



**SIGHT
RESEARCH
UK**



Sight Research UK Research Strategy 2026-2031

Our Vision

A clearer future for those living with sight loss.

Our Research Mission

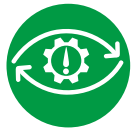
Using our Scientific network across the UK, we champion and accelerate innovative eye disease research. Through targeted investment into the most promising science, we will deliver meaningful impact for those living with sight loss.





Our Values

We believe in S.I.G.H.T



Sustain

We sustain long-term progress against sight loss and blindness by investing in impactful research and building a future where sight loss can be prevented, treated, or even cured. We invest in and develop our team of motivated, skilled staff and volunteers to deliver our strategies for sustained organisational impact.



Independence of thought

We champion independence and inclusivity of thought by being autonomous with our decision-making. We empower researchers to explore pioneering ideas that can transform lives.



Galvanise

We galvanise our national networks to deliver best practice, accelerate breakthroughs & drive meaningful change in the landscape of UK eye health. We incite research participation and involvement through engaging with diverse, inclusive communities.



Humanise

We humanise science by ensuring research leads to real improvements in people's lives.



Transform

We transform the future of eye health through research, partnerships, and patient-driven progress.

Strategic Objectives

Strategic Objective 1

To focus on identifying and investing in research that has the greatest potential to change the experience of those living with sight loss through reviewing our processes and taking advantage of the evolution of technology and commercial opportunities.

Strategic Objective 2

To expand accessibility and develop closer relationships with grant holders to gain a clearer understanding of opportunities and limitations in order to target research investment where it will have the most impact.

Strategic Objective 3

To promote, educate, and inform about the outcomes of research we support through improved communication and systems development, bringing research to a wider audience and increasing our supporter network.

Strategic Objective 4

To set realistic growth expectations to sustain the core work of the charity and align with our future grant-giving ambitions. We will increase turnover to £1.5 million in 3 years through utilising additional resources and seeking new opportunities and partnerships.

Strategic Objective 5

To raise and develop our profile and brand identity using our unique selling points of funding translational research across all eye conditions via our marketing channels and platforms.

Strategic Objective 6

Review, invest in, and develop the skills of our people through a culture of involvement, coaching, and recognition to reflect the scale and diversification of our organisation.



Background

Sight Research UK was established in 1986 as the National Eye Research Centre, founded through the generosity of patients who recognised the urgent need for better treatments for sight threatening conditions. At that time, options for preventing sight loss were extremely limited. Conditions such as age related macular degeneration (AMD) and glaucoma routinely led to irreversible blindness, and surgical interventions such as cataract operations carried significant risks and poor outcomes.

Over the past four decades, research has transformed the landscape of eye care. Anti-VEGF therapy (approved in 2005) now preserves sight for millions of

people with wet AMD. Surgical innovation has made cataract procedures safe, efficient and highly effective, with second eye operations now standard practice on the NHS following research we supported in the late 1990s. More recently, Sight Research UK funded work helped adapt anti-TNF therapies for uveitis, providing a vital treatment option for patients unresponsive to steroids.

Despite this progress, most eye conditions remain incurable or unpreventable. There is still no treatment for dry AMD, no way to regenerate the optic nerve, and limited therapeutic options for inherited retinal diseases. Continued investment in research is essential.

The 2020–2026 Research Strategy

A Recap

When we launched our Research Strategy five years ago, the eye research sector faced severe underfunding across the entire pipeline—from discovery science to pre-clinical development. Researchers were competing for statutory grants against better resourced fields, creating a bottleneck that prevented promising discoveries from progressing toward patient benefit.

Over the past five years, Sight Research UK has invested more than

£2,410,079

into 48 research projects across the UK.

With each £1 invested generating approximately £2.52 in further research funding, which represents a 152% return on investment

To address this, Sight Research UK focused its funding on areas with the greatest potential for translational impact:

- Laboratory-based science with a clear pathway from bench to bedside and strong potential for early-phase clinical trials
- Applied healthcare research capable of delivering rapid improvements in patient outcomes
- Clinical research eligible for NIHR Clinical Research Network support, leveraging our status as an NIHR non commercial partner

This strategic focus enabled us to target the critical gap between discovery and clinical application—historically one of the main barriers preventing innovative science from becoming life changing therapies.



