



## The Canadian Association of Optometrists (CAO) Applauds the Passage of Bill C-284 Dedicated to a National Strategy for Eye Care

### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**Ottawa, ON, November 8, 2024** – Ensuring eye health for all Canadians calls for a comprehensive approach, making eye health, vision care, and rehabilitation essential components of Canada’s public health agenda. The passage of Bill C-284 represents a pivotal advancement, aligning with the CAO’s enduring commitment to establishing eye care as a national health priority and promoting regular, proactive care across the country.

### **Urgent need to improve prevention and treatment in vision care**

Canada is long overdue for a national strategy on eye care. With Canada’s rapidly aging population and a generation of children post-COVID that are facing a myopia epidemic, there is an urgent need to bring together the provincial, federal governments and all vision care stakeholders to understand the risks to eye health but also the available preventative measures and treatment options.

As 65% of Canadians expressing concern for their eye health, our latest survey<sup>1</sup> underlines how little people know about it and the major eye diseases that increase the risk of blindness without proper intervention. Over 8 million Canadians are at risk of eye-threatening conditions, with blinding diseases affecting older adults (55+) at much higher rates. As Canada’s population ages, the number of individuals affected by vision impairment will rise.

### **Optimal vision care and eye health for all Canadians**

The passage of Bill C-284 “An Act to establish a national strategy for eye care”, introduced in June 2022 by the Honourable Judy Sgro, Member of Parliament for Humber River – Black Creek, is a milestone to elevate standards on multiple fronts, and foster investment in research, public education and support, streamlining the approval process for new medicine and technology to treat/prevent vision loss, and enhancing access to care for vulnerable populations, including Indigenous peoples.

It also designates the month of February as “Age-Related Macular Degeneration Awareness Month”. As Age-related macular degeneration is an eye disease that affects central vision with age being a major risk factor for this disease, it is the leading cause of blindness in North American adults over the age of 50.

### **Get ready to see farther**

Optometrists have been advocating for a national strategy for a long time because they are the frontline of eye care. They specialize in the examination, diagnosis, treatment, management and prevention of disease and disorders of the visual system, the eye and associated structures.

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<sup>1</sup> An online survey of 2,000 Canadians aged 18+ was completed between June 5 and June 21, 2024, using Leger’s LEO online panel on behalf of CAO.

They also diagnose ocular manifestations of systemic conditions and work in conjunction with other health care providers to provide integrated, quality care for patients.

“Optometrists have been active on multiple fronts in support of a national strategy over many years. As primary care providers for vision care and eye health, we are positioned to foster a productive discussion with a broad spectrum of vision partners to share our resources and expertise to make this strategy a success”, says Dr. Martin Spiro, President of the Canadian Association of Optometrists.

### **It all Starts by Making Eye Care Routine**

The impacts of vision health span across the lifespan. As we grow or age, our eyes change too.

“Many people overlook the importance of thorough examinations for early detection of vision and eye health issues”, continues Spiro. “As many serious eye conditions do not present obvious symptoms initially, a comprehensive eye examination is the best tool for the early detection of eye disease and several systemic diseases”.

Therefore, the CAO recommends<sup>2</sup> that parents schedule comprehensive eye exams for their children starting at six to nine months, then again between the ages of two and five years, and annually thereafter to age 19. After 19, eye development stabilizes, allowing check-ups every two years for healthy adults with no known eye conditions. However, after age 65, yearly exams are recommended once again due to the increased incidence and risk of eye disease.

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### **About the Canadian Association of Optometrists**

Optometrists are independent primary health care providers and represent the front line of vision health. Optometrists practice in various settings: most work in private practice, others work in clinics, hospitals, community health centres, corporate optometry, research, teaching and administration. The Canadian Association of Optometrists (CAO) is the national voice of optometry. Recognized at home and internationally as a leading advocate for the profession, CAO provides leadership and support to its 8,300+ members (optometrists, students and optometric assistants) to enhance the delivery of healthy eyes and clear vision for all Canadians. For more information, visit [www.opto.ca](http://www.opto.ca).

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<sup>2</sup> CAO Position Statement on Eye Exam Frequency:  
[https://opto.ca/sites/default/files/resources/documents/CAO\\_Position\\_Statement\\_Eye\\_Exam\\_Frequency\\_ENG.pdf](https://opto.ca/sites/default/files/resources/documents/CAO_Position_Statement_Eye_Exam_Frequency_ENG.pdf)