

Policy influencing 2024 annual summary

Key achievements in influencing policy
relating to eye health, refractive error
and neglected tropical diseases

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Introduction

This report is a summary of the key successes in policy influencing achieved across Sightsavers' country offices in 2024 which relate to the thematic areas of eye health, refractive error, neglected tropical diseases and sexual and reproductive health rights, with support from the Policy and Global Advocacy team, Campaigns team, Global Technical Leads and other teams. The report aims to provide an overview of the most significant achievements, although it is not exhaustive and there are many other examples of progress made towards Sightsavers' health policy influencing goals which have not been included in the interests of keeping the summary at a manageable length. Sightsavers recognises that policy change requires long-term investment from multiple actors including government, civil society and international NGO partners, and it is important to note that these achievements are not solely attributed to the input of Sightsavers. For a comprehensive overview of Sightsavers' work on policy influencing in 2021, 2022, 2023 and 2024 please refer to the [Policy influencing data hub](#).

Bangladesh

Development of a comprehensive district eye care plan

In 2024, a comprehensive district eye care plan was developed following the World Health Organisation's Integrated People Centered Eye Care (IPEC) approach for all programme districts. The civil surgeon office of our programme districts has proactively been involved in developing the district level eye care plan and collecting the Cataract Surgical Rate (CSR) data. Sightsavers and its partners are coordinating with district administrations to make the District Disability Committees functional in 16 programme districts and support the roll out of the district eye care plan. In spite of the many challenges and changes in the political situation, committee meetings took place in Khulna, Kurigram, Rangpur and Narsinghdi districts in 2024, with representation from civil society organisations, community-based organisations and Organisations for Persons with Disabilities.

Guinea Bissau

Integration of NTD indicators into the DHIS2

Sightsavers made progress in 2024 towards the goal of integrating indicators on Neglected Tropical Diseases (NTDs) into the DHIS2 national health reporting system in Guinea Bissau.

Sightsavers had positive engagements with the National Health Institute and other health authorities and facilitated a workshop in which the NTD indicators were reviewed, and these are now pending integration into the DHIS2, with a timeline for this to be done in 2025.

India

Development of state eye health advocacy and policy engagement plans

In 2024, state eye health networks in five programme states developed their contextual annual advocacy and policy engagement plans, actively leading policy dialogues and awareness sessions to push the state Universal Eye Health (UEH) agenda forward. At the National Eye Health Conference in July 2024, hosted by Sightsavers India and Vision 2020, we presented eight critical research and program learning papers, influencing national and global policy discussions on geographical equity and localisation of eye care, women's eye health, vision-induced road accidents, government funding, policy gaps, and emerging global eye health targets. With over 1000 stakeholders, including policymakers, practitioners, and public health specialists, the conference debated critical issues like human resource capacities, digital disruptions, climate-compliant eye care, and taxation in eye health. Sightsavers India's contributions helped shape policy discussions, strengthening the national UEH agenda. National and state governments have taken the inputs and recommendations from the network and have committed to hold discussions during the National Eye Health Action Plan redevelopment.

Embedding of driver eye screening in road safety initiatives

As a key member of the National Vision & Road Safety Alliance (VARSA), Sightsavers India spearheaded the high-impact national consultation in 2024 at the Indian Institute of Technology in Chennai, championing a Vision Zero Death approach to road safety by integrating eye care into road safety policies. Bringing together government leaders, civil society, industry, transport, academia, and eye health experts, the consultation explored vision-induced road safety risks, showcased best practices, and fostered multi-sectoral collaborations. Several key commitments were made, including the promotion of safer roads by prioritizing clear vision for drivers and pedestrians, providing regular eye screenings for truck drivers and commercial vehicle operators, raising awareness on impaired vision as a major road safety hazard, and screening an additional 3 million commercial drivers and allied workers by 2030. This landmark initiative solidifies Sightsavers India's position in advancing vision-driven road safety, setting the stage for policy action, systemic change, and a safer future on Indian roads.

Integration of glaucoma screening into state level blindness prevention programmes

Sightsavers facilitated four high-impact consultations across Odisha, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, and Karnataka, engaging Health Ministers, policymakers, and over 100 stakeholders from health, civil society, UN agencies, pharma, and media. State Health

Ministers and key Government Health Authorities pledged policy action, recognizing glaucoma as the third leading cause of blindness. The governments of Karnataka, Uttar Pradesh, Odisha and Madhya Pradesh have committed to integrating glaucoma screening and management into their blindness prevention programmes, starting with government referral centres. This coordinated policy action and institutional engagement mark a major step toward preventing avoidable blindness and integrating comprehensive glaucoma care into India's public eye health system. A national level consultation is planned in 2025 in which all insights, suggestions and findings from the state consultation would be presented to the national stakeholders towards policy and institutional reforms around glaucoma management in the country.

