



**Vision
Collaborative
Scotland**

IVI Scotland Study: The Impact of Vision Impairment Rehabilitation and Habilitation (2024-2026)



Image description: Person using long cane crossing road with assistance from a Vision Rehabilitation Specialist providing sighted guiding.

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Introduction From Laura Walker



Image description: Laura Walker, who has long blonde hair and is wearing a pink shirt, is standing in front of a wall of street art.

As Vice-Chair of Vision Collaborative Scotland and CEO of Visibility Scotland, I am delighted to introduce the findings of the IVI (Impact of Vision Impairment Rehabilitation and Habilitation) Scotland research project.

Vision Collaborative Scotland was established because organisations across the vision impairment sector recognised that the challenges facing people in their community are too significant for any one organisation to address alone. Together, we are committed to transforming the future of vision impairment services in Scotland by amplifying the voices of people with lived experience, identifying shared priorities, and developing sustainable solutions that have life changing impact.

Through this partnership, we have worked to strengthen the vision rehabilitation workforce, support the development of professional training pathways, map Scotland's vision impairment support system, and advocate for improvements in rehabilitation and habilitation services.

A key priority for our group has been building the evidence base for vision rehabilitation and habilitation. While we have long understood the transformative impact these services can have on people's lives, there has been limited evidence demonstrating their effectiveness. We wanted to understand, and clearly demonstrate, the difference these services make for children, young people and adults living with blindness or vision impairment across Scotland.

The IVI Scotland project represents a major milestone in achieving that goal. Funded by two Vision Collaborative Scotland member organisations, Sight Scotland and Thomas Pocklington Trust, and delivered through an international collaboration between Vision Collaborative Scotland, the University of Melbourne, the Centre for Eye Research Australia, Glasgow Caledonian University and PROMInsight in Singapore, this was the first quantitative study of the impact of vision rehabilitation and habilitation undertaken in Scotland.

Importantly, the project was designed and delivered in partnership with the communities it seeks to serve. Through a community-partnered approach, we worked closely with organisations supplying vision rehabilitation and habilitation services across Scotland to evaluate the impact of their work and ensure that the voices and experiences of blind and vision impaired people shaped the future.

The findings support the positive impact that vision rehabilitation and habilitation services have on people's daily lives. They are effective interventions that support and empower people who are vision-impaired or blind to reach their goals, increase or regain independence, participate in society, improve overall wellbeing, and reduce the wider consequences of vision impairment and blindness. At a time when access to services remains inconsistent and workforce challenges continue, this evidence is more important than ever.

We hope the results of the IVI Scotland project will help strengthen understanding of the value of rehabilitation and habilitation, support investment in these essential services, and ultimately contribute to a future where every person in Scotland can access the support they need to live independently and participate in society.

Laura Walker

September 2026

Key findings of the IVI Scotland Study

- Vision-related quality of life scores improved for adults after vision rehabilitation for both individuals certified as Sight Impaired and Severely Sight Impaired
- Emotional wellbeing and mental health improved after vision rehabilitation for both groups of adults
- Falls decreased after vision rehabilitation for a limited study sample of adults
- Rehabilitation services were highly acceptable to clients
- Vision-related quality of life improved for a small sample of children and young people after vision habilitation, but more research is required

IVI Scotland Study Summary

Introduction

This summary outlines the major findings and proposals for action from an international study funded by Sight Scotland and Thomas Pocklington Trust. The collaboration between Vision Collaborative Scotland, the University of Melbourne, the Centre for Eye Research Australia, Glasgow Caledonian University and PROMInsight (Singapore) involved community-partnered research design and implementation, and has delivered the first quantitative study of the impact of vision rehabilitation and habilitation in Scotland.

Vision rehabilitation supports adults blind and vision impaired people to learn and re-learn skills relating to mobility, independent living and communication.

Habilitation teaches these skills to children and young people for the first time.

For both services, the aims are the same – maximising independence and safety, improving emotional wellbeing, enabling employment where relevant and promoting social participation.

Between November 2024 and March 2026, thirteen community-based services across Scotland participated in the study, successfully recruiting 118 participants (109 adults, aged 21 to 102 years, and 9 children between 11 and 18 years). Among adults, quality of life, symptoms of anxiety and depression, and therapy acceptability were all assessed using validated questions to provide a baseline prior to intervention. Among children and young people, the questions focused only on quality of life.

The same questions for both adults and children were repeated within a four-month period.

Independent living - adults

Among adults, vision-related quality of life improved across a wide range of areas following participation in vision rehabilitation services.

These improvements represented gains of between 33% and 43% of participants' starting point at enrolment. This means that many participants reported being substantially better able to manage everyday activities and participate in daily life after receiving rehabilitation support.

For the 63 adults certified as Sight Impaired (SI) in the study, improvements were seen across several important aspects of daily life.

- Participants reported being better able to read and access information (38% improvement), including printed materials, digital content and everyday communications.
- Many also experienced improvements in mobility and independence (43% improvement), helping them navigate their homes, communities, and public spaces more safely and confidently.
- Quality-of-life gains were also observed in activities such as preparing meals, managing personal care, completing household tasks, and engaging in community activities.

For the 46 adults certified as Severely Sight Impaired (SSI) in the study, improvements were seen across key aspects of daily life, and reported greater ability to maintain personal autonomy despite significant vision loss.

- Participants reported a 43% improvement in activities of daily living, mobility and safety.

