

ANNUAL REPORT

2024-2025



CANADIAN ASSOCIATION OF OPTOMETRISTS
ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE DES OPTOMÉTRISTES

President's Message

An effective national association is key to a strong profession. Strategic collaboration between your provincial and national associations ensures comprehensive representation and coordinated efforts on your behalf. While priorities vary across provinces, one of our greatest strengths is unity on national issues, leading to major successes for the profession. The impact we've achieved — despite our relatively small numbers — is impressive.

Reflecting on my term as CAO President, I am proud of the progress we've made. From implementing the goals of our strategic plan to the passage of Bill C-284 to our advocacy efforts addressing federal issues like capital gains taxation, federal vision benefits programs, and our push to modernize the insurance industry, we are moving forward. While challenges remain, including access to care in rural and remote regions, ophthalmic drug shortages, gaps in research, and the need to optimize our scope of practice, I'm confident we will continue building on our momentum.

CAO plays a vital role as a national hub for optometry, advocating for our members, supporting provincial initiatives, and fostering ongoing dialogue to elevate optometric practice.

We continue to strengthen the profession through our advocacy, committee work, annual Optometric Leaders Forum, Biennial Congress, and close collaboration with associations, regulators, academic institutions, and other healthcare stakeholders. CAO ensures that policymakers understand the critical role optometrists play as primary care providers. We also continue to push for greater investment in vision research and public education, both essential to improving eye care outcomes for Canadians.

Clear vision — both literally and figuratively — is the focus of our work. As clinicians, we help people see clearly every day. As a national association, we are charged with charting a vision by anticipating and preparing for the future of our profession. The future of our profession relies on working collectively to ensure our role as primary care providers in an integrated healthcare system, preparing for technological and clinical advances, and ensuring our scope of practice reflects our broad expertise.

Our future also depends on the next generation of optometrists. Engaging with students has been one of the most gratifying parts of my leadership role.

From welcoming first-year students just starting their journey, to attending White Coat ceremonies and graduations at both Canadian schools and meeting students studying in the U.S., I'm continually inspired by their energy, curiosity, and commitment.

Being a relatively small profession in a vast and diverse country presents challenges — practical, logistical, and, at times, ideological. But I rarely feel daunted. Our shared values and spirit of collaboration, from grassroots to leadership, are the envy of many professions struggling to find common ground.

Through our collective efforts, we are building a vibrant future for our profession and helping chart the course for better eye health for all Canadians. We deeply appreciate your trust in us to represent the profession nationally, and we remain committed to advancing both your interests and those of optometry across Canada.

Thank you for the opportunity to serve as your President. It has truly been an honour.



Dr. Martin Spiro
CAO President





The Canadian Association of Optometrists (CAO) remains steadfast in its mission to advance the profession of optometry and improve access to quality vision care for all Canadians.

Over the past year, the CAO has achieved significant advocacy milestones, strengthened partnerships, and expanded public education initiatives. From celebrating legislative wins like the passage of Bill C-284 to addressing key advocacy

issues such as needed improvements to national benefits programs and the modernization of vision care benefits, CAO continues to advance the priorities of the profession.

This report highlights the progress made across all areas of our strategic plan, including advocacy, education, public awareness, student engagement, and professional development, all contributing to a stronger, more unified profession in Canada.

New CAO Council Members



Dr. Krista Bruni (ON) graduated from the Michigan College of Optometry in 2010. She is from Sault Ste. Marie, ON. In 2016, she received her Fellowship designation from the American Academy of Optometry. She is actively involved in mentoring aspiring optometrists, helping them create a path toward fulfilling careers.



Dr. Jessica Wood (PEI) is from West Devon, P.E.I. She attained a Master of Science in Clinical Vision Science from Dalhousie University in 2018 and completed her Doctor of Optometry at the University of Waterloo in 2022, receiving the Good-Lite Pediatric Optometry award. Dr. Wood has a special interest in pediatric optometry and has been a volunteer vision screener with Special Olympics since 2017.



Rebecca Treen joined the CAO Council as the student representative. She completed her third year at the State University of New York (SUNY) College of Optometry and is President-elect of the Canadian Association of Optometry Students (CAOS) at SUNY.



Advancing Federal Advocacy

With the passage of Bill C-284, our advocacy efforts now shift to ensuring that optometry's voice is part of the development of the national strategy for eye care. We continue to actively engage with senior decision-makers within the federal government on behalf of our members and the profession.

