



CANADIAN ASSOCIATION OF OPTOMETRISTS
ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE DES OPTOMÉTRISTES

Impact Report 2025-26

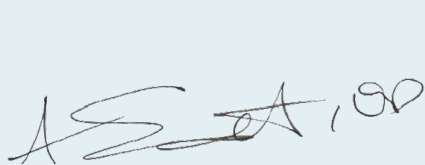


Message from the President and CEO

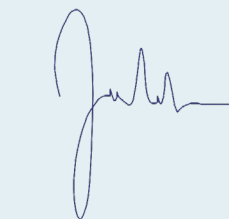
This has been a defining year for CAO — one focused on strengthening optometry’s national presence, deepening collaboration across the profession, and turning member priorities into visible action. From federal advocacy and public education to student engagement, leadership development, practice supports, and national partnerships, CAO’s work has been grounded in one goal: ensuring optometry is heard, recognized, and supported across Canada.

The year also marked an important period of renewal for CAO. In January, we announced a new CEO, and shortly after, launched CAO’s 2026–2029 Strategic Plan. Together, these milestones set a clearer direction for the association and reinforce our commitment to national advocacy, member value, public awareness, and collaboration across the broader health system.

This report highlights CAO’s work over the 2025–26 fiscal year, along with key activities advanced since April 1, 2026, organized around the major areas where CAO is delivering impact for members, students, the profession, and the public.



Dr. Allison Scott
President



Joelle Walker
Chief Executive Officer

Advocacy that protects and advances the profession

As the national voice of optometry, CAO advocates in federal policy discussions, advances national priorities, and collaborates with members, provincial associations, and partners to strengthen optometry’s collective voice on issues affecting the profession, patients, access to care, and the future of eye care in Canada.

National Strategy for Eye Care

Member advocacy + CAO leadership helped shape national eye care policy.

5 WAYS CAO ADVANCED OPTOMETRY’S VOICE

- 1 Mobilized OD letters to federal candidates
- 2 Consulted provincial associations across Canada
- 3 Submitted recommendations to Health Canada
- 4 Advocated for implementation funding through budget submissions
- 5 Met with MPs through Vision Health Month Hill Day together with the Vision Health Partners Coalition

✓ **RESULT**
Canada’s National Strategy for Eye Care was released in June 2026 and reflected several CAO recommendations, helping position optometrists as primary eye providers.

Federal vision programs



CAO advanced member concerns on federal vision benefits programs, including NIHB, IFHP, RCMP, and CAF, and began IFHP fee-review discussions.

Advocacy for new optometry schools

- ❑ **Made the case for greater investment** in Canadian optometry schools, with 50% of Canadian-trained optometrists currently studying in the U.S.
- ❑ **Used public opinion research to strengthen the case**, showing that 86% of Canadians support training more optometrists at home.
- ❑ **Worked with provincial associations and partners** to support proposed new schools at Mount Royal University and the University of New Brunswick, both in partnership with the University of Waterloo.
- ❑ **Focused CAO’s federal advocacy** on securing infrastructure funding through the new Build Canada Strong Fund.

Scope of practice national and provincial support

CAO backed provincial scope advocacy with national evidence, tools, and public messaging to help optometrists practice to their full training.

WHAT WE DID

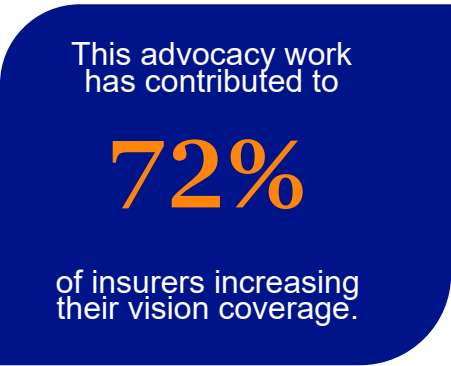
- ❑ Supported provincial advocacy in **Ontario, British Columbia, and Nova Scotia**.
- ❑ Provided formal and student letters of support for provincial scope changes.
- ❑ Launched a **national resource hub** with clinical evidence and advocacy tools.
- ❑ Responded publicly to opposition from ophthalmology with evidence-based statements.

IMPACT FOR OD MEMBERS:

CAO helped strengthen provincial advocacy, equip members and associations with credible evidence, and reinforce optometry’s role in improving access to timely eye care.

