



Optometry in Canada

Optometric Leaders' Forum 2025 Report



CANADIAN ASSOCIATION OF OPTOMETRISTS
ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE DES OPTOMÉTRISTES



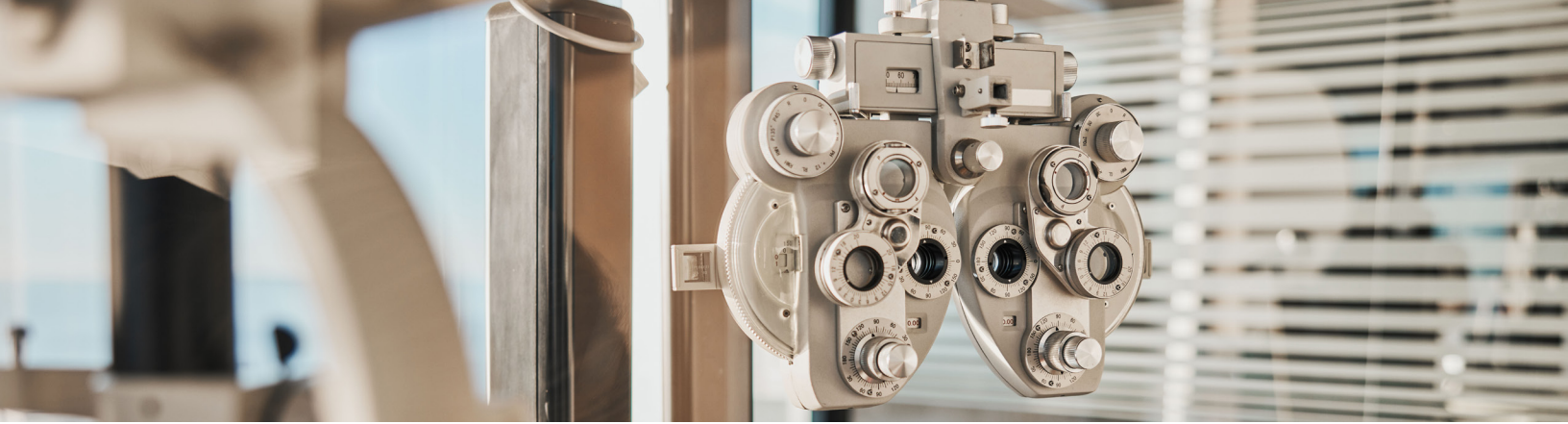
Optometry in Canada

The Canadian Association of Optometrists is pleased to present the 2025 “*Optometry in Canada Report*,” a high-level snapshot of the profession’s landscape. The Report reflects information obtained through a survey of provincial optometric associations and colleges, Canadian schools of optometry, and student leaders at both Canadian schools.

This report provides a summary of key issues, challenges, and opportunities shaping the optometry profession in Canada.

This year’s survey focused on several critical areas, including the expansion of scope of practice, optometry’s role in emergency eye care, and access to care. By gathering insights from provincial associations, regulatory colleges, student leaders, and educational institutions, this report highlights the evolving needs of the profession and pathways to address emerging trends.

For more information or analysis, contact info@opto.ca.



Scope Expansion

Challenges and Opportunities

The expansion of scope of practice for optometrists in Canada is seen as an important step forward and the CAO is seen as playing an important role in it. Challenges identified by the colleges and provincial associations are lack of provincial compensation for expanded services, and delays in government decision-making. Importantly, there seems to be consensus that “**education before legislation**” is the correct approach that the profession should take towards scope expansion. This was clearly articulated by the student leaders and is exhibited by the two Canadian schools as they continue to expand their offerings in advanced procedures training. There seems to be a perception that an expanded scope might lead to increased complaints by the public. However, experience from other countries, especially the US shows otherwise.

Impact on Optometry

One of the primary outcomes of scope expansion on the optometry profession predicted by the colleges and associations is the diversification of optometric practice, with a greater shift towards curative optometry in the future. Other impacts include improved inter-professional referrals, quicker access to care, and allowing optometrists to provide more comprehensive care. However, some predict that these new responsibilities could place pressure to provide expanded services in addition to primary care on an already stretched workforce, particularly as the population grows, and more practitioners retire.