Bill C-284

Ensuring good eye health for all Canadians requires a comprehensive approach, making eye health, vision care, and rehabilitation essential components of Canada's public health agenda. [Bill C-284, An Act to establish a national strategy for eye care](#), received Royal Assent and became law on November 7, 2024.

The Bill outlines the development of a national strategy, based on four pillars:

- 1 Education and training of healthcare practitioners
- 2 Promote and collect data on eye disease prevention, treatment and vision rehabilitation
- 3 Promote information and knowledge sharing between the federal and provincial governments in relation to eye disease prevention, treatment and vision rehabilitation
- 4 Accelerate the approval of devices and drugs related to eye disease

The Act also recognizes the need for additional public awareness of AMD and officially designates February as Age-Related Macular Degeneration Awareness Month in Canada.

In addition to these measures, we are advocating for enhanced public education. Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) support could significantly bolster our effectiveness, reach and impact.

Along with our Vision Care partners, we are calling for the creation of a Vision Desk at Health Canada or the Public Health Agency of Canada.

The Bill's passage represents a pivotal advancement, aligning with the CAO's enduring advocacy efforts and commitment to establishing eye care as a national health priority and promoting regular, proactive care nationwide.

Following its passage, CAO hosted a reception to celebrate the adoption of the Bill attended by distinguished guests, including M.P.s Judy Sgro, Carole Hughes, David Epps, Majid Jowhari, Julie Vignola, Senator Ravalia, the Director General of the Strategic Health Policy Branch, and the Director of Health Policy at the Assembly of First Nations, along with all of the vision partners who worked collaboratively on this long-term advocacy effort.

François Couillard, CAO's CEO, took part in several meetings with Canadian industry players and partners to bring awareness about the Act and the next steps. In December 2024, he participated in a panel discussion hosted by Fighting Blindness Canada, also featuring The Honourable Judy A. Sgro (MP for Humber River-Black Creek), Elisabeth Fowler (CEO, Canadian Ophthalmological Society), and Jennifer Urosevic (President & CEO, Vision Loss Rehabilitation Canada).



Raising Our Sights Townhall

Fighting Blindness Canada

▶ [Watch the recording](#)



CAO C-284 MEDIA RELEASES



- ▶ The Canadian Association of Optometrists emphasizes a persistent need for public education about eye health among Canadians and calls for a dedicated national strategy



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



- ▶ Canada's Vision Health Partners Applaud Parliament's Passage of Bill C-284, the National Strategy for Eye Care Act

2025 Federal Election Campaign Advocacy Initiatives

Recognizing that federal elections are an opportunity to highlight optometrists' priorities, CAO developed election advocacy resources for members, including a letter template that members could personalize to highlight key federal issues, such as the national strategy on eye care, the Interim Federal Health Program, and the Non-Insured Health Benefits program.

To further support this initiative, we prepared a comprehensive Advocacy Toolkit with tips and guidance on effectively engaging with candidates and a Key Messages resource outlining the importance of eye health, the key role of optometry, and what can be achieved at the federal level.

During the month-long initiative, optometrists and optometry students sent **967 emails** to candidates which had a **24% open rate** (above the industry average). This campaign successfully amplified local perspectives, making sure optometrists were heard by their local candidates. This campaign also resulted in **769 visits** to the CAO advocacy web page.

The positive response from candidates and their engagement with our message represents a step forward in building the relationships and visibility needed to advance our mission.

Student Loan Forgiveness

Recognizing that federal policy has the potential to impact not only optometrists in practice but also optometry students, CAO continues to advocate for expanding the list of eligible occupations under the Canada Student Loan Forgiveness Program to include optometrists to help address the access to care challenges faced by people who live in rural, remote, or sparsely populated areas and Indigenous communities. We advocated for optometrists to be eligible through this program through our pre-budget submissions, letters to MPs, and our presentation at the federal finance committee on behalf of the Extended Health Professionals Coalition (EHPC).

During the 2025 Federal Election, CAO launched an Advocacy Initiative focusing on this issue. In collaboration with student members, we launched a letter-writing campaign for optometry students to make it easy for them to contact their local federal candidates and ask for a commitment to include optometry in the Canada Student Loan Forgiveness Program.

We were pleased to see a particularly high participation rate in the campaign among students, which resulted in **634 visits** to the student advocacy web page.

