# Staying independent toolkit– accessing rehabilitation and equipment (England)

## Staying independent: help available to you

The impact of losing your sight on everyday life can be enormous and is often a challenging time. Sight loss can mean having to relearn all that you knew before. But getting the right support at the right time, can really help.

Local authorities in England have a legal obligation under the Care Act 2014 to help people with sight loss develop practical skills and strategies to maintain independence by providing:

* At least 6 weeks of free vision rehabilitation
* Free community equipment, including minor adaptations to the home where this costs £1000 or less.

## Take action

RNIB are aware that some people face difficulties in accessing free vision rehabilitation and equipment through their local authority. This toolkit is designed to help you get the support you need by:

1. Looking at how vision rehabilitation and community equipment can help you to stay independent
2. Explaining how you can access this support
3. Providing you with template letters which you can complete and send to the local authority if you face any difficulties with accessing support.

If you need any assistance with completing this toolkit, please contact our Sight loss Advice Service for further assistance. They can be contacted through our helpline number **0303 123 9999** or by email at **helpline@rnib.org.uk.**

## Part 1: What is vision rehabilitation and community equipment?

Vision rehabilitation (often abbreviated as “rehab”) is one of the key services that local authorities provide to people who have lost their sight. It is a period of training, delivered by trained Rehabilitation Officers (often called ROVIs), which is designed to help people with sight loss maintain their independence by relearning practical daily living and mobility skills. It can also include providing equipment and minor adaptations to assist with this.

Vision rehabilitation can cover the following areas:

#### Orientation and mobility skills

This involves training you to move around safely and independently, both indoors and outside. This may include:

* sighted guide techniques with you and your family
* mobility training in new and unfamiliar areas
* white cane training

#### Independent living skills

This focuses on the skills you may need when carrying out daily living activities such as:

* cooking
* cleaning
* looking after yourself
* taking part in leisure activities

#### Communication skills

Rehabilitation officers may be able to provide advice and training on communication skills, such as:

* using a keyboard or mobile phone
* using aids such as writing frames and labelling devices
* learning braille

#### Provision of “community equipment” including “minor adaptations”

Examples of community equipment could include:

* Magnification software
* Screen readers
* White canes
* Gadgets for the kitchen (e.g. liquid level indicators, adjustable chopping boards)
* Tactile watches and alarm clocks
* Mobile phones with tactile features, well-spaced buttons and a function to read text messages aloud
* Telephones with a very large colour-contrasting keypad

Examples of minor adaptations could include:

* Lighting
* Grab rails
* Lever taps
* Nonslip flooring
* Raised markers

Your local authority has a legal obligation under the Care Act 2014 to provide equipment and/or minor adaptations free of charge where it costs £1000 or less and promotes your independence by reducing your need for support.

## Part 2: How do I access vision rehabilitation and community equipment?

#### Step 1: making contact

Your local authority has a legal duty to assess your needs where you may require care and support. This assessment process should consider how you may benefit from the provision of vision rehabilitation and community equipment (including minor adaptations), as well as looking at whether you have long term needs for care and support. You can read more about getting a ‘needs assessment’ in our factsheets:

* Guide to being assessed by social services (England)
* Preparing for a social care assessment factsheet (England)

There are various ways to contact your local authority, including:

##### Registration

Perhaps the most common way people with sight loss come into contact with their local authority is through the process of being registered. If you’re issued with a Certificate of Visual Impairment (CVI), your hospital eye clinic must then send a copy to your local authority, who then must contact you within two weeks of receiving it and offer you the opportunity to be registered as sight impaired or severely sight impaired.

At this point, you should be asked questions about your daily living needs to determine what support is required and whether a full assessment of your needs is necessary. This is a good time to ask your council for someone to come and discuss with you what vision rehabilitation support is available.

##### Contacting your council directly

Even if you haven’t been issued with a CVI, you can contact your local authority directly at any point, explaining that you have sight loss and want to be assessed for vision rehabilitation and community equipment (including minor adaptations). You can call your local authority’s general number and ask to speak to the social care team which supports people with a visual impairment. To identify your local authority and how to contact them, visit the DirectGov website: **gov.uk/find-your-local-council.**

### Step 2: the assessment

Once you’re in contact with your local authority, they must start collecting information about you and your needs. This is the start of the assessment process. An assessment enables your local authority to understand your needs, and to make a decision about what support you might require.

There are usually three different stages of assessment:

1. **Initial assessment:** This is carried out by someone from a specialist sensory loss team, or a contact centre. You might be referred for rehabilitation and/or a needs assessment, or provided with information and advice about relevant local organisations.
2. **Rehabilitation assessment**: This determines what preventative support you may require and should identify any community equipment you might need.
3. **Needs assessment**: This assesses you against national eligible criteria and determines whether you qualify for long term care support. This is more detailed and may be carried out alongside a rehabilitation assessment. You can read about this process and how to prepare for a needs assessment in our factsheets:

* Guide to being assessed by social services (England)
* Preparing for a social care assessment factsheet (England)

You only require a rehabilitation assessment to be able to access vision rehabilitation or community equipment. However, if you are having a full needs assessment that is looking into whether you need long term care and support, your social worker may pause this assessment and refer you for a rehabilitation assessment to see if you will benefit from a period vision rehabilitation and/or community equipment.

