

Optometry and Vision Health IN CANADA



What Do Optometrists Do?

Optometrists are primary care healthcare professionals who specialize in eye care. They conduct comprehensive eye exams to diagnose and treat various eye conditions, such as nearsightedness, farsightedness, astigmatism, and glaucoma. They also prescribe corrective lenses, such as eyeglasses and contact lenses, and provide treatment for eye infections and inflammations.

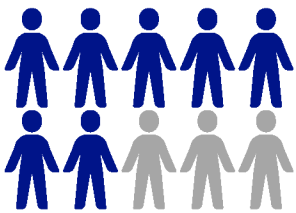
Seeing an optometrist regularly is crucial for maintaining good vision and overall eye health. Regular eye exams can also help detect early signs of serious health conditions, such as diabetes and high blood pressure, which can manifest in the eyes before other symptoms appear.



Early detection and treatment of eye conditions can prevent vision loss and improve quality of life.

The State of Vision Health in Canada

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.



65% of Canadians express concern for their eye health



More than **8 million** Canadians are at risk of eye-threatening conditions with blinding diseases affecting **adults 55+** at much higher rates.

As Canada's population ages, the number of individuals affected by vision impairment will rise.

As a disease currently affecting **30%** of the population, **myopia** has evolved into a global public health crisis demanding our immediate attention.

By **2050**, the prevalence of myopia is estimated to increase to **50%** of the world's population.



Along with the rising prevalence, myopia is occurring at earlier ages, starting in childhood between **6 to 7 years of age**



Myopia is progressing at a more rapid rate than the previous generations. People with myopia will have trouble seeing distant objects, such as the road sign, whiteboard, movie screen and TVs.

High amounts of myopia is associated with increased risk of sight threatening conditions including retinal detachments, cataracts, glaucoma and myopic maculopathy.

How can we improve vision health in Canada?

Support the national strategy for eye care (Bill C-284)



Canada is long overdue for a national strategy on eye care. The passage of Bill C-284 will create a national strategy on eye care that will elevate standards on multiple fronts, foster investment in vision health research, invest in public education on vision care, streamline the approval process for new medicine and technology to treat/prevent vision loss, and enhancing access to care for vulnerable populations, including Indigenous peoples.

We need a continued commitment to not only create the strategy but to support investment in implementing it once completed.

Investment in existing federal vision care programs

The federal government offers vision care services for vulnerable groups like Indigenous people through the Non-Insured Health Benefits Program (NIHB) and refugees through the Interim Federal Health Program (IFHP). However, the limited funding for these programs means that people relying on NIHB and IFHP often face reduced access to essential care services.

Without proper coverage, they might experience delays in getting necessary eye exams, corrective eyewear, and treatments for eye conditions. This can lead to untreated eye diseases progressing, causing more severe health issues and higher long-term healthcare costs. Additionally, poor vision can significantly impact quality of life, making it harder for individuals to integrate into society and limiting their work opportunities.

Ensuring adequate and timely coverage, along with sufficient remuneration to incentivize optometrists to participate in these programs, is crucial for preventing these long-term costs and improving overall health outcomes for these vulnerable populations.

Supporting the current and future optometry workforce

Federal programs aimed at retaining and recruiting healthcare providers often overlook optometrists. For instance, when the government expanded the Canada Student Loan Forgiveness Program to offer debt relief for healthcare workers in rural and remote areas, optometry wasn't included.

Similarly, federal initiatives like studies on primary care often are focused solely on physicians and nurses. By leaving out optometrists, the government misses out on utilizing the full spectrum of primary care providers.

It's crucial for federal efforts on the healthcare workforce to include and recognize optometrists as essential primary care providers. Additionally, optimizing the scope of practice for optometrists can significantly improve access to care, ensuring that more people receive the eye care they need.