Proposed Increase to Capital Gains Tax

Following the announcement of proposed increase to the capital gains tax in April 2024, the CAO urged the government to implement an exemption for healthcare professionals, recognizing the negative impact the increase would have on our members' investments in their clinics and retirement planning. In collaboration with other healthcare associations, we drafted a letter to the Minister of Finance, Chrystia Freeland, urging the federal government to create an exemption from the capital gains tax increase for health professionals.

In March 2025, the government announced that it would cancel the proposed hike in the capital gains inclusion rate, recognizing the vital role of small businesses and offering them more support and stability for the future.

Federal Vision Care Benefits Programs

Keeping up with the requirements and processes of federal vision care benefits like NIHB, IFHP, and CAF can be challenging, as each program independently sets its own fees, and participation in the programs by optometrists is optional. To help members better understand and navigate these programs, we have developed a Federal Program Guide.



View CAO's Federal Program Guide

The Guide explains the calculation of fees and the conditions under which balance billing is allowed.

It also includes links to program websites for further details. The CAO continues to advocate on behalf of our members, working towards fair and transparent remuneration for services.

CAO Pre-Budget 2025 Submission

The CAO submission outlines specific actions we want the federal government to take to improve both the eye health of Canadians and working conditions for optometrists. We also emphasize the need for a National Vision Strategy to ensure optimal eye health for all Canadians.

Read CAO's Pre-Budget submission



Tariffs

Although the U.S. tariff policy remains unclear, it's possible that tariffs could increase the costs of importing essential medical devices and disrupt medical supply chains. CAO met with the office of the Minister of Health to discuss the potential impact of tariffs on optometrists. Currently, there are no proposed tariffs for importing ophthalmic equipment, glasses, frames, contact lenses, or medical devices.

The CAO diligently follows this developing situation and collaborates closely with other allied healthcare providers to ensure that the government fully understands the potential impact these tariffs may have on our professions and the critical services our members offer.



Advocating for improved eye health, vision care access, and outcomes

CAO's advocacy and awareness initiatives focused on promoting the key role of optometrists as primary eye care providers and collaborating with health care coalitions with the shared aim of improving eye health and vision care for all Canadians.

2024 Vision Champion Award



Shelley Ann Morris was the recipient of CAO's 2024 Vision Champion Award, in recognition of her pivotal role in various groups

and programs in Ottawa in improving accessibility and increasing inclusive opportunities for people with visual impairments to engage in recreation and sports.

AFN and NIHB Navigators

Last Fall, CAO Director of Government Relations and Advocacy, and Dr. Dana Blakolmer delivered a presentation to the Assembly of First Nations (AFN) to educate the NIHB Navigators Group.

The Navigators provide advocacy and liaison support regarding the NIHB Program on behalf of First Nations communities, community health workers, their clients, and organizations.



Interim Federal Health Program

The CAO met with the Director of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada to address concerns about low reimbursement fees in the Interim Federal Health Program (IFHP). After consulting optometrists involved in the program, the CAO will submit a document advocating for higher fees and resolving audit issues.

Canada's Health Care Workforce – Eye Care is Primary Care

Both independently and through our leadership within the Extended Health Professional Coalition, CAO has consistently championed the recognition of optometrists as primary care providers in healthcare workforce planning to promote an integrated system in Canada. Our advocacy efforts have spanned various platforms, including our representation at the EHPC seat in the Coalition for Action for Health Workers and our participation in Health Workforce Canada's work on health workforce modelling. These initiatives underscore our commitment to highlighting optometrists' vital role in primary care.

Building on this momentum, the CAO issued a statement addressing the exclusion of optometrists in the **Caring for Canadians: Canada's Future Health Workforce – The Canadian Health Workforce Education, Training and Distribution Study**. This omission is concerning, and we are hopeful that by bringing attention to it, along with our continuous advocacy work, we can ensure that optometrists are duly recognized as integral members of primary care teams in future endeavours.

CAO MEDIA RELEASE



▶ Eye Care is Primary Health Care

Health Human Resources

Following last year's announcement from the Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI) that they were pausing the annual Health Workforce in Canada: Overview Data Release, the Extended Healthcare Professionals Coalition (EHPC) contacted the President of CIHI, expressing the crucial value the report has for health workforce planning and offering support for ongoing data collection and reporting. In a follow-up meeting, the CAO was pleased to learn that CIHI has resumed data collection for the Health Workforce in Canada Report. CAO's CEO, François Couillard, was invited to the Health Workforce Canada (HWC) meeting on Health Workforce Modelling and Forecasting in Canada.