Insurance/delisting advocacy

Modernization of Vision Care Benefits



CAO continues engaging insurers and plan sponsors on modernizing vision care benefits through the **Don’t Lose Sight** campaign, including one-on-one meetings with senior insurance executives, blogs and industry publication pieces, and CE-accredited webinars for insurance stakeholder staff.

[Learn about the Don’t Lose Sight Campaign →](#)

Taking Action on Insurance Delistings

- ❑ **Responded quickly** when insurers began delisting clinics in Alberta.
- ❑ **Advocated directly** with CLHIA and five major carriers on delisting, appeal processes, and fair treatment of clinics.
- ❑ Worked closely with AAO and ACO through a **dedicated delisting taskforce**.
- ❑ **Strengthened member protection** by adding legal expense coverage through BMS.
- ❑ Created a **new interprovincial insurance working group** with all provinces to coordinate action and advance broader insurance reform.

IMPACT FOR OD MEMBERS:

Working with provincial partners, CAO helped contain the spread of delistings beyond Alberta and built a national structure to respond to insurer issues earlier and more effectively.



Visibility that connects Canadians to optometrists

Public education campaigns that drove awareness and Find a Doc Searches

CAO used bilingual public education campaigns to encourage Canadians to protect their eye health and connect with CAO member optometrists through **Find a Doc**.

“Everyday Mistakes”



2,300 Find a Doc searches
Over 3.6 million impressions

May - June 2026

Supported by NLAO, NSAO, PEIAO, and industry sponsor Alcon.

“Eye issues aren’t always obvious”



750 Find a Doc searches
Over 9.3 million impressions

October 2025 - Children’s Vision Month

Supported by NBAO, NLAO, NSAO, PEIAO, and industry sponsors Alcon and CooperVision.

“Don’t let your eye health become a game of red flags!”



860 Find a Doc searches
Over 7.3 million impressions

May 2025 - Vision Health Month

Supported by NBAO, NLAO, NSAO, PEIAO, and industry sponsors Alcon and CooperVision.

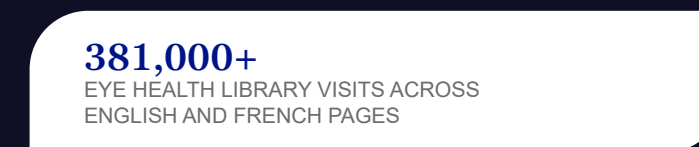
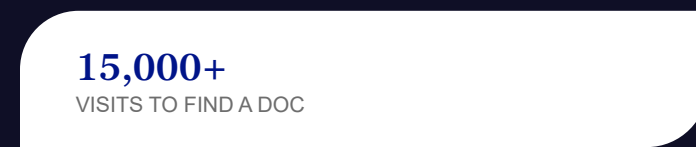
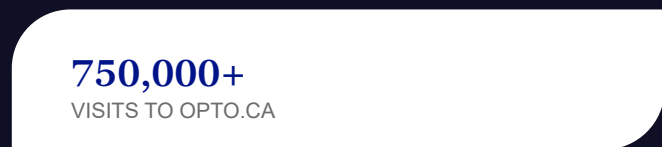
Myopia Awareness Toolkit



CAO partnered with the **Global Myopia Awareness Coalition (GMAC)** to create an Awareness Toolkit with parent guidebooks, infographics, informed consent checklists, and customizable social assets for members.

Digital reach connecting Canadians to members

CAO’s digital platforms helped Canadians access trusted eye health information, find CAO member optometrists, and stay connected to national optometry priorities.



SOCIAL FOLLOWING

Facebook	6,698
LinkedIn	2,347

Instagram	1,551
YouTube	1,000

X	2,652
---	-------



Tools and programs that support your practice

Certified Canadian Optometric Assistants (CCOA)

Strengthening Clinic Teams

250 new Optometric Assistants were certified

Four hands-on workshops were delivered in Calgary, Toronto, Halifax, and Montréal, with support from Zeiss.

CCOA Indigenous Scholarship

Supports Optometric Assistants toward certification and sustainable employment.