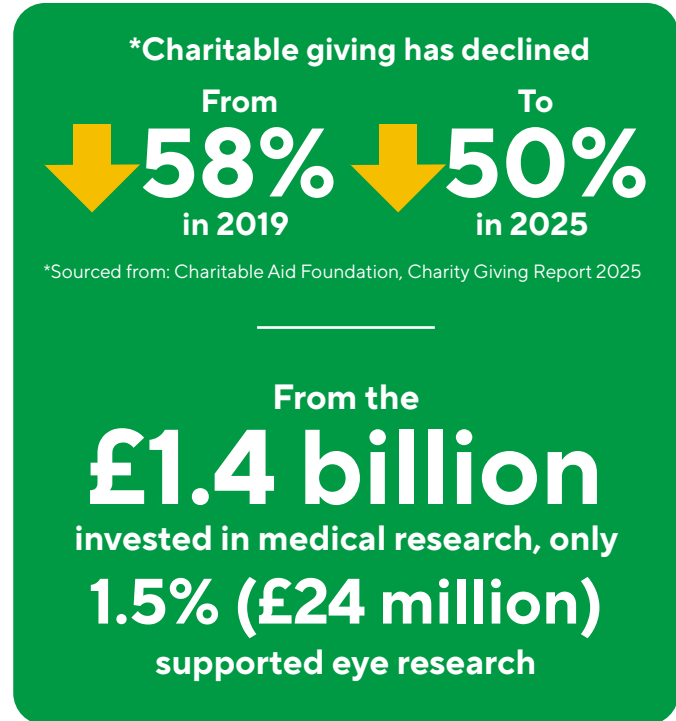
Introduction to the Research Strategy 2026–2031

The evidence presented in the 2020-2026 Impact Report makes one thing clear: Sight Research UK's work is valued, essential and urgently needed. The progress achieved over the past five years shows the power of targeted investment in eye research—and the importance of sustaining momentum in a rapidly changing landscape.

A Changing Environment

The period from 2020–2026 has been shaped by significant socioeconomic and political pressures. The continuing effects of COVID-19, combined with a decline in charitable giving (*from 58% in 2019 to 50% in 2025), have reduced the capacity of many organisations to sustain grant making programmes. To remain resilient, our strategy must balance beneficiary impact with strong financial governance and a clear risk management approach to yield a financial return on investment.

Government priorities have also shifted. Sight loss research remains under-recognised within Government, and England is now the only UK nation without a National Eye Health Care Plan. In contrast, Wales has invested in a National Clinical Strategy for Ophthalmology and set out a long-term approach to optometry services. This disparity highlights the need for continued advocacy and investment from the charity sector.





Although precise figures are difficult to isolate, estimates from 2018 suggest that only 1.5% (£24 million) of the £1.4 billion invested in medical research supported eye research.

The Eyes Have It coalition argues that public investment must urgently double to £50 million per year by 2030, particularly as sight loss is projected to affect 3.5 million people by 2030.



The Eyes Have It coalition argues that public investment must urgently double to at least

£50 million
per year by 2030



Particularly as the number of people living with sight loss is

projected to reach
3.5 million by 2030

New Opportunities and Expectations

In the UK Government budget of November 2025, it was announced up to £137 million for its AI for Science Strategy. This strategy potentially introduces new opportunities for medical research charities in their positioning for investment and longer term sustainability through commercialisation. Key elements include:

A mission to develop trial ready drugs within 100 days by 2030

Increased focus on AI driven experimental infrastructure

Strengthened public private partnerships and clearer routes to commercialisation

Rising public research and development investment, reaching £22.6 billion by 2029–30, alongside Innovate UK programmes such as the £130m Growth Catalyst and £500m Research and Development Missions Accelerator

For charities like ours, this initiative could increase the likelihood that early-stage research can attract follow-on funding and progress more rapidly toward clinical and commercial impact.

New entrepreneurship and enterprise fellowships to support translation science and spinout companies



Where Sight Research UK Adds the Greatest Value

Our review of the political, economic and technological landscape, combined with benchmarking and extensive consultation with researchers, advisory boards and Seed panels, has clarified where our funding is most catalytic.

- Seed grants de-risk novel ideas, generate essential preliminary data and position researchers to secure larger Government or industry backed awards.
- Early and later stage translational grants bridge the gap between discovery science and commercial readiness, supporting pathways toward enterprise fellowships, spin outs and Innovate UK programmes.



A clear direction for 2026–2031

The landscape points us toward a clear direction: Sight Research UK will continue to prioritise and expand its seed and translational funding, enabling downstream investment and accelerating future patient impact.

In the future, larger partnership grants will allow us to support strategically significant projects with strong potential to progress into innovative solutions.

Our mission continues with renewed urgency, greater clarity and a strengthened commitment to delivering meaningful impact for people living with sight loss.





Our Strategic Objectives, Delivered Through Our Grant Programmes

Strategic Objective

1. To focus on identifying and investing in research that has the greatest potential to change the experience of those living with sight loss through reviewing our processes and taking advantage of the evolution of technology and commercial opportunities.

Operational Delivery

Our Research Strategy will deliver two Seed Award rounds per year for grants up to £15,000 to support early-stage eye research for UK-based researchers and clinicians.

