



Advocacy for Eye Health: A Beginner's Guide



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This guide is for beginners in advocacy who want to advance eye health policy, elevate the issue of eye health in their community and improve eye health outcomes by driving change through government and institutions.

IAPB developed this guide to help you and your institution advocate for better public policies and health systems to address eye health issues.

IAPB is the overarching alliance for the global eye health sector, with 200 member organisations worldwide. IAPB is recognised as a global leader in eye health advocacy, co-ordinating major campaigns such as World Sight Day and leading initiatives including 2030 In Sight, the UN Friends of Vision group, and Vision for the Commonwealth. IAPB has an official relationship with the World Health Organization.

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How to use this guide?

This is a basic guide for advocating for the prioritisation of eye health, and covers the following areas:

- [What is advocacy?](#)
- [Why advocating for eye health is needed?](#)
- [How to make a powerful case on eye health?](#)
- [Building an effective advocacy project](#)
- [Key advocacy messages](#)
- [Tips and resources for successful advocacy](#)

Acknowledgement:

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1. What is advocacy?

The International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness defines advocacy as a planned process of influencing in order to achieve a specific outcome. This process is applied to convince decision-makers to address a problem, debate various solutions, and decide on specific policy actions.

Advocating for eye health means any planned process aimed to elevate eye health across any sector and to ensure universal access to eye care.

For a successful advocacy campaign, it is important to develop a strategy, rather than focus on individual activities, and also to invest appropriately in planning and capacity building. A strategic approach should promote analytical thinking, encourage creativity, generate ownership and facilitate clear decision making.

Global advocacy on eye health:

Advocacy happens at different levels: global, regional, national, and subnational. There has been important progress at the global level on eye health issues.

- The United Nations General Assembly adopted a resolution on “[Vision for Everyone, accelerating actions to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals](#)” in 2021. This was the first ever resolution at the United Nations designed to tackle preventable sight loss. The resolution enshrines eye health as part of the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals. IAPB together with its members successfully championed this resolution.
- The [73rd World Health Assembly](#) (WHA) endorsed a resolution on “Integrated People-centred Eye Care (IPEC), including preventable vision impairment and blindness” in 2020. The resolution urged member states to make eye health an integral part of Universal Health Coverage (UHC) and to implement IPEC in health systems.
- The [74th WHA](#) in 2021 adopted two eye care targets to be achieved by 2030: 40%-point increase in effective coverage of Refractive Error Correction and 30%-point increase in effective coverage of Cataract Surgical Coverage.

These global-level documents point out the critical aspects of eye care services that we expect to see across the world and show that there is global support and agreement on what needs to be in place for eye health. Global developments such as these need to be translated and implemented at national level to ensure that everyone everywhere has access to the eye care services when they need. Crucially, the [WHO World Report on Vision](#) recommends that eye health should be part of every country’s journey towards UHC.

Advocacy at the regional, country, or local level is required to ensure that governments implement the recommendations of the World Report on Vision and the resolutions they have agreed to.

Examples of successful eye health advocacy at a country level

A country case-study from Nepal

The majority of the eye care service delivery in Nepal is provided by non-government organizations (NGOs) and the private sector. Most of them are local IAPB members. Along with the professional associations of ophthalmologists, optometrists and ophthalmic assistants they are the major eye health advocacy stakeholders in Nepal. They are active in advocating policy change regarding the integration of eye health into the national health system.

Following persistent advocacy efforts, the government of Nepal adopted the National Health Policy in 2019 with specific mentions of eye health. The policy states that basic eye health services are to be integrated into the government health system while the secondary and tertiary services are to continue with public-private partnership model. Prior to this, eye health service delivery functioned with minimal involvement from the government.

After the endorsement of the new health policy in 2019, Nepal launched the Country World Report on Vision in 2020, completed the RAAB Survey (Rapid Assessment of Avoidable Blindness) in 2021, and conducted several policy dialogues on implementing Integrated people centred eye care and IAPB's 2030 In Sight strategy. In 2022 the first ever National Eye Health Strategy was endorsed by Ministry of Health and Population (MoHP). To support effective governance of these initiatives, the MoHP formed the High-Level Committee on Eye Health. The committee sits under the chairmanship of the MoHP Secretary in the Policy, Planning & Monitoring Division. The committee includes representatives from professional associations, IAPB and the NGO sector.

Much of this progress is the result of consistent, coordinated advocacy from the eye-health sector.



