

ACH Works Alongside Action for Blind People to Tackle Poor Eye Health in Those Most At-risk

Last week marked **National Eye Health Week**, a campaign to help improve the nation's eye health. For the sixth annual event of its kind, eye care charities, organisations and health professionals from across the UK joined together to promote the importance of eye health and the need for regular sight tests for all. Hundreds joined in a social media campaign to raise awareness of the importance of taking care of eye health, using the hashtags #VisionMatters and #EyeHealth.

One of the key messages taken from this week is that the loss of eyesight is often preventable. In fact, **a staggering 80% of visual impairment is avoidable**. Furthermore, **people with poor eye sight are 90% more likely to live in poverty**. Research shows that marginalised groups of society in the UK have experienced unnecessary and significantly poorer eye health due to a lack of education on both prevention and treatment of eye health problems. An ingrained perception of a lack of entitlement to healthcare facilities, as well as cultural attitudes towards health, can also contribute significantly to poor eye health, particularly within BME and newly arrived communities.

Following National Eye Health Week, organisations from across the globe will join together on the **8th October** for **World Sight Day**. World Sight Day (WSD) is an annual day of awareness to focus global attention on blindness and vision impairment. This is a part of the World which has a rolling theme of **Universal Eye Health** and this year, the call to action for World Sight Day is **Eye care for all**.

Ashley Community Housing is proud to be a part of **International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness'** aim to ensure "access to eye health, particularly for the most marginalised, is increased significantly, fulfilling their right to sight" through our recently formed partnership/new pilot project with Action for Blind People. The purpose of this project in partnership with **Action for Blind People** is to engage with East African and other newly arrived refugee and migrant communities who are at significant genetic risk of common eye conditions (Glaucoma and Cataracts) which cause sight loss. We will create a stable, capable ecosystem of community organisations capable of maintaining a sustainable infrastructure to champion eye health.

Key Elements of the project will be:

- Awareness raising and signposting at the heart of the community delivered in community languages embedded into established training provision

- Community Eye Health Champions (CEHC) who will be working in the community delivering sessions, advice and guidance relevant to the local community. They will also work with the existing eye care providers to ensure that their services are available to and relevant to the needs of BME communities
- Community Eye Health Volunteers and Peer Mentors within the ecosystem organisations, who will be recruited and trained to support the CEHC ensuring sustainability and that knowledge of eye health is embedded in local communities.

We have strong links to and a detailed understand of the needs of our target communities as well as community facilities from which this project can be delivered. ACH has an established training, outreach and cultural responsive capability which will enable a strong delivery partnership to be built with Action for Blind People that reaches deep into the community.

On world Sight Day **Ashley Community Housing** will be hosting a community meeting between key community activists and leaders to discuss how we can take eye health care forward. The meeting will take place at 2 pm at the St Paul's learning centre, BS2 8XJ.