



CANADIAN ASSOCIATION OF OPTOMETRISTS  
ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE DES OPTOMÉTRISTES

## The Canadian Association of Optometrists Announces Joelle Walker as New CEO

### FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**December 15, 2025 - Ottawa, ON** – The Canadian Association of Optometrists (CAO) is pleased to announce that Joelle Walker will assume the role of Chief Executive Officer starting on January 19, 2026.

She will replace current CAO's CEO, François Couillard, who will retire at the end of 2025 after a distinguished career spanning more than 40 years.

Joelle Walker is a health-sector leader and advocate who has built her career advancing public policy to improve care for Canadians - while supporting the health professionals who deliver that care every day. She began her career in government relations at the Canadian Cancer Society and most recently served as Executive Vice President, Strategy and Operations at the Canadian Pharmacists Association. In that role, she elevated the national profile of pharmacists and the profession. She played a key role in securing student loan forgiveness for pharmacists and in positioning pharmacists as a trusted voice on drug shortages, bringing practical, patient-focused solutions to decision-makers and the public.

Walker is a lawyer by training and holds a Bachelor of Laws (LLB) and a Bachelor of Political Science from the University of Ottawa. Joelle values collaboration, clear communication, and practical progress.

"I'm honoured to join the Canadian Association of Optometrists and to follow François Couillard's exceptional leadership", says Walker. "At a time when demand is rising, optometry's role as primary eye-care providers is more important than ever. I'm excited to work alongside optometrists across the country, in partnership with members, stakeholders, and governments to strengthen access to timely, high-quality vision care and advance CAO's strategic vision for better eye health for all Canadians".

Reporting to the CAO Council, Walker will be responsible for advancing the Association's strategic vision, strengthening the national voice of optometry and promoting optimal and timely access to vision care for all Canadians.

"We are thrilled Joelle is joining CAO. She will bring passion, strong acumen, a fresh perspective, along with remarkable achievements in health care advocacy, policy development, and representation.



She will lead CAO's initiatives to support the optometric community, advance the profession, and raise public awareness about eye care among Canadians", says Dr. Allison Scott, President of the Canadian Association of Optometrists.

Building upon strong relationships with members, vision care partners, and government officials, Walker will step into her new role at a pivotal time for eye care in Canada, as the country faces an aging population, rising prevalence of vision-threatening diseases, and increasing strain on hospitals and specialists. With the development of the National Strategy for Eye Care - an initiative aligned with CAO's long-standing advocacy, she will champion the Association's mission to emphasize optometry's critical role as a core component of Canada's healthcare system.

The CAO Council and staff extend heartfelt thanks to François Couillard for his exceptional tenure at the CAO, and wish him a fulfilling and well-deserved retirement.

"A thoughtful communicator and natural collaborator, François forged stronger partnerships across the eye-care system and significantly enhanced the CAO's visibility and influence within the broader health-care community. His calm, steady leadership guided the organization through a period of rapid change, leaving CAO well-positioned to advance its mission of ensuring healthy eyes and clear vision for all Canadians. The passage of Bill C-284 stands as a testament to the lasting impact of his dedicated leadership", added Scott.

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

The Canadian Association of Optometrists (CAO) is the national voice of optometry. Optometrists are independent primary health care providers and represent the front line of vision health. Optometrists practice in a range of settings: most work in private practice, others work in clinics, hospitals, community health centres, corporate optometry, research, teaching, and administration. Recognized at home and internationally as a leading advocate for the profession, CAO is dedicated to providing leadership and support to its +8,400 members (Optometrists, Students, and Optometric Assistants) to enhance the delivery of healthy eyes and clear vision for all Canadians. For more information, visit [opto.ca](https://opto.ca).

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