Kenya

Implementation of the National Strategic Plan for Eye Health

Kenya's current National Strategic Plan for Eye Health runs from 2020 to 2025. In 2024, Sightsavers continued to support the ophthalmic services unit in delivering the plan, as well as beginning the process for reviewing and developing a new strategic plan for the next five years. Sightsavers engaged with the Ministry of Health, eye health NGOs and other key stakeholders through the National Eye Health Working Group at the mid-term review of the eye health strategy and will continue to support the process of developing the new strategy in 2025. As part of this, Sightsavers is working to ensure that the National Eye Health Working Group meets regularly and has the capacity to lead the country's long term eye health plans.

Finalisation of the national eye health policy

Sightsavers has led the National Eye Health Working Group in drafting a national eye health policy for several years, and development of the policy was largely completed in 2023. In 2024, a further important step was taken with the completion of Rapid Assessments of Avoidable Blindness (RAABs), and the Ministry of Health shared the data from these surveys. The next step will be the incorporation of the RAAB data into the national eye health policy so that it can be finalised and launched.

Liberia

Inclusion of county level eye care costs in the national operational plan

In 2023, five counties in the south east (Grand Gedeh, River Gee, Maryland, Grand Kru and Sinoe) introduced a budget line for eye health into their respective county budgets. In the two remaining counties where the project is active (Nimba and Bong), eye care is delivered by private rather than government partners. In 2024, the funding for the county eye health budgets was integrated into the national operational plan. This is an important step forward

for the sustainable provision of eye care in Liberia. Sightsavers will continue its advocacy work in 2025 to ensure that government funding is allocated and disbursed.

Development of eye health indicators

As part of the A Better World programme funded by Irish Aid, one of Sightsavers' advocacy objectives is to ensure that data on the cataract surgical rate and other eye health indicators is collected and reported through the Health Management Information System (HMIS). In 2024, the Ministry of Health took some important steps forward, reviewing 20 proposed eye health indicators, designing the ledger and developing new reporting and summary forms to be used. The integration of the indicators into the HMIS is due to take place in 2025, and further advocacy work will continue to ensure that the reporting mechanism for the HMIS is fully operationalised.

Mozambique

Harmonisation of the ophthalmology training curriculum in line with the regional standard

In 2024, Sightsavers continued to advocate for the review of the ophthalmology training curriculum in Mozambique. At present, the training curriculum for ophthalmologists is outdated and does not conform to the regional standard. In 2023, Sightsavers contracted two ophthalmologists as consultants to work on the harmonisation of the Mozambican ophthalmology training curriculum in line with the regional standard set by the College of Ophthalmology for Eastern, Central and Southern Africa (COECSA). In 2024, further progress was made with the conduction of a situational analysis to understand the specific gaps in the current curriculum, and the development of recommendations to inform the curriculum review process. Sightsavers will continue its advocacy work in 2025 to facilitate the review process.

Nigeria

Investment in eye care in Plateau State

The Plateau State Eye Health committee, supported by partners Sightsavers and the Christian Blind Mission International (CBMI) engaged stakeholders to advocate for the creation of a dedicated budget line for eye health with appropriate funding. This effort resulted in the successful approval of the eye health budget line at the state level, accompanied by approval of the financing. Beyond this, the Plateau State Ministry of Health confirmed that they would post human resources for eye health across all senatorial zones of the state, as well as continuing rotational visits from ophthalmologists.

Dissemination of the Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights policy in Kaduna State

Following the sign-off of the Sexual and Reproductive Health Rights (SRHR) policy in Kaduna State in December 2023, Sightsavers supported the state Ministry of Health with the dissemination and roll out in 2024. The Honourable Commissioner for Health in Kaduna State launched and disseminated the validated document. Moreover, a costed implementation plan has been included in the state's Annual Operational Plans. Building on the success in Kaduna State, Sightsavers is looking to expand its work on SRHR policy in other states, and there may also be an opportunity to engage on the national level SRHR policy.

Pakistan

Inclusion of eye health medicines into the essential drug list

Following advocacy from Sightsavers and partner organisations, the essential drug list for the province of Punjab was revised to include eye health medicines in 2023. In 2024, Sightsavers supported the roll out of the revised drug list in the province of Sindh, with Rural Health Centres integrating eye health medicines into the essential drug list. In this way, Sightsavers is influencing the delivery of eye care services across multiple provinces in Pakistan.