Role of CAO in Scope Expansion

The regulatory colleges and associations view the CAO as a critical facilitator in scope expansion efforts. Responsibilities of the CAO may include government outreach and advocacy, providing continuing education programs, assisting provinces with advocacy efforts, supplying data and research to support scope expansion, facilitating the sharing of best practices, providing progress updates and jurisdictional information across Canada.

Emergency Eye Care

Challenges

There is a strong consensus on the importance of optometry's role in emergency eye care. However, several challenges persist. Limited interest among optometrists in providing after-hours or on-call services was among the top concerns, alongside concerns about inadequate provincial reimbursement rates. Additional concerns include acceptance by the medical profession, and legal and administrative hurdles, such as obtaining hospital privileges.

Role of CAO in Emergency Eye Care

The CAO has been identified as playing a key role in advocating for optometrists' involvement in emergency care. This includes providing education to governments, health authorities, and the public about optometrists' training and capabilities in handling emergency eye care, conducting research, and sharing best practices across provinces. Advocacy for fair reimbursement was also identified as critical.

Access to Care

Underserved Areas

Survey responses identified a notable shortage of optometrists in areas outside of urban centres including rural and remote areas in every province. Among others that experience difficulties accessing care include some First Nations communities, and certain populations within urban centres.

Existing Initiatives

Very few programs or initiatives in place to address the shortage of optometrists in rural and remote areas and underserved areas were identified. However, some provinces, and the schools of optometry have implemented initiatives. For example, British Columbia has a provincially funded program to send optometrists to rural and Indigenous communities and encourages optometrists practicing in underserved areas to precept for students within their practice. The Manitoba Association of Optometrists is participating in a pilot program in Churchill with the University of Waterloo School of Optometry and Vision Science. As well, the University of Montréal reserves seats in its optometry program for students from underserved areas. Several students from the University of Montréal are also participating in a two-week rural placement in Québec to learn about the challenges and rewards of providing eye care in underserved areas.

Top Issues from the Public

The top issues that the public contacts both the regulatory colleges and associations about are:

1. **Cost related inquiries:** including the cost of eye examinations, glasses, billing issues, charges for “additional” tests, provincial coverage including coverage for children and seniors, and refunds on spectacles or other products.
2. **Finding an optometrist:** seeking information about finding an optometrist or clinic in general, finding an optometrist that does home and hospital visits, and those that do exams for children specifically.
3. **General questions:** regarding eye health and vision care, glasses and lenses, and general practice questions.