Emotional wellbeing and mental health - adults

Losing vision or visual changes often creates challenges in maintaining independence, participating in social activities, continuing employment, accessing information, and carrying out everyday tasks such as independent travel. These challenges can contribute to feelings of worry, uncertainty, isolation, and reduced confidence. Rehabilitation services address many of these practical barriers by providing training, support, coping strategies, and access to technology and digital skills, which can improve psychological wellbeing.

Emotional wellbeing scores increased for both the SI and SSI groups.

- The SI group showed a 39% improvement in emotional wellbeing scores, suggesting that people felt more confident, less restricted by their vision loss, and better able to participate in the activities that mattered to them.
- The SSI group showed a 34% improvement in emotional wellbeing scores, highlighting the role of vision rehabilitation services in helping individuals adjust to changes in vision and maintain a sense of control, confidence, and connection with others.

The study also shows mental health benefits after rehabilitation input for both adult groups. At follow-up, fewer participants reported symptoms of anxiety and depression than at the start of the study.

- The percentage of people experiencing anxiety symptoms fell from 63% to 29% after therapy for the SI and SSI groups combined.
- The number of people experiencing depressive symptoms also reduced.

A particularly important finding was the strong relationship between vision-related emotional wellbeing and mental health outcomes. Participants who

reported better emotional wellbeing were also much less likely to report symptoms of anxiety and depression. This suggests that the benefits of rehabilitation extend beyond functional skills alone. By increasing confidence, supporting independence and enabling people to remain engaged in daily life, rehabilitation services may help protect against some of the broader emotional and psychological consequences of low or no vision.

Vision rehabilitation acceptability - adults

Adults were asked about emotional wellbeing and programme acceptability. More than 96% of participating adults rated their rehabilitation programme as 'acceptable' or 'completely acceptable'. This exceptionally high level of acceptability indicates that services were relevant, practical, and responsive to individual needs. Participants reported positive experiences across multiple areas, suggesting that rehabilitation support can be successfully tailored to people with different levels of vision impairment, personal circumstances, and goals.

Falls - adults

Falls are a major cause of injury, hospitalisation, loss of independence and health care expenditure, particularly among older adults. Vision impairment and blindness are well-recognised risk factors for falls, as reduced vision can affect balance, mobility, environmental awareness and hazard detection.

Among a limited number of adults who responded to this question (24), the proportion of participants reporting a recent fall almost halved between baseline (21%) and follow-up (12%).

Vision rehabilitation services often include interventions that support safer mobility, environmental adaptation, orientation techniques, and use of assistive devices. The reduction in reported falls observed in this study suggests that rehabilitation may contribute not only to improved quality of life but also to improved safety and potentially reduced demand on health and social care systems.

Children and young people

Two participating sites engaged the nine children and young people involved in the IVI Scotland Study. For vision habilitation services delivered, there was a promising trend for improvement in vision-related quality of life with an average of 6.7% improvement. However, given the small number participating, larger studies involving children and young people are needed to fully assess the impact and acceptability of vision habilitation. It is important to note that children and young people were asked questions only about vision-related quality of life and not about emotional wellbeing or programme acceptability.

What needs to come next

Looking to the future, the IVI Scotland Study highlights several priorities for future work.

1. Individuals should be followed during and after their vision rehabilitation or habilitation programme to determine whether benefits are sustained over time.
2. Research is needed to identify which programme components contribute most to individual outcomes.
3. Lived experience perspectives should be more fully integrated into study design and delivery.
4. Larger studies are needed to assess the benefits of vision habilitation for children and young people and to draw more reliable conclusions.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated the value of vision rehabilitation and habilitation as specialist skills development services that empower people who are blind or have a vision impairment to maintain independence, confidence, and quality of life.

Alongside these findings, Vision Collaborative Scotland's mapping work indicates that access to services remains uneven across Scotland and that provision is at risk in some areas despite evidence of meaningful benefits for those who receive support.

This evidence highlights the importance of sustained investment in a vision rehabilitation and habilitation specialist workforce and accessible community-based services, ensuring that everyone in Scotland with vision impairment and blindness has access to timely support that enables autonomy, risk reduction and inclusion.

At a time when demand for support is growing, it is vital that these essential vision rehabilitation and habilitation services are recognised, protected, and strengthened. Vision Collaborative Scotland hopes that the evidence presented in this report will inform future investment, collaboration and innovation, enabling people with vision impairment and blindness across Scotland to access timely, effective support that enhances independence, promotes wellbeing, and supports full participation in community and civic life.

Key actions required

What needs to happen to improve vision rehabilitation and habilitation in Scotland:

- ✓ Increased investment from the Scottish Government and local authorities in preventive vision rehabilitation services and the training of future Vision Rehabilitation Specialists and Assistants, recognising these services as essential to protecting the human rights, independence, and social inclusion of people with sight loss.
- ✓ Timely access to vision rehabilitation input, with services aiming to begin support within three months of referral wherever possible to reduce safety risks and loss of independence.
- ✓ National quality standards for vision rehabilitation services, developed with people with lived experience, service providers, and policymakers to ensure consistent support across Scotland.
- ✓ A national workforce review and professional pathways to assess future demand, address staffing needs, and strengthen recognition and regulation of the profession.
- ✓ Further research and evaluation to demonstrate the long-term outcomes and cost savings of vision rehabilitation.
- ✓ Further research on the effectiveness of vision habilitation services for children and young people

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Their invaluable support, expertise, and commitment have been instrumental in helping us better understand the impact of vision rehabilitation and habilitation in Scotland.



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