Canadian Vision Stakeholders and Advocacy Collaboration

The CAO collaborates with national and international vision stakeholders to strengthen optometry's voice. We also partner with organizations interested in promoting and advancing eye health and vision care for people in Canada and around the world.

CAO also works with allied healthcare organizations and coalitions, such as the Extended Healthcare Professionals Coalition (EHPC) and the Health Action Lobby (HEAL), on various initiatives to positively influence care delivery across Canada's health system.

CAO's direct advocacy and dedicated work with strategic partners and stakeholders have seen significant success on various fronts. The passage of Bill C-284 and the recent cancellation of the capital gains tax increase demonstrate the importance and impact of strong, collaborative advocacy.

CAO plays an active role in both HEAL and the EHPC, where CAO holds the chair position. Through these memberships, we engage in discussions concerning health human resources, focusing on areas such as retention, recruitment, planning, and innovation. Along with CAO's individual efforts, EHPC was also very active in calling for expanding the Canada Student Loan Forgiveness Program, advocating for the repeal of the proposed increase in capital gains tax for healthcare workers, and pushing for improvements to the NIHB program, including increased remuneration for healthcare providers.

In October, EHPC Chair François Couillard spoke to the Finance Committee during pre-budget consultations. He advocated for expanding the Canada Student Loan Forgiveness Program, investing in the Health Workforce, and offering a tax credit for small businesses expanding health insurance coverage for employees.

Health Professionals Coalition Releases Consensus Document

On November 4, at a Press Conference on Parliament Hill, the HEAL Co-Chairs officially launched the HEAL Consensus Document. The HEAL Coalition, which includes 43 national health associations, including the CAO, representing over 600,000 health professionals, is calling for urgent action on Canada's health care challenges. The consensus document focuses on three key pillars:

- 1 Addressing health human resource challenges
- 2 Investing in mental health parity
- 3 Promoting community-based care



Read the HEAL Consensus Document



JOINT MEDIA RELEASES



➤ Canada's Vision Health Partners Applaud Parliament's Passage of Bill C-284, the National Strategy for Eye Care Act



➤ Chiropractic, dental, and optometrist associations reiterate calls to repeal the proposed increase in capital gains

Global Myopia Awareness Coalition

François Couillard, CAO's CEO, joined the 2025 Board of Directors of the **Global Myopia Awareness Coalition** (GMAC) to raise awareness and drive global action to address childhood myopia. He is Chair of the Membership Committee, which recruits new Industry and association members and promotes GMAC's mission globally. GMAC is working on a new marketing strategy to support eye care professionals and advance awareness of myopia through selected associations in four pilot countries, including Canada.



Up Close With: GMAC's Membership Committee Chair François Couillard

Review of Myopia Management

[▶ Listen to the interview](#)

World Council of Optometry

As a member organization of the WCO, CAO regularly shares WCO information and resources in our member newsletter. CAO Past-President Dr. Michael Nelson serves as the North American representative on WCO's Board of Directors and is a member of the Education Committee.

Enhancing the voice of optometry to the public

Solar Eclipse Eye Safety

After the large media exposure optometry benefited from the Solar Eclipse on April 8, 2024, the CAO updated our Solar Eclipse Toolkit. We reminded people to get out their eclipse glasses again, shared safety tips with members and the public on our social media channels in preparation for the partial solar eclipse that was visible in parts of Canada on March 29, 2025. This boosted traffic on our **updated information on the Eye Health Library** (3,000+ visitors) and our social media platforms.

Vision Health Conference

In October, the CAO attended the 2024 Vision Health Conference, hosted by the Canadian Council of the Blind (CCB) and Fighting Blindness Canada (FBC). The conference explored findings from Part II of the Vision Report Card on the current state of vision health in Canada and what we can anticipate moving forward from the post-pandemic era.

CAO Vice-President Dr. Allison Scott spoke at the conference, highlighting findings from a 2024 Leger survey showing the need for increased awareness of regular comprehensive eye examinations, particularly within an aging population, and a myopia epidemic among children. With a renewed focus on preventive care, she emphasized the importance of integrating eye care into the healthcare routines of all age groups, from toddlers to seniors.



Promoting Comprehensive Eye Exams

Public awareness of optometry and eye health continues to grow through public education campaigns, expanding our presence on social media platforms, press releases, a monthly contribution to *Optical Prism* magazine, media interviews, promotion of our Eye Health Library, and position statements.