Canadian Optometry Schools

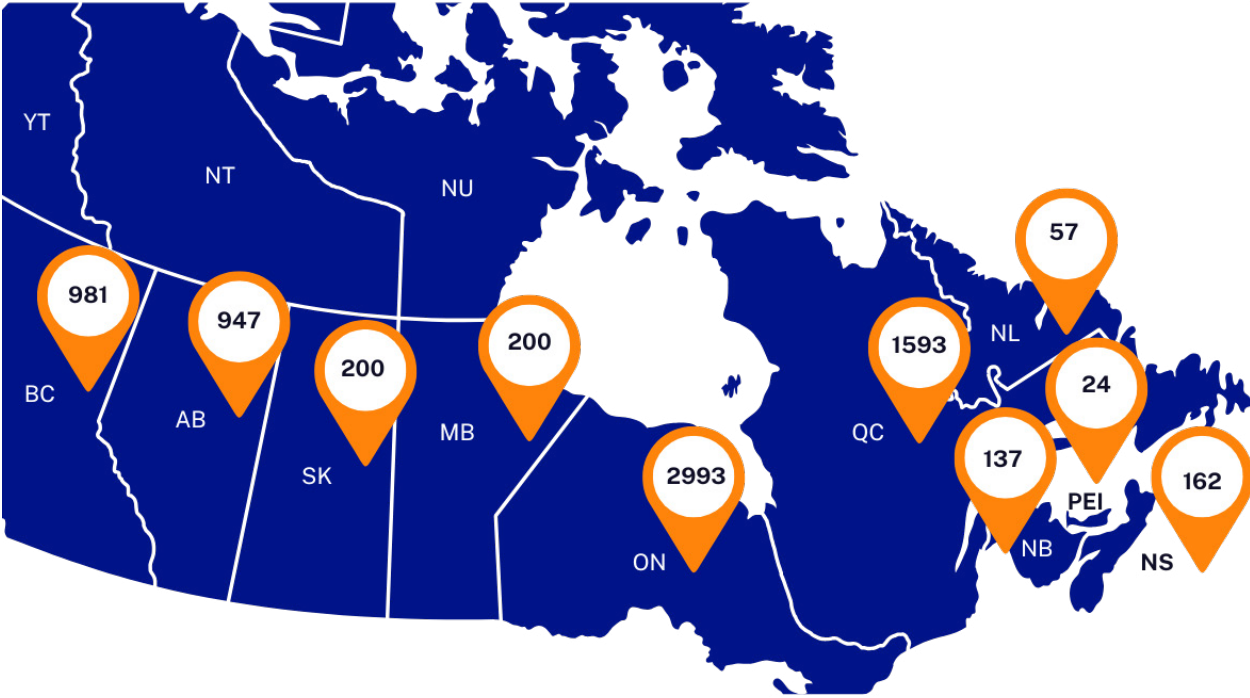
Key opportunities in optometry identified by the optometry schools include enhancing interdisciplinary collaboration, Indigenous access to eyecare including teleoptometry, preparing optometrists for hospital settings, eye data and AI, and increasing the number of optometrists in remote areas. Currently, curricula for advanced procedures at the University of Montréal includes injections, while the University of Waterloo offers a course on office-based lasers and minor surgical procedures.

Canadian Optometry Students

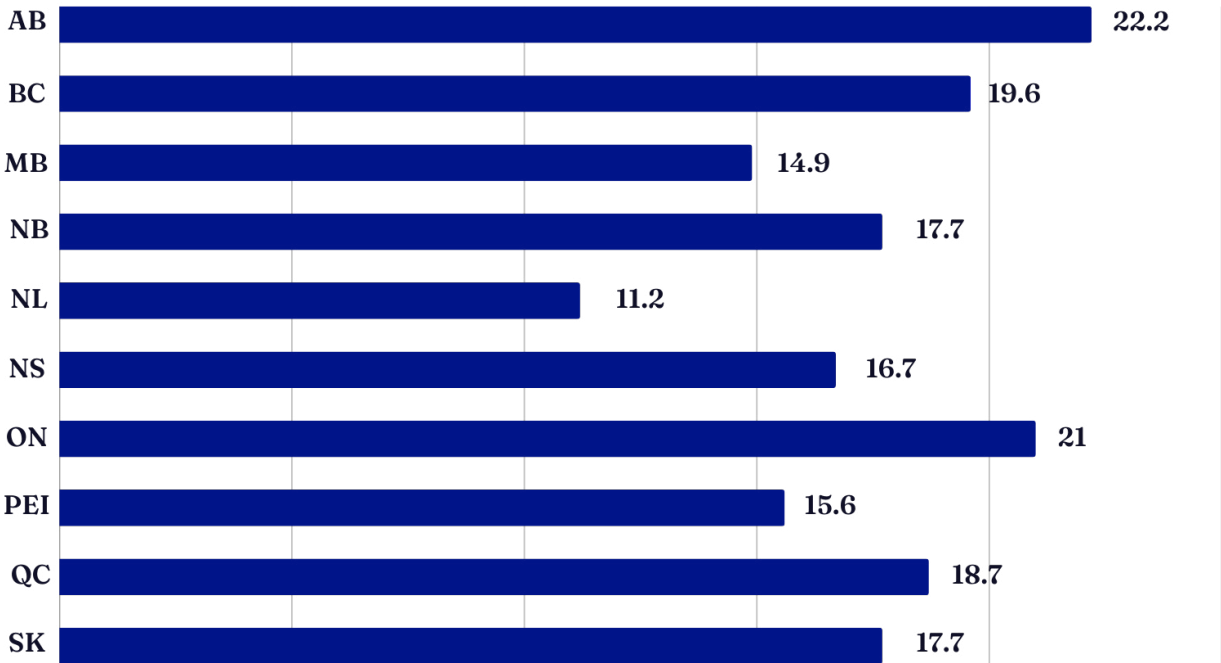
Canadian optometry students highlighted several challenges that they face, including limited scope of practice compared to their U.S. counterparts and difficulty navigating a saturated job market. This is confirmed by CAOs own research which shows that Canada has one of the highest proportions of optometrists per population in the world – See tables below. They see differentiating themselves through specialization as important. Student leaders expressed a desire for more exposure to advanced procedures in their training, emphasizing the stance of “**education before legislation.**” When deciding where to practice, Canadian optometry students prioritize professional growth opportunities. Location, salary, work-life balance, scope of practice, and the ability to collaborate with fellow optometrists were also emphasized by optometry students as priorities.