### Step 3: getting the support

After your assessment, you should be given information about what support you will receive and when. You may be offered a period of rehabilitation training, a range of equipment and/or minor adaptations. You may also be referred for a full assessment of your needs if you need additional long-term support. In any event, all plans for your care should be documented in a plan and made available to you in an accessible format.

If you are declined the support, you need or are facing unreasonable delays, whether this is accessing vision rehabilitation or obtaining equipment, you can use our **template letters in Part 3 of this toolkit** to write to your local authority challenging this.

You can also get advice and support from RNIB in completing this toolkit by contacting RNIB’s Sight Loss Advice service through our Helpline.

#### If you need support and assistance immediately: ask for it.

The aim of vision rehabilitation is to promote independence and many people with sight loss find that they may not need personal assistance with many daily living tasks after completing a period of vision rehabilitation.

However, waiting lists for vision rehabilitation can be long. If you need support now (e.g. with cooking, cleaning, washing, dressing or getting out and about) then you can request the local authority put this in place while you wait. Local authorities have the power to do this, and they can meet urgent needs before they have carried out an assessment. If your local authority refuses to provide you with this support while you wait, or you are facing unreasonable delays, then contact our helpline, as RNIB’s Legal Rights service may be able to assist you.

### Top tips for getting the equipment you need

#### Be pro-active

It helps to be proactive and creative in thinking about what equipment and/or minor adaptations might help you to maintain your independence. If you look into this before the assessment, you can request funding for this directly at the assessment which can speed up the process.

You may find browsing our online shop may give you some ideas with this process. Our shop can be accessed online at **shop.rnib.org.uk** or through our Helpline.

You can also speak with RNIB’s “Technology for life” team to find out how technology might benefit your day-to-day life by contacting our Helpline. For more information you can see the technology page on our website at **rnib.org.uk/practical-help/technology-hub**.

#### Collect supporting evidence

It can help with getting funding from your local authority if you can get supporting letters that show how the equipment or minor adaptation you want will promote your independence and reduce your need for support. Supporting letters may come from a range of professionals (e.g., your ophthalmologist, optometrist, rehabilitation officer or social worker). You may also find that your assessment document contains recommendations for certain equipment, so keep copies of these documents. If your assessor suggests that something would help you, ask them to record it in your assessment and provide you with a copy.

#### If your request is refused, use this toolkit

If your council refuses to provide you with the support you need, use our template letters in Part 3 of this toolkit to write to your local authority and challenge this.

You can also get advice and support from RNIB in completing this toolkit by contacting RNIB’s Sight Loss Advice Service by calling our Helpline.

## Part 3: What can I do if I face problems getting support?

As mentioned above, RNIB are aware that many people face difficulties in accessing the vision rehabilitation and community equipment they need, when they need it. This part of the toolkit includes a set of template letters that you can complete and send into your local authority to challenge this via their complaints procedure.

Details of your local authority complaints procedure can normally be found on their website; you can search for your local council at **gov.uk/find-your-local-council**.

## Using our template letters

In this section we have **2 sets of template letters** that you can send to your local authority to request support:

**Letter (1)** complains about a lack of free vision rehabilitation provision. You can use this letter if you have been refused this support or are experiencing unreasonable delays in getting this support.

**Letter (2)** complains about a lack of free community equipment (including minor adaptations) provision. You can use this letter if your council refuses to fund equipment you need to stay independent where this costs £1000 or less.

**Each letter has 2 parts:**

1. A template letter for you to fill in
2. A standard RNIB advocacy letter citing the relevant law

**You should complete (a) and send it in to your local authority along with (b). If you are requesting funding for equipment, you can also send in any supporting letters/documents you have for this.**

If the template letters fail in resolving your issue, then you may wish to call our Helpline, as our Legal Rights service may be able to assist you.

The letters can be found on the following pages in this order:

* 1. Template for free vision rehabilitation request
  2. Standard RNIB Advocacy letter for free vision rehabilitation request
  3. Template for free community equipment and adaptations request
  4. Standard RNIB Advocacy letter for free community equipment and adaptations request

## How we can help

### RNIB Helpline

If you need someone who understands sight loss, call our Helpline on **0303 123 9999**, say **“Alexa, call RNIB Helpline”** to an Alexa-enabled device, or email **helpline@rnib.org.uk**. Our opening hours are weekdays from 8am – 8pm and Saturdays from 9am – 1pm.

### Sight Advice FAQ

Sight Advice FAQ answers questions about living with sight loss, eye health or being newly diagnosed with a sight condition. It is produced by RNIB in partnership with a number of other sight loss organisations. **sightadvicefaq.org.uk**

### Connect with others

Meet or connect with others who are blind or partially sighted online, by phone or in your community to share interests, experiences and support for each other. From book clubs and social groups to sport and volunteering, our friendly, helpful and knowledgeable team can link you up with opportunities to suit you. Visit **rnib.org.uk/connect** or call **0303 123 9999.**

The factsheet gives general guidance only and is not an authoritative statement of the law.



