



Joint advocacy for optometrists and eyecare clinics

Managing eye health and vision as a whole allows for significant savings on the societal level

Optical businesses and private eyecare clinics, as well as the importers and wholesalers that serve them, have joined forces to establish a new association. The Finnish Association of Vision and Eyecare (NÄE) represents the entire field of vision and eye health in Finland. The aim of the new form of collaboration is to improve the service, quality of treatment and availability related to eye health and vision for the people living in Finland.

NÄE represents the field extensively as its member businesses constitute 80 % of the field's turnover. Members of the association include optical businesses, private eyecare clinics, wholesalers and importers in the field as well as educational institutions and associations. The Finnish Association of Optometry (FAO), which previously represented the field of eyecare, will continue its activities as part of NÄE. **Panu Tast**, who has piloted FAO since 2011, will continue as CEO of the new association.

The aim of the new, joint advocacy is to manage eye health and vision as a whole in our society, like oral health care. Panu Tast, explains, "In the current situation, vision and eye care are scattered within the health care system". He adds, "Now is the right time to transform service integration and make it more customer-centred. It is estimated that an efficient treatment chain will generate millions of euros in savings for the society.

Clarifying the treatment chain will help to bridge the differences in health and well-being and reduce costs. Preventive care, early identification of possible eye diseases and treatment referral create significant savings. Issues related to eye health and good vision are topical not only because of the reform of the Finnish health care system but also because of Finland's demographic structure. Finland's aging population and, on the other hand, the younger generations that have spent their entire life around various electronic screens and mobile devices are significant consumers of eyecare products and eye health care.

Treatment processes can be optimized through regulation. As examples, Tast states, "At the moment, the increased number of cataract operations and the unnecessary limitations on the work of optometrists unwarrantedly encumber specialized health care. Granting optometrists the right to prescribe eye-drops to treat dry eyes could render millions in savings annually for costs accruing from visits to specialized doctors and referring patients for routine cataract operations to private clinics would free up the capacity for more demanding operations in university hospitals".

The expertise of certified healthcare professionals working in specialized businesses can also be capitalised better in this new service production model. A nationwide optical business network and the optometrists and ophthalmologists offices within the network, as well as eyecare laboratories, make the basic services available to everyone. Maintaining their operational preconditions and strengthening competitiveness guarantee the availability of services in the future as well. "There are magnificent opportunities in Finland to offer the population high-quality eyecare services and eye health care impartially and economically when there is extensive freedom of choice", Tast says.

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The Finnish Association of Vision and Eyecare (NÄE) was established in the spring of 2016, when optical businesses and private eyecare clinics, as well as the importers and wholesalers that serve them, joined forces. NÄE is responsible for advocating field-related business, health care, education and communication, and engages in research and offers training. The member businesses make up more than 80 % of the turnover in the field. In addition to businesses, the association comprises educational institutions that train professionals in vision and eye health as well as the organisations representing those institutions. NÄE belongs to the Finnish Commerce Federation and the Federation of Finnish Enterprises.

You will find the Finnish Association of Vision and Eyecare in the social media under the name NÄE and tagged #naery.