Position Statements - new and updated



Position Statement:
Myopia Management



Position Statement:
Recommended Frequency of the Comprehensive Eye Examination



Position Statement:
Children's Vision Screening and Comprehensive Eye Examinations

Public Education Campaigns

For Vision Health Month in May of last year, CAO released a national, bilingual, “**Get Eye Wise**” awareness campaign, prompting people to book regular eye exams with their optometrist as an important part of their healthcare routine. The digital campaign ran throughout May on TikTok, YouTube, Spotify, Instagram and Facebook.

“If my Dad’s eyes are ‘just fine’ why does he always make this face?”



Vision Health Month Campaign Reach



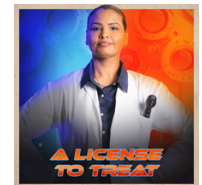
2.3 million unique viewers, with **7.4 million** total impressions



over 9,000 people converted to the **Find a Doc** search tool

The Get EyeWise page on the website had 861 clicks, and the press release had a reach of almost 4K, with over 300 online postings.

For Children's Vision Month last October, CAO launched a new national digital campaign “**Get Ready to See Farther**” focused on awareness of myopia and the critical importance of annual eye exams for children. The campaign ran on Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and Spotify throughout October.



Children's Vision Month Campaign Reach



2.1 million unique viewers, with **6.9 million** total impressions



over 12,000 people converted to the **Find a Doc** search tool

YouTube and TikTok performed particularly well, driving high-intent traffic and supporting our conversion goals.

Members were invited to download campaign creative assets in various formats to share on their own social media platforms. We developed a social media guide to make using and sharing the resources simple.

These campaigns were launched in partnership with the NBAO, NSAO, PEIAO and NLAO and received sponsorship support from Alcon, CooperVision and Sun Pharma.



CAO MEDIA RELEASES



- ▶ The Canadian Association of Optometrists releases a new “GetEyeWise” digital campaign to bring awareness about eye health and vision care



- ▶ The Canadian Association of Optometrists raises awareness about the myopia epidemic among children and the importance of limiting screen time

Book an eye exam today.



eyewise

SAVE YOUR SIGHT.
SEE AN OPTOMETRIST

[GetEyeWise.com](https://www.geteyewise.com)

Advancing Practice Conditions

Scope Optimization

The 2025 CAO's Optometric Leaders Forum focused on 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.



Download CAO's 2025 OLF summary report

CAO also conducted a thorough environmental scan of optometry's scope of practice in Canada and a review of scope and optimization efforts in the USA and New Zealand, which are known for their broad scopes and successful initiatives in recent years. We're now developing further resources to support provincial associations in optimizing their scope of practice.

Following the OLF, CAO President Dr. Martin Spiro was a guest on the 20/20 podcast, hosted by Dr. Harbir Sian.

Dr. Spiro shared insights and data from the meeting to illustrate why scope optimization is necessary for our profession, the healthcare system, and, most importantly, our patients.



Ask Not What What Your Profession Can Do For You... - Dr. Martin Spiro

Dr. Harbir Sian

[▶ Watch the 20/20 Podcast Episode](#)

Promoting the modernization of vision care benefits

CAO's efforts to educate insurance stakeholders about the importance of modernizing vision care benefits continue. We engaged with multiple stakeholders through one-on-one meetings with senior executives, several blogs and industry publication pieces, and webinars offering CE credits to insurance stakeholder staff.

Our webinar with the Hon. Judy Sgro and Dr. Spiro attracted the largest number of participants since the launch of the Don't Lose Sight campaign in mid-2020. We are now beginning to see industry publications and insurance stakeholders adopting our language about modernizing vision care benefits.

The **Don't Lose Sight campaign** made significant progress in the past year with **Medavie offering new vision benefits options** to clients and the Canadian Armed Forces, increasing their remuneration rate.

Starting November 14, 2024 Medavie offered three group vision care options:

- **Follow-up eye exams between comprehensive eye exams** - \$100-\$200/12 months
- **Urgent office visits** - \$30/\$60/12 months
- **A higher allowance for those requiring multifocal glasses** - \$275-\$650/24 months
- **A higher allowance for contact lenses due to disease** - \$200-\$400/24 months
- **Vision therapy assessment and training** - \$200-\$750
- **Intraocular lens implants** - \$500-\$1,000/eye per lifetime
- **Laser eye surgery** - \$500-\$2,000/lifetime.