Photo Credits: High level committee meeting at MoHP Nepal

New Zealand: the first high-income countries to conduct an eye care situation assessment

In New Zealand, 75% of blindness and vision impairment is avoidable. Despite this, many New Zealanders continue to experience avoidable vision loss, and a loss of independence due to conditions such as refractive error, age-related macular degeneration, diabetic retinopathy, glaucoma and cataracts. Currently, New Zealand has no formal data on the prevalence or causation of blindness and visual impairment. Past estimates of the burden of vision loss have been obtained by extrapolating Australian surveys to the New Zealand population.

Since 2020, the Eye Health Aotearoa Trust (EHA) had been advocating for New Zealand to complete its first ever National Eye Health Survey. The IAPB Regional Program Manager for the Western Pacific region suggested that conducting the ECSAT would provide a “snapshot” of the eye care sector in Aotearoa New Zealand. Further, the Regional Program Manager advised that the ECSAT findings could be used to help to make the case for a National Eye Health Survey. EHA briefed officials from the New Zealand Ministry of Health about the opportunity, who decided not to get involved with the ECSAT at that time.

EHA took the lead in sourcing financing and technical support to conduct the ECSAT. Some items scored well overall, but they required major strengthening to address equity of access. The findings showed a huge gap in leadership and governance of eye health. There was an urgent need to integrate eye care into legislation, policies, and plans.

Following this, EHA ran its “Love Your Eyes” Campaign to elevate vision as a fundamental, economic, social and development issue. The campaign included launching the ECSAT report and offering eye tests at the New Zealand Parliament, presenting their petition for a National Eye Health Survey to the Co-chairs of the Parliamentary Friends of Eye Health, and holding a nationwide tactile art competition.



Photo Credits: Eye Health Aotearoa

2. Why advocating for eye health is needed?

We have seen that concerted efforts from the eye health sector in the past have resulted in significant progress in raising the global profile of eye health and addressing eye conditions and vision impairment. The UN resolution on Vision for Everyone and several World Health Assembly resolutions have been adopted, action plans implemented, and global coalitions formed. This has built a strong platform to accelerate future action.

However, despite the continuous efforts and global campaigns from the eye health sector, there is an obvious lack of understanding and awareness about the health, social and economic benefits of comprehensive vision services. Eye health has not been prioritized in national plans, leaving it under-resourced and poorly integrated into national health systems. Eyesight is often taken for granted and limited concerns are shown for its care. This lack of awareness applies to governments and to an extended part of society including employers and educators. Moving forward, challenges remain, particularly related to changing population demographics; integration of eye care in health strategic plans; workforce; and coordination with the private sector.

More than 2.2 billion people, almost one-third of humanity, are living with vision impairment. At least 1.1 billion people suffer the consequences of sight loss which is easily preventable; they simply don't have access to basic eye care services. This number is estimated to increase to 1.8 billion by 2050, if left untreated. The prevalence of myopia is rising steeply with an estimation of half of the world's population having myopia by 2050. However, solutions are available and immediate. An eye examination and the use of spectacles are among the most practical and cost-effective of all health-care interventions to implement. Similarly, other conditions like cataract, glaucoma, age-related macular degeneration, diabetic retinopathy etc, can be addressed with early screening and treatment.

Even when global and national political commitments towards eye health have been made, resources have not been provided at the scale and breadth required to meet growing demand. There remains a significant funding gap to support access to services, primarily within the national health care systems around the world. The [WHO World Report on Vision](#) puts the gap for unaddressed refractive errors and cataracts globally at \$24.8 billion US dollars.

Advocating for eye health is important to address the growing challenges, and to achieve the change we want to see. IAPB envisions that by 2030:

- No-one experiences unnecessary or preventable sight loss, and everyone can achieve their full potential;
- Eye care and rehabilitation services are accessible, inclusive and affordable to everyone, everywhere whenever they are needed; and
- People understand the importance of caring for their own eye health and demand access to services, free from the weight of any social stigma.

Advocating for eye health is critical for increasing political prioritization and mobilizing political will. The Lancet Global Health Commission on Global Eye Health outlined the political prioritization of eye health in four categories: power of the actors involved, ideas they use to portray the issue, the political context, and characteristics of the issue.