Data

Distribution of Optometrists by Province



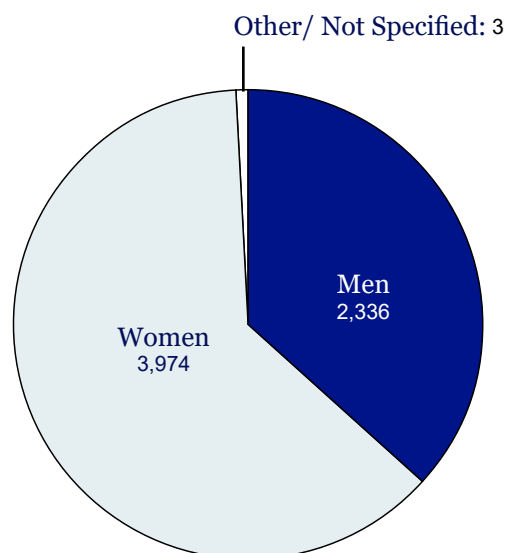
Distribution of Optometrists by Province per 100,000 population*



* Calculated using 2021 Census Data

Distribution of Optometrists by Gender

Province	Male	Female	Other / Not Specified
AB	428	519	0
BC	N/A	N/A	N/A
MB	94	106	0
NB	51	86	0
NL	23	34	0
NS	59	103	0
ON	1162	1829	2
PEI	8	16	0
QC	425	1167	1
SK	86	114	0

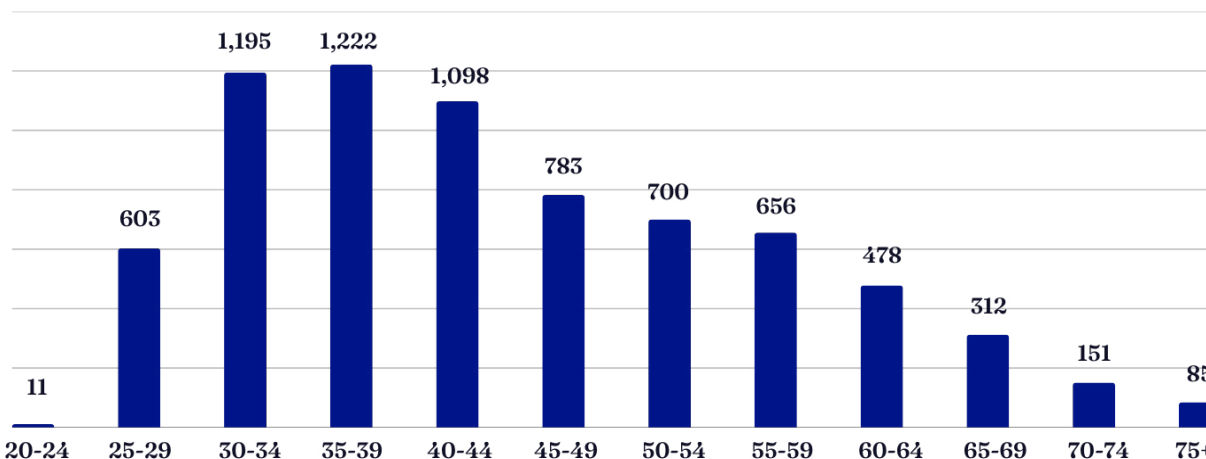


* Totals do not include optometrists from B.C as this information was not provided

