Certification of Visual Impairment in Northern Ireland: 10 years of data

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Background

- Northern Ireland has a population of around 1.89 million
- Certification of visual impairment (CVI) data has been collected regionally in Northern Ireland since 1980, enhanced clinical and demographic data available from 2013
- We now have robust and detailed CVI data for 10 consecutive years in Northern Ireland
- The CVI team produces annual reports for clinical audit and circulation to PHA & DHSS. These set out CVI causes, age, level of visual impairment and other demographics
- In 2016, a new set of CVI forms was compiled alongside material designed to increase awareness and promote the benefits of certification
- People are certified as visually impaired by an ophthalmologist

Methods

- Annual data is collected through forms and entered into an excel spreadsheet
- The CVI team check 10% of the data to ensure accuracy
- All spreadsheets from the past 10 years were collated and analysed through SPSS Statistical Analysis Software

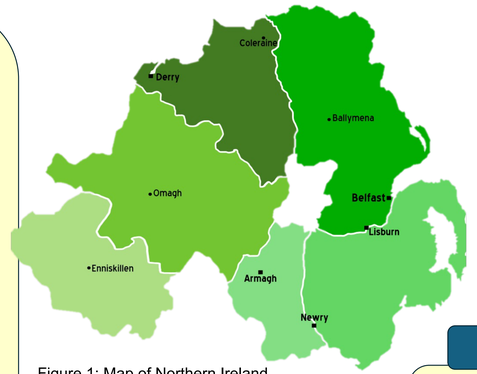


Figure 1: Map of Northern Ireland

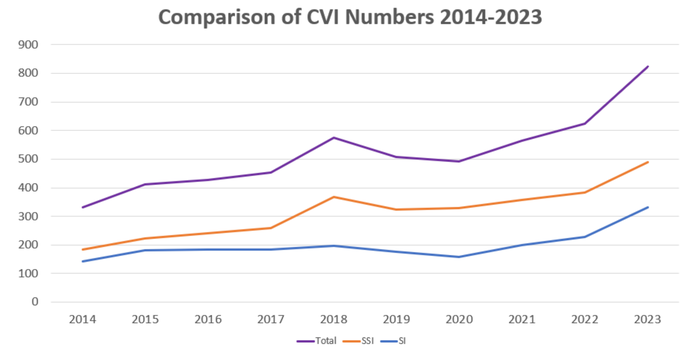


Figure 2: 10-year comparison of SSI, SI and total CVI numbers

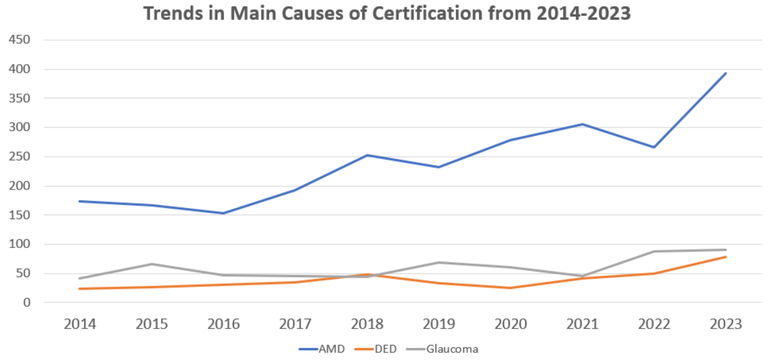


Figure 3: 10-year comparison of the main causes of sight impairment in adults

Results

- The number of CVI submissions has increased year on year, with a dip in 2019/2020 (due to COVID-19) (Figure 2)
- There have been similar increases in Severely Sight Impaired (SSI) and Sight Impaired (SI) certifications with a ratio of around 60% certified SSI and 40% SI
- There have been more certifications in 2023 than in any other year since data collection commenced. (31.84% increase in comparison to 2022)
- This includes a 46.3% increase in children's certifications from 2022-2023

- The most common cause of visual impairment in adults remains age-related macular degeneration (AMD) accounting for around 50-60% of certification every year
- From Figure 3 it is clear that AMD is increasing year on year apart from in 2022 where it dips slightly
- The second biggest causes of visual impairment are diabetes and glaucoma, which fluctuate as second and third biggest causes year on year but are not generally increasing
- In children, the biggest causes of visual impairment are cerebral visual impairment (around 50%), Albinism, Optic Atrophy and inherited retinal diseases

Conclusions

The number of individuals certified (CVI) year on year in Northern Ireland has increased by over 135% over the last 10 years. The leading causes of CVI in adults remains AMD, Glaucoma and Diabetic Eye Disease similar to the rest of the UK and Europe. The biggest cause of CVI in children is cerebral visual impairment which accounts for 50% of certificates.