**RNIB Legal Rights Service**

**June 2023**

**PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL**

**[Insert your address**

**and telephone number**

**and email address/]**

For the attention of the Director of Adults Services

**[Insert name and address of local authority]**

**[Insert date]**

**-REQUEST FOR REHABILITATION SERVICES UNDER S.2(1) CARE ACT 2014-**

Dear Sir or Madam,

**Re: provision of vision rehabilitation**

I am writing to complain about the failure of **[insert local authority]** to provide me with a period of free vision rehabilitation as per its legal obligations under the Care Act 2014.

**Summary of issue**

**[Explain issue - i.e. that you have sight loss and need vision rehabilitation, but this has not been provided. Include relevant details of when this was requested, how long you have been waiting and any responses you have received.]**

**Relevant law**

I refer **[insert local authority]** to the letter from RNIB’s Legal Rights Service (attached), outlining your legal obligations in relation to providing vision rehabilitation.

**Remedy**

I ask that **[insert local authority]** confirm that they will fulfil their legal duties to provide me with free vision rehabilitation, without delay. We ask that this confirmation be provided in writing within 14 working days.

Yours faithfully,

**[insert name]**

**[insert address]**

**[insert contact details – e.g. phone and email address]**

**RNIB advocacy letter**

**This is a standard letter**

Dear Sir or Madam,

S.2(1) of the Act includes a duty at on all local authorities to provide preventative services to prevent, reduce, and/or delay the development of long-term needs of adults within its area.

Para.2.9 of The Care and Support Statutory Guidance confirms that vision rehabilitation is classed as a form of preventative support that local authorities have a duty to provide to adults within its area.

Furthermore, reg. 4 of the Care and Support (Preventing Needs for Care and Support) Regulations 2014 confirms that rehabilitation provided for up to 6 weeks and community equipment (including minor adaptations costing £1000 or less) must always be provided free of charge. This is reiterated at para.2.59 of The Care and Support Statutory Guidance.

The Care Act also stresses the critical importance of preventative services intervening early in this process to maximise independence and reduce the need for longer term support.

The Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (ADASS) have published a position statement on vision impairment rehabilitation timeframes requiring that sensory assessments and the provision of vision rehabilitation be completed within 3 months.

The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman has found that failure to observe the vision rehabilitation timeframes of the ADASS position statement comprises maladministration (see para. 34 of Complaint against London Borough of Hammersmith & Fulham (18 019 465) (25 February 2020)).

You are receiving this letter because a blind or partially sighted person has not been provided with a period of free vision rehabilitation within required timeframes. We ask that you address this person’s complaint directly and ensure that you are compliant with your legal obligations under the Act. If you fail to comply, the individual may take formal action in relation to this matter.

**RNIB Legal Rights Service**

F.A.O. Director of Adult Services

**[insert address of local authority]**

**[insert date]**

Dear Sir or Madam,

I am writing to complain about the failure of **[insert local authority]** to provide me with free community equipment, as per your legal obligations under the Care Act 2014.

**Summary of issue**

**[Explain issue i.e., that you have sight loss and require the particular piece of equipment or minor adaptation and how it will help you to stay independent (also include reference to any supporting evidence you have and include a copy of it with this letter).]**

**Relevant law**

I refer **[insert local authority]** to the letter from RNIB’s Legal Rights Service attached, outlining your legal obligations in relation to this issue.

**Remedy**

I ask that **[insert local authority]** confirm that they will fulfil their legal obligation to fund the required preventative equipment, without delay. We ask that this confirmation be provided in writing within 28 working days.

Yours faithfully,

**[insert name]**

**[insert address]**

**[insert contact details – e.g. phone and email address]**

**RNIB advocacy letter**

**This is a standard letter**

Dear Sir or Madam,

The Care Act 2014 places the promotion of independence and wellbeing at the centre of all local authority functions performed under Part 1 of the Act. Specifically, s.2(1) of the Act includes a duty at on all local authorities to provide preventative services to prevent, reduce, and/or delay the development of long-term needs of adults within its area.

Para.2.9 of The Department of Health, Care and Support Statutory Guidance confirms that community equipment and minor adaptations are classed as a form of preventative support that local authorities have a duty to make available to adults within its area.

Reg.4 of The Care and Support (Preventing Needs for Care and Support) Regulations 2014 confirms that community equipment (including minor adaptations costing £1000 or less) must be provided by local authorities free of charge. This is reiterated at para.2.59 of the Care and Support Statutory Guidance.

You are receiving this letter because a blind or partially sighted person has been refused funding for community equipment or minor adaptations that would promote their independence and prevent or reduce the need for care and support. We ask that you address this person’s complaint directly and ensure that you are compliant with your legal obligations under the Act. If you fail to comply, the individual may take formal action in relation to this matter.

**RNIB Legal Rights service**

# June 2023