Incorporation of eye health indicators into the HMIS

Building on the advocacy achievements in 2023, Sightsavers continued to advocate for the incorporation of eye health indicators into the District Health Information System (DHIS2). Now that eye care services have been established at all rural health centres, Sightsavers initiated discussions with the district health authorities to activate the eye care indicator in the DHIS2. Beyond this, Sightsavers proposed new indicators to be introduced, to capture the delivery of refractive error, cataract and diabetic retinopathy services in the DHIS2.

Launch of the first diploma level dispensing opticianry course

In collaboration with the National Committee for Eye Health and the College of Ophthalmology and Allied Vision Sciences (COAVS), Sightsavers developed a two-year opticianry course in 2023. The course was approved by the relevant regulatory body, in this case the Punjab Medical Faculty. Until now, there was no formal academic programme in opticianry, and this course is the first-ever diploma programme in Pakistan, which will produce a skilled workforce of opticians. The course was formally launched in 2024.

Senegal

Development of an eye health budget

In 2024, the Ministry of Health took an important step forwards with the development of a draft budget for the promotion of eye health services in Senegal. The process involved collaboration between the ministries of health, education and finance, and Sightsavers played a role in facilitating the input from civil society groups and Organisations for Persons with Disabilities (OPDs). The development of the draft budget reflects the commitment to finance eye care on the part of the Ministry of Health and paves the way towards the funding and implementation of the national eye health strategy.

Sierra Leone

Launch of the human resources for eye health plan

Sierra Leone's human resource for eye health plan was validated and approved in 2024, and is now in use. The Human Resources for Eye Health plan supports the deployment and effective eye health delivery all 16 of Sightsavers' project districts. In addition to ophthalmic nurses and ophthalmic community health officers, optometrists and optometrist technicians have also been deployed across most districts. With support from Sightsavers, an ophthalmology residency training programme was launched during in 2024. Once this is implemented in the coming years, the cost for training will be drastically reduced as it will no longer be necessary to fund training overseas, thus increasing the resources available for human resources for eye health in the country.

Tanzania

Progress towards the resourcing for eye health in the Health Sector Strategic Plan

In 2024, Sightsavers conducted an eye care situation analysis across project districts and facilitated a policy dialogue to share feedback and request government commitment to address the gaps identified in the analysis. The analysis identified gaps in medical supplies, demand, infrastructure, human resources, health information systems, data quality, governance, and healthcare financing. Results were shared at a national and sub-national meeting, highlighting the effectiveness of eye care services and emphasizing the need for consistent quality and sustained services. Government representatives committed to tackling these challenges by tackling the shortage of eye care commodities, encouraging district councils to increase their eye health budgets, and following up with the Medical Stores Department (MSD) to increase the supply of ophthalmic medical and consumables. Beyond this, the National comprehensive catalogue was reviewed and updated to guide procurement processes for eye care commodities, and health facilities in 17 councils were supported to

review their standard eye health stock and procurement plans to include eye care commodities.

Zambia

Development of a Rehabilitation Strategic Plan

Through participating in the Technical Working Group (TWG) chaired by the Ministry of Health, Sightsavers contributed to developing the Zambia rehabilitation strategic Plan 2022-2026. Key areas included in the plan are rehabilitation, governance, assistive technology, workforce, information and financing. It was identified that most of the workforce is concentrated in urban areas, and that rural areas are deprived of services. Meanwhile for assistive technology, the country does not have the minimum standards, thus opening up the country to substandard equipment. In finance, the need for a separate budget for rehabilitation is another area that has been identified. Discussions with the relevant government ministries resulted in the National Rehabilitation Strategy adopting measures to address the issues identified, including the development of an assistive technology product list.

Launch and implementation of the National Eye Health Strategic Plan

2024 marked the finalisation and launch of the 2022 – 2026 National Eye Health Strategic Plan. Sightsavers supported the development process and participated in the technical review committee, facilitating input from OPDs, and ensuring the inclusion of a focus on the collection of disability disaggregated data. Crucially, the Ministry of Health has committed to financing 65% of the budget to deliver the plan, with partner organisations financing the remainder. This is a huge step, as previously, 100% of the eye health budget had been covered by partner organisations. Sightsavers has also been involved in discussions around implementation of the strategic plan, following up on the commitment to increase the provision of human resources, and leading to the recruitment of four additional ophthalmic staff at district level.