Power of actors involved	Ideas they use to portray the issue	Political contexts	Characteristics of the issue
<i>Policy community cohesion</i> Strong degree of coalescence exists among the eye health community on the issue, however, the sector needs to build partnerships outside the sector.	<i>Internal frame</i> Eye health actors generally agree on the definitions, causes, and solutions to blindness and vision impairment. However, they also need to be united in framing the issue.	<i>Policy windows</i> The UN General Assembly & World Health Assembly are the global events of opportunity, similarly the national plannings at country level.	<i>Credible indicators and targets</i> The two eye care targets are the most feasible ones to be included in the UHC monitoring framework.
<i>Leadership</i> The sector has produced excellent programmatic leaders but has few system leaders or external champions for the cause.	<i>External frame</i> Eye health has not been portrayed in a way that resonates with external audiences, especially with political leaders.	<i>Global governance structures</i> The UNGA resolution on vision and several WHA resolutions provide high aspirations for improving eye health.	<i>Severity</i> Eye health has direct impact on wider social and economic issues. Including such evidence is vital in unlocking the commitment and financing will.
<i>Civil society mobilization</i> to translate the global commitments regionally and nationally.			<i>Effective interventions</i> are available and among some of the most feasible and cost-effective of all health-care interventions.

A coordinated effort is required to achieve these ambitious goals. Therefore, we want to support all interested organisations to advocate effort at their level, in their region, and celebrate all successes.

3. How to make a powerful case on eye health?

IAPB's 2030 In Sight is the sector's strategic plan for the next decade. The strategy brings together the WHO World Report on Vision, the Lancet Global Health Commission on Global Eye Health and the landmark UN Resolution on Vision for Everyone. Refer the strategy before you begin with your advocacy project on eye health in order to ensure that your efforts are aligned with the rest of the sector.



3.1 Frame eye health as social, economic and development issue

Eye health needs to be clearly framed as a development issue that has substantial and immediate benefits for prosperity and social progress. The Lancet Global Health Commission on Global Eye Health shows that addressing vision impairment is a realistic and highly cost-effective way of unlocking human potential. There is a significant return on investment—vision loss causes \$411 billion in lost productivity annually.

Good eye health enables children to gain an education and working-age adults to get and keep a job. It also improves equality for women and girls who are more likely than men to have poor vision and less likely to receive treatment.

Discussing eye health within these contexts resonates more clearly with political leaders, donors, and international institutions.

3.2 Promote eye health within Universal Health Coverage

Universal Health Coverage means that all people have access to the health services they need, when and where they need them, without financial hardship. UHC is the linchpin of the health-related Sustainable Development Goals.

UHC cannot be achieved unless all people have affordable access to the eye care services, they need. For eye care to be truly universal governments need to adopt the Integrated People-centred approach.

The World Report on Vision sets the strategic framework for the delivery of eye care in health systems. The key recommendations of the report are to make eye care an integral part of Universal Health Coverage and implement integrated people-centred eye care in health systems.

3.3 Encourage national governments to implement global commitments

Countries have committed to achieve the SDGs by 2030. The UN resolution on Vision for Everyone has shown how eye health cuts across multiple SDGs. The Lancet Global Health Commission on Global Eye Health demonstrates compelling evidence to prove that improving access to eye health services contributes to achieving over half of the SDGs.



Approach: Using World Sight Day to leverage global eye health discussion

What is World Sight Day?

World Sight Day, observed annually on the second Thursday of October, is an International Day of Awareness to focus attention on the global issue of eye health.

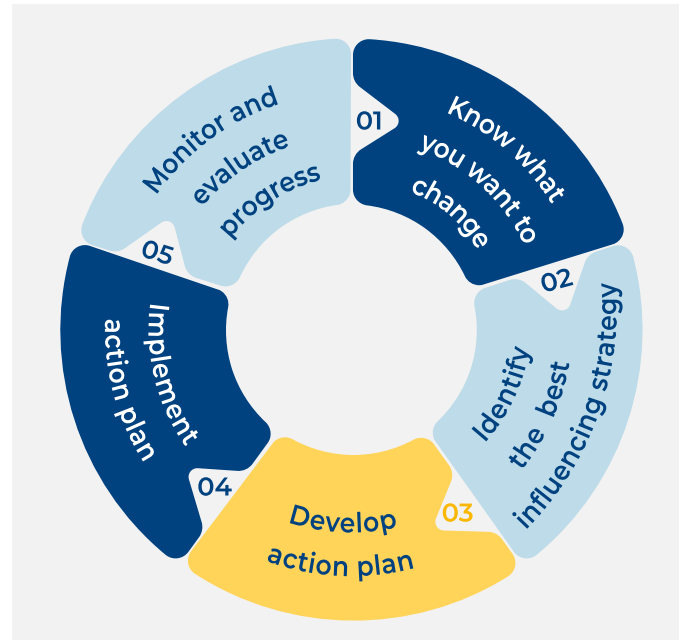
World Sight Day is also an opportunity for the eye health sector to draw the world's attention to the importance of eye health for everyone, everywhere.