Effective October 1, 2024, the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) increased remuneration for comprehensive eye examinations from \$140 to \$180 and no longer requires pre-approval for OCT

and retinal imaging if the cost falls within that range. The form optometrists need to complete was also significantly simplified because of our efforts. Prior authorization is still required should the cost exceed the pre-set amount.

CAO is now primarily focused on brokers, advisors, and large plan sponsors to create more demand for improved and modernized benefits.

In support of CAO's work on insurance industry modernization, the CAO President, Dr. Martin Spiro was featured in an article for the insurance industry publication, *Benefits and Pensions Monitor*. He discusses how traditional insurance coverage of biannual basic eye exams and modest eye wear allowances falls short of current patient needs and cautions that the gap in coverage for advanced diagnostic tools like retinal imaging and OCT limits early detection and proactive management of serious eye diseases, which can lead to irreversible vision loss.



Read the article "Why plan sponsors need to modernize vision benefits"

Benefits and Pensions Monitor - Vision Care Special also recently featured an article exploring the gaps in vision benefits and how eye disease is affecting workplace productivity with insurers, Medavie Blue Cross and Beneva.

Read the article "How eye disease is costing plan sponsors' bottom line"



Regular meetings with insurance stakeholders were supplemented with webinars, blog posts and resources.

- Blog: **What the Experts Say - Creating a Best Practices Vision Care Benefit**
- Resource: **Best Practices Guide to Vision Care Benefits**
- Blog: **First National Care Vision Care Survey**
- Webinar: **What the Research Says about Vision Care**
- Blog: **The Survey Says: New Insights into Vision Care Benefits**

Online Prescription Verification Concerns

Last April, François Couillard, CEO, met with the new Senior Manager of Anti-Fraud & Member Management at the Canadian Life and Health Insurance Association (CLHIA) to reinforce our concerns about the risks of online optical purchases without proper prescription verification. CLHIA appreciated CAO's feedback and committed to raise the issue with their members.

Since then, the Canada Revenue Agency (CRA) has revised its guidance and provided more clarity on what is required to demonstrate that a valid prescription was utilized.

Bulletin **Excise and GST/HST News – No. 119** provides new guidance.

CRA Revised Position

Based on feedback received, the CRA has concluded that as an alternative to retaining a copy of the valid prescription or assessment record, a supplier must obtain and retain the following details in order to demonstrate, sufficiently and credibly, that a valid prescription or assessment record existed at the time the supply was made:

- the issue date of the prescription or assessment record;
- the name of the eye care professional who issued the prescription or assessment record to the consumer; and
- the details of the prescription or assessment record, such as the sphere, cylinder, axis, base curve, or pupillary distance values and any additional lens recommendations provided by the eye care professional and included on the document.

Addressing Ophthalmic Drug Shortages

Following the consultation that Health Canada conducted in 2023 on drug shortages, in which the CAO actively participated, the Department announced **a three-pronged approach to addressing and building resilience against drug and medical device shortages:**

- 1 Identifying and addressing shortage risks,
- 2 enhancing and sharing supply chain information, and
- 3 improving access to health products.

Health Canada's approach seems to align with CAO's proposals. We continue to provide a monthly update on ophthalmic drug shortages and expected end dates in Contact, the CAO member e-newsletter.

CAO Member Programs

CAO continues to expand partnerships, offering members a range of exclusive benefits and resources tailored to supporting their professional and personal needs. Last year, we launched a partnership with Perkopolis, giving members access to thousands of promotions from sought-after brands.

We also produced a member benefits information package outlining all benefits and programs and shared it with all members via a dedicated email.

Webinar: Navigating Banking for Personal and Business Needs

CAO collaborated with TD Financial to deliver a webinar for members on Business Ownership, covering topics such as business structures, business banking, funding your business, and buying or building a practice.

Indigenous Eye Care Webinar

Last September, the CAO offered an Indigenous Eye Care webinar, led by a panel of optometrists to help members gain a greater understanding of Indigenous eye care in Canada and to stimulate the creation of a pan-Canadian Community of Practice focused on access to vision care for Indigenous Peoples.

The panel included Dr. Johnathan Lam, who spoke about his work developing BCDO's Rural Access Program; Dr. Shannon Gatrell, who shared her experience with mobile eye clinics for Indigenous communities in Saskatchewan; and Dr. Dana Blakomer and Dr. Sally Brant, who provided information on initiatives they are involved with in Ontario.

The webinar was open to optometrists, optometry students, CCOAs, provincial association staff, and optometry school faculty, and we had close to 250 attendees.