Distribution of Optometrists by Age, by Province

Prov.	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49	50-54	55-59	60-64	65-69	70-74	75+
AB	0	89	172	214	173	101	85	51	24	20	15	3
BC	0	58	163	179	155	115	98	93	66	31	15	8
MB	0	13	32	39	40	22	15	12	11	9	5	2
NB	0	17	13	22	18	18	13	11	13	10	2	0
NL	0	4	9	13	7	10	3	3	1	3	1	3
NS	0	16	33	25	28	18	8	11	12	7	2	2
ON	0	225	511	468	454	308	289	274	198	152	74	40
PEI	0	1	1	5	4	1	4	2	5	1	0	0
QC	11	161	237	202	196	170	164	183	137	75	33	24
SK	0	19	24	55	23	20	21	16	11	4	4	3

Distribution of Optometrists by Age, Canadian Totals



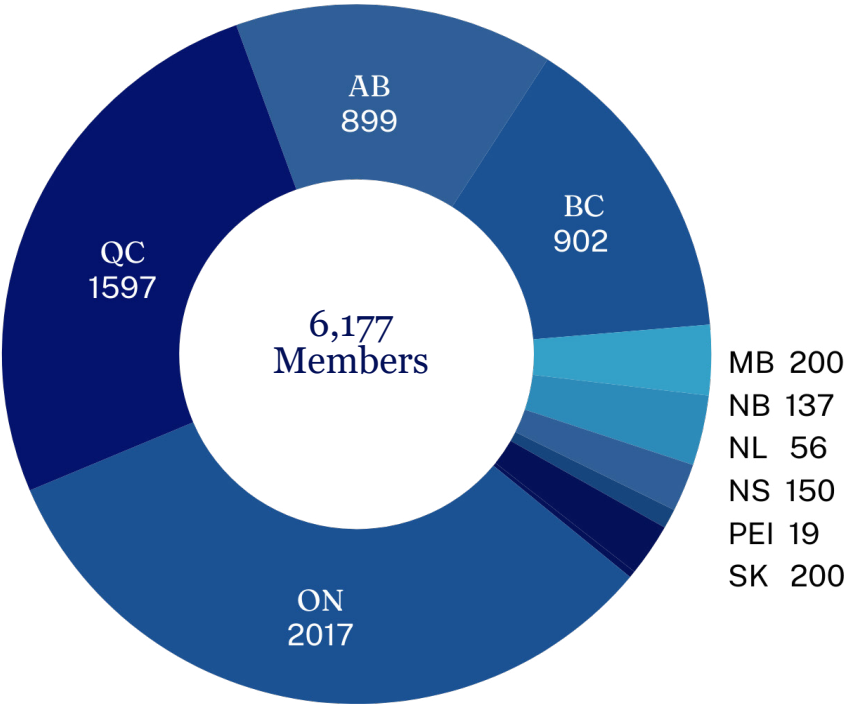
Optometrists by Type of Practice*

Province	Owner/decision maker (Private practice, solo or group)	Associate, independent contractor, or employee	Other (academic, hospital or medical clinic)
AB	N/A	N/A	N/A
BC	N/A	N/A	N/A
MB	114	81	5
NB	53	80	4
NL	0	0	0
NS	N/A	N/A	N/A
ON	1080	1636	88
PEI	10	14	0
QC	406	1139	48
SK	139	54	7

** Numbers may differ from totals because some optometrists might work in more than one setting or because optometrists do not report on their type of practice*

Association Members by Province*

**As of December 31, 2024, Reported by Provincial Associations*



Optometry students by School and Year

	Université de Montréal	University of Waterloo	Canadian Total
Year 1	53	91	144
Year 2	48	90	138
Year 3	43	96	139
Year 4	43	93	136
Year 5	43	0	43
IOBP / ASOPP	18	10	28
Most Recent Graduating Class	43	94	137

