditions**

During Fight for Sight's previous strategy period (2012-17) we led on the development of the Sight Loss and Vision Priority Setting Partnership (SLV-PSP) and the production of a report setting out the questions that patients, carers, relatives and eye health professionals wanted research to address. Working with the James Lind Alliance and 40 other organisations, over 2,200 people were involved in this process and raised questions relating to over 100 eye diseases and conditions.

In an ideal world Fight for Sight would have sufficient funds to be able to fund research to address all of the questions raised by this exercise. Unfortunately this is not the case and we have had to carefully consider how best to use our limited resources.

During the period 2017-22 we have decided that, whilst we will continue to allocate funding to research that aims to address sight loss from any eye disease or condition, the majority of our funding will be allocated across a small number of areas that will form core Strategic Programmes for the charity.

In order to decide on our Strategic Programme areas we undertook a multi-criteria decision-making process, considering a range of objective and subjective factors. To support this approach we commissioned a report from the Office of Health Economics that considered such criteria as prevalence, severity, non-health burden, duration, treatment availability and group characteristics of eye diseases / conditions.

As a result of this process, we decided to develop Strategic Programmes in the following areas:

#### **Strategic Programme 1: Age-related macular degeneration**

Age-related macular degeneration (AMD) is the commonest cause of severe visual impairment in older adults in the developed world. It is estimated that there are 600,000 people in the UK with sight loss caused by AMD and this number will more than double to 1.3m by 2050<sup>2</sup>.

There are two forms of AMD (wet and dry) with the dry form affecting nearly 80% of those with the condition. Our Strategic Programme is focused on finding ways of stopping the sight loss caused by both wet and dry AMD.

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<sup>2</sup>The estimated prevalence and incidence of late stage age related macular degeneration in the UK (2012). Owen CG1 *et al.* Br J Ophthalmol. 96(5):752-6

As part of our AMD Strategic Programme, we have launched a major collaboration called Action Against AMD together with three other sight loss charities (Macular Society, Blind Veterans and Scottish War Blinded). The top AMD priority identified by the SLV-PSP was the development of a treatment to stop early stage AMD progressing. Action Against AMD's objective is to facilitate the funding of medical research with the aim of building a pipeline of therapeutic approaches.

It is expected that over the course of our strategy period we will work closely with Action Against AMD with regard to addressing early stage AMD, whilst also addressing prevention and the development of treatments for late stage AMD.

### **Strategic Programme 2: Glaucoma**

Glaucoma is the second most common cause of blindness in the world. In the UK it is estimated that there are 480,000 people with open angle glaucoma<sup>3</sup>.

Sight lost from glaucoma cannot be recovered. However, early diagnosis, monitoring and regular treatment can help prevent vision loss. Regular eye tests can help to detect glaucoma early. Our Strategic Programme is focused on improving diagnostics that can lead to early interventions and on improving therapeutics.

### **Strategic Programme 3: Inherited eye diseases**

There are a large number of genetic disorders that cause disease of different structures of the eye (including the retina, lens and cornea), which are associated with visual impairment. Although individually rare, collectively inherited eye diseases are a significant cause of sight loss. Our Strategic Programme is focused on understanding the mechanism of disease and the development of improved diagnostics and therapies for inherited eye diseases.

### **Strategic Programme 4: Sight loss linked to other diseases (Multi-morbidities)**

It is increasingly being recognised that there is a growing group of people who are affected by the loss of sight while also dealing with other conditions. The ageing population is a key driver of increasing levels of people with multiple conditions and this presents a challenge for healthcare services, researchers and research funders.

Fight for Sight has established this Strategic Programme to encourage and support research that helps increase our understanding of how sight loss co-exists with other long-term conditions including diabetes, inflammatory conditions and Alzheimer's disease. The Strategic Programme is focussed on understanding and exploiting similarities in disease mechanisms and pathways to develop new therapies.

We will assess the feasibility of additional Strategic Programmes during the course of the strategy period.

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<sup>3</sup>National Eye Health Epidemiological model <http://www.eyehealthmodel.org/>

## **b) Allocation of Research Funding**

All high quality research that seeks to address sight loss will continue to be eligible for funding from Fight for Sight. However, it is expected that the majority of our research funding will be allocated across the charity's Strategic Programmes.

