



PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

21 DECEMBER 2009

‘MPs and Peers listen to people with learning disabilities on eye health’.

Members of Parliament and national charities are to hold an event in Parliament to listen to people with learning disabilities and their carers. They, alongside health and social care professionals, and NHS managers will have the opportunity to give their views and share their experiences at a unique listening event to be held in Parliament on **Tuesday 19 January 2010**.

The event is being hosted by SeeAbility, Mencap, RNIB and the Eye Health Alliance and supported by the All Party Parliamentary Group for Eye Health & Visual Impairment and the All Party Parliamentary Group for Learning Disabilities.

Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Eye Health and Visual Impairment Sandra Gidley MP (Liberal Democrat, Romsey) said:

“This listening event will highlight the problems of the one in three people with a learning disability who have a sight problem yet have difficulty accessing care and treatment. As a consequence, the majority have never even had a sight test. They may not be able to communicate that they have a problem with their eyes yet improving their vision can make a huge difference to their quality of life and improve their independence.”

David Scott-Ralphs, Chief Executive of SeeAbility, said:

“We know from SeeAbility's work through our **eye 2 eye Campaign** that people with learning disabilities face many barriers in accessing good, appropriate eye care. People with learning disabilities are most likely to have sight problems and least likely to get the right help and support with their eye care. This event is an important opportunity to raise these vital

issues with policy and decision makers and to suggest ways to improve awareness and practice nationally.”

David Congdon, Mencap's Head of Campaigns and Policy, said:

“This event is a valuable opportunity for everyone involved with people with learning disabilities, including their families, support workers and carers, to express their views on this matter. We hope that many people will take part in this event and help contribute to the debate on this vitally important issue for people with a learning disability.”

Heather Marshall from the Eye Health Alliance, said:

“Eye health is important for everyone but for people who have difficulty communicating that they have a problem with their eyes, it is even more crucial that they have appropriate eye care. A person’s sight is often overlooked yet improving their eye health can make a huge difference to their quality of life and increase their independence.”

The event aims to address the issues around eye health needs and support of people with learning disabilities. We need people with a learning disability and their carers or supporters to share experiences of eye care services, such as having sight tests or attending hospital eye clinics. **In particular the event needs to hear about:**

What sight problems do you have?

Why it is particularly important for you to have good vision and eye health?

Do you have regular sight tests i.e. at least every two years and if not, why not?

Whether you find it difficult to access local NHS eye care services in the community and if so what are the problems?

How could eye care services be improved for you?

We also want to find out more about:

How many people with a learning disability have a sight problem and what research is available on this issue?

What else needs to happen to improve eye care and eye health for people with learning disabilities.

To have your say, visit www.seeability.org/listen
Alternatively call 01372 755066 or send a video recording to the address below.

Information is required by Monday 18th January to be used at this important event but can be submitted until 31st January.

For more details about the event and to register a place please contact:

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- ENDS -

Issued by SeeAbility, for further information please contact:

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NOTES TO EDITORS

- SeeAbility is the operating name for The Royal School for the Blind, a national charity which has for over 200 years provided support for people who are blind or partially sighted and have additional disabilities.
- SeeAbility offers a wide range of quality residential and community services for people with a visual impairment and additional disabilities. Our aim is to provide each individual with the support they need to develop essential life skills for greater independence and fulfilling life.

- SeeAbility's eye 2 eye Campaign, a community-based initiative, is improving eye care and vision for people with a learning disability through access to information, specially-adapted sight tests and low-vision support.
- SeeAbility currently operates a range of services in London, Sheffield, Birmingham, Bristol, East Sussex, Hampshire, Devon, Somerset, Surrey and West Sussex.
- SeeAbility is a member of UK Vision Strategy and Eye Health Alliance which promote awareness of and the importance of regular accessible sight tests.
- SeeAbility's Head Office is based in Epsom, Surrey and for further information call 01372 755000 or go to www.seeability.org