Following the discussions and information shared during the webinar, we compiled a list of resources on the CAO website for those interested in learning more about improving access and equity in eye care delivery, particularly for Indigenous populations.



View the available resources on opto.ca (log in required)

The information includes a recording of the webinar, practice resources and links to continuing education offerings on cultural competency, and Indigenous health and wellness.

Optometrists and optometry students identifying as Indigenous are invited to join the Indigenous Optometrists of Canada community (IOC).



Contact ioc@opto.ca to learn more or join



CCOA Program

The Canadian Certified Optometric Assistant (CCOA) program continues to grow, helping to ensure that your staff is comprehensively trained and ready to fully support your practice. The 2024-2025 CCOA program started in September with 168 registrants. We have added valuable continuing education content through an expanded agreement with the Opticians Association of Canada (OAC) to include French learning modules for CCOA members.

The CCOA program is also available On-demand as a flexible version of the full CCOA program, allowing OAs to enroll at any time and complete the modules at their own pace.

There are 14 CE modules currently available, including updated CE modules on Myopia Management and a new module on Scleral Lenses in English and French. 926 CE modules were successfully completed in the 2024-25 cycle. A micro-credential in Dispensing is under development.



CAO Learning Module	Modules Completed in 24/25
New Scleral Lenses	348
Updated Myopia Management	238
Ocular Nutrition	54
Human Resources Management	52
Dry Eye Management	47
Vision Therapy Part I	37
Vision Therapy Part II	34
DPAs	27
Children's Vision	27
UV and the Human Eye	23
Refractive Eye Surgery	22
Low Vision Aids	17

CAO has partnered with Centennial Optical to update the three CCOA modules on Dispensing, a Customer Service/Patient Experience module. We also partnered with Marketing 4ECPs on a Marketing Module for this credential.

In collaboration with the Canadian Optometric Education Trust Fund (COETF), CAO developed a CCOA Indigenous Scholarship Program and provided support for one individual. CAO covered the registration while COETF provided up to \$ 1,000 for travel and accommodations.

Vision at Work

Vision at Work revenues have increased, and the program appointed Optik K&R lab to manage all frame orders and warranty claims, resulting in significantly improved turnaround times. Migration of the billing platform has improved invoice processing and offers expanded opportunities for revenue generation. VAW Employers were provided with updates to ensure more straightforward guidelines for order fulfillment, and their feedback is the foundation for a project exploring self-serve portal options for order submission and tracking.



VAW supports over **500 members** as part of the program

The program has generated \$64,000 in dispensing fees for optometrists participating in the program in the past year.

The Manager of the Vision at Work program meets regularly with the directors of provincial occupational vision programs to discuss best practices and opportunities for mutual support.

Supporting students and early career optometrists with their transition to practice

Connecting with students and fostering strong relationships is a key priority for CAO.

Understanding the needs and concerns of future practitioners helps us provide meaningful and effective support now and in the future.

Over the past year, the CAO President has also travelled to the U.S to meet with Canadian students at PUCO, SUNY, NECO, MCPHS, and ICO, providing updates on the Canadian optometric landscape, the role of the CAO, and the importance of association membership.



Last Fall, Dr. Martin Spiro, CAO President, attended the 2024 Université de Montréal Sarraus et Valises (White Coats and Cases) ceremony, presenting white coats to students and extending congratulations on behalf of the CAO.

He also participated in the University of Waterloo White Coat Ceremony, where he had the honour of leading the Class of 2028 and the Advanced Standing Class of 2026 in their oath before presenting white coats to students as they transition into the clinical phase of their studies.

CAO also hosted a reception for optometry students and faculty at the University of Waterloo in October. The event was an opportunity for students to meet CAO Councillors and learn more about optometric practice across Canada and the CAO. We were pleased with the interest in the event, which had over 100 students in attendance.

In January, Dr. Spiro met with first-year optometry students at ÉOUM. He introduced future practitioners to the benefits of CAO student membership, the role of the national association, and the organizations representing optometry. The discussion also explored different practice models and current issues facing the profession.

For the past few years, Pacific University has held a Thanksgiving dinner event for CAOS students. This year, over 65 students from BC, Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Newfoundland, and Labrador gathered for dinner. CAO was pleased to co-sponsor the event with BCDO and AAO and give Canadian students a taste of home.

CAO Leadership Award Winner

CAO's annual Leadership Award is given to fourth-year students to recognize exceptional commitment and professionalism that align with the Association's values of responsibility, collaboration, innovation, and impact in our community.



