

**EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM TO**  
**THE OPTICAL CHARGES AND PAYMENTS (AMENDMENT)**  
**REGULATIONS (NORTHERN IRELAND) 2015**

**S.R. 2015 No. 266**

**1. Introduction**

- 1.1. This Explanatory Memorandum has been prepared by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety to accompany the Statutory Rule (details above) which is laid before the Northern Ireland Assembly.
- 1.2. The Statutory Rule is made under Articles 62, 98, 106 and 107(6) of, and Schedule 15 to the Health and Personal Social Services (Northern Ireland) (Order) 1972 and is subject to the negative resolution procedure.

**2. Purpose**

- 2.1. These Regulations amend the Optical Charges and Payments Regulations (Northern Ireland) 1997 ("the principal Regulations") to increase the value of optical vouchers issued to certain patients, depending on their financial circumstances, to help towards the cost of glasses or contact lenses under the Health Service.

**3. Background**

- 3.1. The value of the voucher varies according to the patient's optical prescription. (The higher the annual increase in the value of optical vouchers, the greater the benefit to the patient). There are nine voucher bands ranging from £38.70 to £213.40 and depending on the strength of the prescription, voucher holders can either get a basic pair of spectacles from within the voucher value or top up the voucher to get a more expensive pair.

**4. Consultation**

- 4.1. No public consultation has taken place as these Regulations do not alter existing policy. The Department consulted with Optometry Northern Ireland and the British Medical Association as representatives of optometrists and ophthalmic medical practitioners on the increase in voucher values.

**5. Equality Impact**

- 5.1. An assessment was not considered necessary as these Regulations do not alter existing policy.

**6. Regulatory Impact**

- 6.1. An assessment was not considered necessary as these Regulations do not alter existing policy.

**7. Financial Implications**

- 7.1. The extra cost arising from these increases is anticipated to be approximately £108,000 and can be accommodated within Health & Social

Care Board planning figures. The Department of Finance and Personnel have agreed to join us in the signing of these Regulations.

**8. Section 24 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998**

8.1. Considered compliant with Section 24 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998.

**9. EU Implications**

9.1. Not applicable

**10. Parity or Replicatory Measure**

10.1. It has been the Department's policy since the inception of Health Service optical vouchers in 1986 to have arrangements regarding their increases here aligned with the rest of the UK. By implementing these changes we will be ensuring that amendments to the principal regulations continue to remain unified and ensure that the population of Northern Ireland is not disadvantaged.

**11. Additional Information**

11.1. Not applicable