4. Building an effective advocacy project

Every advocacy project should be designed according to what you want to achieve and the context in which you are operating. There is not one way to do advocacy, and we do not recommend a one-size-fits-all approach.

For an effective advocacy project, we recommend you follow the 5 phases of the advocacy cycle.



Phase 1: Know what you want to change

Know exactly what you want to change and be clear and focused. Agree on aims and objectives. An aim should relate to the ultimate impact you are trying to achieve, while an objective is a tangible change that you want to influence.

For example:

- Ministry of Health adopts a strategy to integrate screening of diabetic eye diseases in the primary health service facility. (Policy change objective)
- 90% of target population participate in NTD vaccination and treatment program (behaviour change aim)

The four steps to know what you want to change:





Phase 2: Identify the best influencing strategy

An influencing strategy is an overall approach to influencing the decision-making process for a particular objective. There are three important elements that need to be considered in developing an influencing strategy:

- The target audience who will be engaged,
- Influencing objectives for that audience, and;
- Key messages that will be used to engage them

Select and target those stakeholders who have the most influence over the decision-making process. A stakeholder analysis can be conducted to find out stakeholders with the most influence and the most impact. You might want to refer [IAPB IPEC Advocacy to Action toolkit](#) for the stakeholder mapping matrix.

Identifying an appropriate influencing strategy should include assessing your capacity and analysing the social and political context. Ensure that your messages are consistent and coherent across different audiences. The message can be phrased differently for different audiences while ensuring consistency.



Phase 3: Develop action plan

Advocacy activities are different types of communications designed to engage with and influence target audiences.

For example, events such as lobbying meetings, conferences, street theatre or press stunts, or materials such as leaflets, videos, websites and letters.

Consider which activities are most appropriate for your different stakeholder audiences, and devise an activity plan that will help you communicate with them in order to achieve your objectives. The activities should be focused on how you deliver your messages to these stakeholders. As every advocacy issue is different, and the context for advocacy varies widely, each advocacy strategy and activity plan should be unique.

Follow the following steps to develop an action plan:

Plan activities
to engage each
audience



Plan budget
across the
activities



Finalise
Monitoring and
Evaluation plans



Agree strategy
and coordination
mechanism

Other elements of advocacy such as planning budgets, risk management and monitoring & evaluation plan need to be finalized before the whole plan can then be agreed and adopted.



Phase 4: Implement action plan

This is where you start having conversations! Arrange your meetings, host your events, and develop and send your materials. It is worth making sure that you reflect on your progress as you go, and build in points to review and amend your activities if you feel that they are not achieving your objectives. Some common approaches to advocacy are lobbying and working with the media.

Lobbying is the process of persuasion through direct engagement, usually at a face-to-face meeting.

Tips for lobbying:

1. Do some research on the background of the decision maker you are going to meet, and tailor your briefing to their background interests.
2. Think about the probable questions you might be asked, and get prepared,
3. Be clear about your ask and about what you want them to do as a result of your meeting,
4. Prepare a short briefing to send them beforehand or leave after the meeting,
5. After the meeting, send a thank you note or email confirming key discussion points, information, and commitments.

Approaches to working with media as part of advocacy strategy include relaying advocacy campaigns through radio, TV, newspaper, magazines and internet news services. Being covered in the media means that your issue will have a higher profile and may start to shape public opinion. In addition, policy makers often regard media coverage as being a reflection of public opinion, which can add weight to your advocacy campaign.



Phase 5: Monitor and evaluate progress

Monitoring and evaluating your advocacy is important, as you need to know if your strategy is working or not. You may need to update your action plan and revise your strategy as you go, based on what you learn. Monitoring and evaluating also helps keep track of activities and inform on next steps. It also ensures that you hold yourself accountable to the various stakeholders, in particular those communities affected by the issue, partners and funders.

The basic steps are:

Document what
you and others
are doing



Monitor how
your audience
reacts



Evaluate
progress over
plans



Take action:
steer, learn,
report



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5. Key advocacy messages

Eye health is integral to advancing the SDGs

Good vision has the potential to advance the SDGs by contributing towards poverty reduction, zero hunger, good health and wellbeing, quality education, gender equality, and decent work.

Eye health is essential to Universal Health Coverage

Eye health is key to ensuring good health, mental health and well-being; and to building strong and resilient health care systems.