## **c) What Types of Research**

We aim to fund the highest quality research, from basic to clinical that supports our goals. We will not routinely fund social or service delivery research unless it is through a strategically targeted call.

## **d) What Research Costs are Covered**

Fight for Sight does not pay the full economic costs (FEC) of research. Open competition and rigorous peer review ensures that universities can receive the Charity Research Support Fund (CRSF), a top-up fund established by the Government in recognition that charity-funded research only covers direct costs of the research including dissemination costs (e.g. open access charges). The CRSF is used for the general running costs (e.g. indirect costs, estates costs, investigator costs) incurred by the university in conducting charity-funded research and is allocated by Research England. The CRSF enables charities to maximise the impact and returns on their research funding and stay true to their public mission by ensuring their funds are used to support research as opposed to covering university central overheads. Charity support for universities in the devolved nations is allocated by their respective national higher education funding bodies.

## **e) Where Research Can Take Place**

Fight for Sight will fund researchers attached to UK institutions who undertake research in the UK and/or overseas. In exceptional circumstances Fight for Sight may decide to widen specific programmes or calls to researchers attached to institutions outside of the UK. These circumstances may include significantly large programmes or calls and/or where there is limited relevant expertise within the UK.

## **f) Funding Streams**

Fight for Sight will offer response mode funding for research projects to address sight loss. Over the course of the strategy period, Fight for Sight will also issue targeted and themed calls within its Strategic Programme areas. Current funding streams include:

- PhD Studentships
- Project Grants
- Small Grants
- Primer Fellowships
- Ophthalmology Trainee Network Awards

- Clinical Fellowships (in partnership with the MRC)
- Fulbright / Fight for Sight Award

These funding streams will be continually evaluated over the strategy period to ensure they remain relevant and effective.

## **Ensuring Scientific Quality**

Fight for Sight is a member of the Association of Medical Research Charities (AMRC) and complies with the AMRC's guidelines on peer review. The Charity passed its Peer Review Audit in 2015.

All research awards made by Fight for Sight are subject to independent peer review. The processes for each type of award differ, with some adopting a two stage approach while some include interviews as part of the selection process. For smaller awards (currently those where the request is under £50,000), the charity retains flexibility as to the level of peer review to minimise the time, resource and burden on the research community, while ensuring scientific rigour in awarding these grants.

## **Working in Partnership**

Fight for Sight is keen to build partnerships with a broad range of organisations that share our mission to stop sight loss. In 2017/18 the charity had established partnerships with 21 other organisations. We will continue to explore further opportunities to maximise funding and work with organisations who share our mission. The charity is keen to partner with others for any of its funding calls (response mode or targeted/themed calls) to support ambitious research projects on a match funding basis. Partnerships will be considered with government, charities, professional bodies and industry.

## **Maximising Dissemination of Research Findings**

Researchers funded by Fight for Sight are encouraged to publish their research in open access journals, to present their research at national and international conferences and engage with patients and the media including through our Speaker Network. We work directly with researchers and their institutions to ensure that important advances resulting from our funded research are actively communicated to the public and eye health professionals. We currently have an active dissemination programme for our funded research, which includes formal reports, press releases to the media and other organisations in the vision sector as well as on the charity's website. In addition, our supporters are kept informed of the advances in research that we and others fund through newsletters, e-newsletters and patient events.

## **Monitoring Research Outputs and Outcomes**

The results from research include both outputs (new knowledge, publications or patents) and outcomes (development of new diagnostics, therapies and improvements in healthcare provision). It is essential that we are systematic in monitoring our funded research. We will continue to collect

interim reports of active awards through Researchfish and reports from grants that have ended. We will build on mechanisms for analysing and publishing submitted data. This will allow us to also measure the level of subsequent grant funding obtained by researchers as a direct consequence of receiving our original support. It will improve our understanding of the collaborations and partnerships that have been fostered including; industrial partnerships, spin out companies as well as tracking the career progression of PhD studentships we supported.

Registered charity number 1111438

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British Eye Research Foundation operating as Fight for Sight is a company limited by guarantee registered in England (Company Number: 05525503) and a charity registered in England and Wales (Registered Charity Number: 1111438) whose registered office is 18 Mansell Street, London E1 8AA.

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