UM student **Isabella Duguay**, current President of the AÉOUM was recognized for her contributions to the

VOSH (Volunteer Optometric Services to Humanity) committee, her role as an event organizer for the AÉOUM, her role as student representative to the AOQ, and her commitment to maintaining harmonious relationships with her peers, improving student life.



UWOVS Student, **Amy Yamei Gu** was recognized for her work as the CAOS Mentorship Director and her

humanitarian trips to the Philippines and Jamaica to provide eye care to underserved communities.

Practice Management Course

CAO renewed funding for the OPTOM380 Practice Management course for third-year students at UWOVS. The course explores issues relating to solo practice, associateships, contracts, developing and running a clinical practice, opening a practice, staff training, dealing with complaints, data collection, practice promotion and marketing, advertising, financial, and legal issues. A focus group of young optometrists was consulted for feedback on the course, resulting in several topic suggestions and recommendations on webinar formats.



Enhancing competencies and fostering collaboration

CAO Biennial Congress



For the 39th Biennial Congress, CAO partnered with the Nova Scotia Association of Optometrists (NSAO) and Vision Therapy Canada.

2025 Congress features speakers from across Canada and the U.S. lecturing on a wide variety of topics, from disease treatment and management to vision therapy to practice management, the Optofair tradeshow, and memorable social events showcasing traditional Nova Scotian music.

CAO at Salon Vision 2024

CAO hosted a booth at the AOQ's annual Salon Vision event on October 4-5th in Montreal. CAO staff enjoyed interacting with our Quebec members, discussing CAO activities, member benefits, the Canadian Certified Optometric Assistant (CCOA) program and our latest public education campaign on myopia in children.

Emergency Care Working Group

As part of our effort to better understand the dynamics of ocular presentations to emergency departments and to aid in developing a knowledge-based approach to emergency ocular care, the CAO conducted a review of research on ocular presentations to Canadian emergency departments. We also asked a representative sample of members about their current and potential role in emergency ocular care.

The information gathered is currently being analyzed, with the goal of providing resources for provincial associations and individual optometrists to increase involvement in emergency ocular care and reduce the burden on emergency departments.



Championing the beneficial integration of technology

AI and Teleoptometry

Building on the 2024 Optometric Leaders Forum that focused on AI and Teleoptometry, CAO continues to seek out and share relevant and emerging information on AI and Teleoptometry so members are knowledgeable about potential uses and implications and well-prepared for the evolving eye care landscape in Canada.

The Vol. 86 No. 3 issues of *the Canadian Journal of Optometry* featured a paper examining issues for teleoptometry, including patient consent, efficiency, delegation, training and the patient pathway including referral protocols when indicated.



Comprehensive Teleoptometry Exams in Canada: A Proposed Clinical Framework

Nicolas Blais, Jean-Marie Hanssens, Adrianna Warren, Stanley Woo

Leadership Development Program

CAO is designing and implementing a comprehensive leadership program tailored to optometrists. The program's overarching objectives encompass developing and enhancing leadership qualities and self-assurance, establishing enduring partnerships with community stakeholders, improving initiatives within our members' practices, and fostering professional connections among colleagues. This training endeavor will prepare our members to assume roles on provincial and national boards and place them in a position to actively engage in discussions at the forefront of national healthcare deliberations. CAO Council members and Provincial Associations' presidents will be the first to participate in the program this fall.

Expanding research capability

Canadian Journal of Optometry (CJO)

Work continues towards indexing the **Canadian Journal of Optometry**. Last year, we completed a thorough review of *CJO* content, processes and guidelines. We implemented XML, HTML formats of the digital version, improved the OJS workflow, authors' statements and guidelines and created Terms of Reference for the Editorial Board. Dr. Andrew Rixon, Assistant Professor at the Southern College of Optometry, Memphis Veterans Administration Medical Center, U.S, joined the Editorial Board.

In 2025, we will implement further changes to comply with indexing requirements and ensure sustainability. The *CJO* welcomes submissions from optometrists, vision scientists, researchers, educators, and practitioners worldwide. It is an open-access journal with no publication fees for authors, who can earn points for fellowships at the American Academy of Optometry and/or the Canadian College of Specialties in Optometry.

Witer Learning Resource Centre

CAO has renewed our support of the **Witer Learning Resource Centre** (WLRC) at the University of Waterloo. The WLRC provides a range of free information services and resources for CAO members and alumni (OD), with funding provided by the CAO and the School.

