

**EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM TO**  
**THE OPTICAL CHARGES AND PAYMENTS (AMENDMENT)**  
**REGULATIONS (NORTHERN IRELAND) 2018**

**S.R. 2018 No. 211**

**1. Introduction**

- 1.1. This Explanatory Memorandum has been prepared by the Department of Health 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, by 1%, 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 £39.50 to £217.70 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. An existing provision in the principal Regulations for small frame supplements is also amended to clarify policy intent by allowing practitioners to issue and certify vouchers for glasses where the frame needs to be specially manufactured.

**4. Consultation**

- 4.1. No public consultation has taken place as these Regulations do not alter existing policy. The Department has however 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 £103k and can be accommodated within Health & Social Care Board planning figures. The Department of Finance 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. These regulations do replicate given that a decision was made to freeze NHS Optical Voucher values in Great Britain (GB). There are therefore currently no corresponding provisions set out or contained in any equivalent GB Regulations.

## **11. Additional Information**

- 11.1. Not applicable