

April 23, 2010

The Honourable Kevin Falcon
Minister of Health Services
Room 337, Parliament Buildings
Victoria BC
V8V 1X4

Dear Minister Falcon:

Re: Changes in eye-care regulations in British Columbia

On behalf of the Canadian Diabetes Association, I writing to express concern regarding the Government of British Columbia's decision to make changes to the regulations affecting eye care in the province. The Association is concerned that these changes might have unintended negative consequences for those live with diabetes, pre-diabetes and the undiagnosed.

While we appreciate the Province's intent to modernize how residents obtain the eyewear they require, it is important that the government fully considered and consult on the impacts such modernization may have on the health of the population. As the voice of Canadians living with diabetes, the Canadian Diabetes Association is keenly aware that regular eye exams are essential in preventing serious eye disease including diabetic retinopathy. The most common cause of new cases of legal blindness in people ages 19 – 65, diabetic retinopathy is a result of ongoing high blood glucose levels (hyperglycemia) in individuals with diabetes, prediabetes as well as with those living with undiagnosed diabetes.

The Canadian Diabetes Association is concerned that some people with diabetes in British Columbia may assume that these changes mean they no longer require a regular eye exam to screen and evaluate for retinopathy and will simply renew their eyeglass prescription with an optician. We are also concerned that British Columbians with pre-diabetes and undiagnosed diabetes who would otherwise pay either privately or through their employers for a regular eye exam will instead visit an optician and potential miss an important diagnosis of early-stage retinopathy and the underlying cause of diabetes.

Diabetes and secondary complications such as diabetic retinopathy compromise the quality of life of those British Columbians who incur these conditions, and also place significant strain on the publicly funded healthcare system in your province. Therefore it is important for the government to consult closely with the provinces' ophthalmologists and optometrists to ensure that any such changes to eye care regulations in the province does not compromise the health of the population. Furthermore, we would urge the government to work with all relevant health care stakeholders to ensure the population is well educated about the difference between a sight test conducted by an optician and an eye-health exam conducted by an eye care professional.

Thank you for your consideration of this important issue.

Sincerely,



Ellen Malcolmson, President,
Canadian Diabetes Association

Cc: Margaret Beatty
Vice-President, Research, Professional Education and Government Affairs
Canadian Diabetes Association

Connie Abram
Executive Director, Pacific Area
Canadian Diabetes Association

Daryl Beckett
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Adrian Dix
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David Lee
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