The Seed Award supports a diverse portfolio of research projects, including:

- Proof of concept, fundamental or basic, and disease modelling research with a clear pathway to patient benefit.
 - Laboratory-based, pre-clinical research projects, building on existing proof-of-concept data, with a clear pathway to patient benefit. In particular, we will consider discrete elements of larger translational research projects such as:
 - Projects that are relevant to and highly promising in the clinical setting (i.e., the applicants have already shown that the idea might be used as therapy in patients).
 - Projects that are focused on therapeutic entity/drug development/repurposing. We welcome projects that assess properties such as potency, efficacy, selectivity, or bioavailability of compounds identified by previous research as potentially strong candidates for therapeutic applications.
- We encourage applications from non-tenured early career researchers.

Translational Readiness Awards Level 3 and 4

Our new Research Strategy introduces a new Translational Research Award for Translational Research levels 3 and 4 for an award up to £150K.

This new Award is aimed at researchers who are an earlier stage with their work and concept development but who expect to be able to progress their work to 5,6 and 7 within an 18-24 month period. Subject to panel assessment towards the end of their project, researchers may be invited to apply for follow-on funding as part of the next stage Translational round when their project achieves milestones to demonstrate TRL 5,6 and 7 readiness.

Translational Readiness Awards Level 5, 6 and 7

Sight Research UK will continue to offer Translational Research Awards at levels 5,6 and 7 for up to £250K which supports research projects with a clearly defined pathway to achieving patient benefit in the UK.

- The goal is to help to accelerate the translation of scientific findings to the early stages of development of new therapies, devices, and diagnostics.
- Applications to the Translational Research Award must already have proof of concept preliminary data.
- We welcome projects that have robust commercial potential, likely to attract large scale follow-on funding from other charitable, statutory or industry funders.



Strategic Objectives to support Research Grant Programmes

Strategic Objective

2. To expand accessibility and develop closer relationships with grant holders to gain a clearer understanding of opportunities and limitations in order to target research investment where it will have the most impact.

Operational Delivery

Sight Research UK wish to support and advocate for the important work we fund. We have developed a Researcher Visitor programme to gain a comprehensive understanding of the research we are funding with a view to a longer term partnership with researchers and their projects. This knowledge and feedback shapes our future strategy and the sustainability of the charity.

Strategic Objective

3. To promote, educate, and inform about the outcomes of research we support through improved communication and systems development, bringing research to a wider audience and increasing our supporter network.

Operational Delivery

Sight Research UK will produce and publish annual Impact Reports, used to inform audiences of the work we fund and to promote the impact and achievements of the researchers we support. This creates stronger long-term links with researchers, promotes advocacy and ensures sustainability for the charity.

Strategic Objective

4. To set realistic growth expectations to sustain the core work of the charity and align with our future grant-giving ambitions. We will increase turnover to £1.5 million in 3 years through utilising additional resources and seeking new opportunities and partnerships.

Operational Delivery

Ensuring long-term sustainability for the charity, so that we can continue to support groundbreaking research requires a robust fundraising strategy. We will develop new opportunities and innovative approaches to safeguard the legacy of the charity, including harnessing commercial and investment opportunities.

Strategic Objective

5. To raise and develop our profile and brand identity using our unique selling points of funding translational research across all eye conditions via our marketing channels and platforms.

Operational Delivery

We seek to increase visibility amongst the research community, encouraging applications for our funding by attending and supporting networking events and conferences. We will diversify our supporter audience to encourage greater inclusion and engagement with our work and that of the researcher.

Strategic Objective

6. Review, invest in and develop the skills of our people through a culture of involvement, coaching and recognition to reflect the scale and diversification of our organisation.

Operational Delivery

We place value in and have gratitude for our people. As our organisation grows and develops, so do we invest in our staff and volunteers to ensure a happy and skilled team who go above and beyond in their delivery to our stakeholders. This includes encouraging individual and team CPD, investing in capacity building, growing our professional panels and encouraging early career scientists to gain experience on our panels by introducing mentoring.



Turning Science into Sight

We will continue to fund projects with the best chance of accelerating patient benefit

Grant rounds:

Our funding schemes will run at specified times each year. Applications are reviewed by an independent Research Advisory Board or our Seed Panel and by external peer reviewers. The final funding decisions rest with our Board of Trustees, who consider the advice received from our expert advisors and allocate funding according to our financial capacity.

Sight Research UK is proud to be a member of the Association of Medical Research Charities, and it is committed to funding the highest quality research delivered at the highest standards.

We make our funding choices in a fair and transparent way, relying on the independent advice of global experts.





A Thank You For Our Donors and Supporters

We are sincerely grateful for the contribution and the impact our donors and supporters make to our Mission. This strengthens our work and drives meaningful change. To sustain this progress, we invite supporters to continue their valued partnership with us. This ongoing commitment is essential to the work we do.

Get in touch

hello@sightresearchuk.org

sightresearchuk.org



**SIGHT
RESEARCH
UK**

Registered Charity Number 1156134