Eye health is a social and development issue

Good vision enhances academic outcomes, improves economic prospects and workplace productivity and contributes to gender equity.

Eye health is critical if we are to leave no-one behind

The prevalence of blindness and vision impairment is not uniformly distributed. 90% of people with vision impairment or blindness live in LMICs. Often, the greatest needs fall among people living in rural areas, those with low incomes, women, people with disabilities, ethnic minorities and indigenous populations.

Work Together

Addressing eye health requires processes for structured and meaningful coordination amongst governments, international organisations, the private sector and civil society, and across the different levels and sites of eye care delivery within and beyond the health sector.

Embrace technological solutions

Enable the maximum use of cutting-edge technologies in the delivery of every aspect of eye care services, including promotion, prevention, treatment, and rehabilitation.

6. Tips for successful advocacy



1. Make it simple

Describe the issue in simple language, avoid jargon. Assume the audience of your advocacy are not experts, and have not encountered these issues before. Explain it as you would to a good friend who is interested in your work.



2. Brief is better

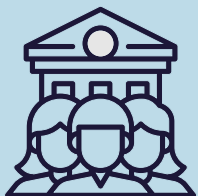
Lengthy papers and reports can risk people losing interest, even if the detail is accurate. Policy makers are amongst the busiest people and deal with numerous issues every day.

Being brief is one of the best ways to be appreciated by them. Take the time to make your oral and written communications succinct.



3. Best use of scientific evidence

Advocacy should be backed up with scientific evidence. Make a proper use of evidence to make the project credible.



4. Capture policy windows

Learn about the potential policy windows like national planning, budget announcements, and elections, and make proper use of the opportunity to bring the desired change.

5. Work together, be inclusive and respectful

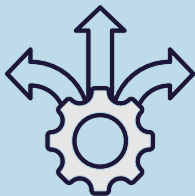


Create an environment where everyone is welcomed, and everyone feels valued. Ensure that your advocacy strategy includes voices from diverse backgrounds, and they have active participation in decision making. A co-operative, respectful approach is much more likely to be successful in the longer term.



6. Offer solutions, don't just raise problems

Offer your ideas about how issues you raise can be overcome. It makes policy makers especially local and state governments easier to address the issue.



7. Be flexible while sticking to your mission

Being flexible makes you able to deal with the changes that might come in due course and makes your project resilient. However, try not to lose sight of our objectives throughout the process.



8. Maintain records

Keep a record of the activities (could be a phone call, email or letter) and maintain notes of the meetings. This helps in follow-up, tracking progress and keeping the ball rolling.

In addition, hard work, perseverance, good timing, and luck also play an important role in the success of an advocacy.

7. Links to IAPB advocacy resources

Equip yourself with IAPB advocacy resources:

IPEC Advocacy to Action Toolkit:

A toolkit aimed at facilitating advocacy on the implementation of Integrated People-centred Eye Care at a national level. Includes link to all related WHO resources, tips and techniques of advocacy and adaptable templates. [Find the toolkit here.](#)



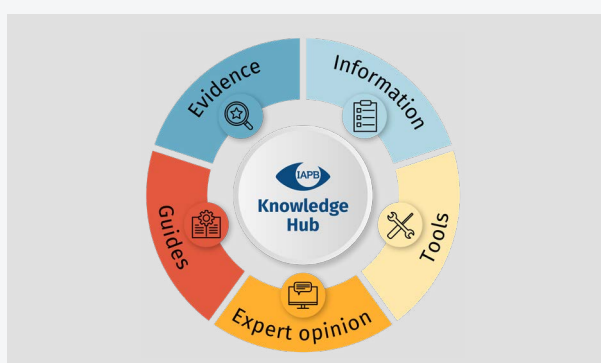
Advocacy to Action:

An IAPB forum aimed to develop advocacy capacity for eye health at the country and regional level. Includes required advocacy knowledge, activities, and strategies on how the global policy and advocacy advancements can be translated into national and regional actions. [Find the webpage here.](#)



Knowledge Hub:

A wealth of content around key issues of eye health to support you to help accelerate action on global eye health. [Find the webpage here.](#)



IAPB Vision Atlas:

A rich mix of the latest eye health data, narrative and presentation tools. [Find the webpage here.](#)



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Photo Submitted by: Keith Kalu to the IAPB World Sight Day Photo Competition



Photo Submitted by: Arpan Chowdhury to the IAPB World Sight Day Photo Competition



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