



CAO's Optometric Leadership Forum

2025 Summary Report



CANADIAN ASSOCIATION OF OPTOMETRISTS
ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE DES OPTOMÉTRISTES



Every year, the Canadian Association of Optometrists convenes leaders in optometry from across Canada to discuss strategic issues shaping the profession. The Optometric Leadership Forum serves as an important platform, uniting representatives from provincial associations, regulatory authorities, academia, industry, and international stakeholders to collaboratively address challenges and chart the future of optometry in Canada.

On January 30 and 31, 2025, 107 participants from Canada and the United States gathered in Ottawa to engage in discussions on optimizing scope of practice in optometry. As the profession evolves to meet growing patient needs and advances in medicine and in technology, the forum explored optimizing optometric scope of practice to enhance access to eye care, improve patient outcomes, and strengthen the profession's role within the broader healthcare system.



Highlights from Presentations

Optometrists' essential and expanding roles

Dr. Sophie Leung, O.D.,

President, Alberta Association of Optometrists

Dr. Rich Castillo, O.D., DO,

Founding Dean, University of North Carolina College of Optometric Medicine

The opening presentation on Thursday evening emphasized the growing pressures on eye care systems in both Canada and the U.S., and the increasing demand for vision care due to aging populations and rising chronic eye and systemic conditions.

Key Takeaway:

- In both the U.S. and Canada, the disparity between the projected increase in number of ophthalmologists and those aged 65+ consistently points towards a workforce inadequacy, particularly outside of metropolitan areas. These geographic disparities align with findings from the 2024 Leger Survey on access to vision care, conducted on behalf of the CAO and raise critical questions about access to vision care.

With evolving patient needs and systemic challenges, optometry's future hinges on ensuring its role as a key provider of accessible, high-quality eye care.

Why our health systems must promote health professionals working at their full potential

Keynote Speaker: **Dr. Ivy Lynn Bourgeault, PhD**

University of Ottawa Research Chair in Gender, Diversity and the Professions and Canadian Health Workforce Network Lead

The keynote address from Dr. Ivy Lynn Bourgeault emphasized the importance of positioning scope optimization as one part of a larger and adaptive complex health system. Dr. Bourgeault also emphasized the importance of language- **optimizing** rather than **expanding** scope of practice. The term “expanded scope” focuses on specific tasks, whereas optimizing scope ensures that professionals fully utilize their training within legal, social, and practical frameworks. It promotes collaboration rather than substitution within healthcare teams.

Key Takeaways:

- The health workforce is a complex, adaptive system.
 - The goal and activities associated with optimizing scope of practice are best understood within broader health workforce structures, processes, and outcomes frameworks.
 - Barriers to optimal scopes of practice exist at the micro, meso, and macro levels.
-

The Role of CAO

Ibrahim Daibes,

Director of Policy and Research, CAO

Bonnie Kirkwood

Director of Advocacy and Government Relations, CAO

Ibrahim Daibes, Director of Policy and Research, and Bonnie Kirkwood, Director of Advocacy and Government Relations from the Canadian Association of Optometrists outlined how the CAO supports optometrists in advancing scope optimization.

Key Takeaways:

- The CAO can act as a resource to help optometrists advance scope optimization.
- CAO's work on scope includes:
 - Providing evidence-based literature and international comparisons to support scope discussions.
 - Compiling data and research to strengthen policy proposals and advocacy efforts.
 - Surveying optometrists to gather critical information that informs their strategies— participation in these surveys is essential to making a strong case for scope optimization.



Highlights from Panel Discussions

Panel discussion on scope optimization in the U.S

Dr Chris Wroten, O.D.,

*Past President, Optometry Association of Louisiana
Board Trustee & Former Chair, Southern College of Optometry*

Dr. David M. Redman, O.D.,

Vice President & U.S. Chief Strategy Officer, FYIDoctors

Dr. Cliff Caudill, O.D., FAAO, NAP, FASOS, FAAOMS, Dipl. ABO

Associate Dean of Clinical Affairs, Kentucky College of Optometry

A panel of American optometrists consisting of Dr. Chris Wroten from Louisiana, Dr. David M. Redman from California, and Dr. Cliff Caudill from Kentucky, shared insights on their experiences with modernizing scope in their respective U.S. states. They highlighted the importance of engaging legislators and grassroots support, addressing opposition, and remaining resilient. Lessons from their experiences provide valuable takeaways for Canadian optometry as it seeks to optimize scope of practice.

Panel discussion on provincial lessons learned in Canada

Dr. Kim Bugera, O.D.

*Registrar, College of Optometry of Alberta
Former Council Member, Alberta College of Optometrists & Alberta Association of Optometrists*

Dr. Sarah MacIver, O.D.

*Associate Clinical Professor, University of Waterloo School of Optometry & Vision Science
Program Chair American Academy of Optometry Glaucoma Section*

Dr. Justin Boulay, O.D.

*Registrar, Newfoundland & Labrador College of Optometrists
Vice Chair, FORAC
Chair, OEBC*

Dr. Mark Bourdeau, O.D.,

Former President, Alberta College of Optometry

A panel of Canadian optometrists consisting of Dr. Kim Bugera, Dr. Sarah MacIver, Dr. Justin Boulay, and Dr. Mark Bourdeau, shared their experiences with scope modernization in Canada, discussing the challenges unique to the Canadian healthcare and political landscape. They highlighted the bureaucratic complexities, shifting government priorities, and inter-professional challenges that make advocacy for scope modernization difficult. However, strategic approaches, strong research-backed proposals, and interprovincial collaboration were identified as key enablers for success.

Both panels reinforced that scope modernization is not just about adding procedures—it is about securing optometry's place as a primary care provider within a larger collaborative health system as outlined in the keynote talk by Dr. Ivy Bourgeault earlier in the day.

Afternoon Workshops

In the second half of the day, participants rotated through workshops where they were able to gain hands-on experience- simulating lid lesion removals, intradermal injections, and ophthalmic lasers including Nd:YAG capsulotomy, laser peripheral iridotomy, and selective laser trabeculoplasty. Participants also took part in small-group discussions on scope modernization.

Highlights from Group Discussions

Rural Optometry & Modernizing Scope of Practice

Breakout discussions explored whether scope modernization in rural areas is possible or advantageous. While there was consensus on the need to improve access in underserved regions, participants highlighted both opportunities and challenges.

Prioritizing Scope Modernization

Participants discussed which one scope should be prioritized or how different procedures should be ranked. While there was no single consensus, laser procedures emerged as the most commonly desired area for scope modernization. However, it was also argued that no single procedure should take precedence, as practicing to full scope is essential for maintaining a high standard of care.

Role of Provincial Regulators in Scope Modernization

The discussion explored the perceived and actual roles of provincial regulators in optometric scope modernization, along with how these roles should ideally function. Participants noted regional differences in the relationships between regulators and associations, as well as the challenges posed by government expectations and regulatory structures.

Challenges of Combined College-Association Model in Scope Modernization

The discussion explored whether New Brunswick, Saskatchewan, and Manitoba's combined college-association model poses challenges when advocating for optimized scope practice. While some saw collaboration and efficiency benefits, other highlighted conflicting responsibilities and external perceptions as potential obstacles.