2 scholarships awarded, Supported by the OSI Group and COETF

3 Year committed support from the Canadian Optometric Education Trust Fund (COETF)

New Online Learning Modules

18

hours of new learning

Topics Covering:

- Change Management
- Cultivating Culture and Social Competence for Optometric Leaders
- Emotional Intelligence Essentials for Professionals
- Mastering Patient Experience Skills
- Marketing
- Skin Diseases and the Eye
- Vision Therapy

Continuing Education

Updated Learning Module: “Skin Diseases and the Eye”

Re-accredited for **2.0 COPE credits**

Webinars

- A Patient-Centered Approach to MPD Diagnosis and Management - accredited for **1.0 COPE credit**
- Professional Liability Insurance: Legal Implications of AI and Social Media in Practice
- Technology and AI in Optometric Practice
- Indigenous Eye Care

Canadian Journal of Optometry (CJO)

Published quarterly at cjo-rco.ca as an open-access journal with no publication fees for authors.

Moved to a new platform in January 2026 to improve search, indexing, manuscript submission, and peer review.

Vision at Work Program for Ontario ODs

- Processed over **\$78,000** in payments to participating optometrists
- Dispensed **1,590 pairs of safety eyewear**
- Worked with **464 members** across 280 locations
- Enrolled **3 new employers**

Vision at Work continues to work closely with safety vision program counterparts across the country to share information and best practices.

Member benefits and insurance supports

CAO’s member benefits help members raise their profile, stay informed, strengthen their practices, and access savings that support day-to-day operations by:

Getting Noticed:

- Practice listing on national **Find a Doc** site, connecting members of the public with CAO member ODs.

Having Your Voice Heard In:

- National advocacy, CAO gets in front of the right people to make things happen.
- Research, national policy development, and optometric leaders’ discussions.

Staying Current:

- Free access to the **Canadian Journal of Optometry**
- Via *Contact*, weekly bilingual newsletter, on federal advocacy initiatives, policy and research activities, vision partners collaboration, member benefits, updates from the schools, optometric news, and events.
- Member site with resource library and practice tools

Enhancing Your Practice:

- Access to the Certified Canadian Optometric Assistant (**CCOA**) program
- Free **Job postings**

Exclusive Savings and Discounts:

Insurance Coverage Solutions by **BMS**:

- Legal Expense for Insurance Audit **(NEW)**
- Commercial General Liability
- Cyber Security and Privacy Liability
- Employment Practices Package
- Clinic and Business Package
- Building Coverage
- Legal Expense Coverage Package
- Best-in-class Individual, clinic/business Professional Liability Insurance
**except for members in Ontario & Quebec where provincial programs exist*
- 24-hour Accident Coverage **except for members in Quebec*

‘Private Label’ frame program by **Centennial Optical**, complemented by Centennial’s Lab Pak frame and lenses package program.

- Exclusive CAO member pricing and frame selections through **Centennial Optical’s** frame program.

The Personal Home and Auto Insurance

TD Professional Banking Services

HUB International National Benefits Program **currently available in Ontario, New Brunswick, Newfoundland and Labrador, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island*



Leadership and the future of the profession

CAO strengthened optometry's leadership pipeline by training current and emerging leaders, aligning national partners, and helping students see themselves as future advocates for the profession.

Leadership Development Program

25 provincial and national leaders trained

in CAO's inaugural Leadership Development Program, supported by Johnson and Johnson and CooperVision

Optometric Leaders' Forum

110 participants at the 2026 Optometric Leaders' Forum

Representatives from provincial associations, regulators, CAOS, schools of optometry, and partners. **Forum focus:** building advocacy capacity and preparing more optometrists to contribute at policy tables

Supporting students and future colleagues

Student engagement highlights:

- CAO received the 2026 AOSA Founders Award for student support.
- Supported the election of the inaugural Canadian Association of Optometry Students Executive Committee.
- Led student advocacy sessions at Waterloo's Optometric Leadership Forum, supported Washington, D.C. student advocacy programming, and helped students advocate for federal loan forgiveness.

A stronger national optometry community



New Strategic Direction Launched

CAO's **2026–2029 Strategic Plan** is built around three commitments:

01

Strengthening our national voice

02

Improving access to eye care across the country

03

Building programs that
genuinely serve you and the
profession



Position Statements Updated



- Hand-held Laser Pointers and Eye Safety
- Internet Dispensing — Position Statement and Fact Sheet
- Prescription Medication Labelling



 CAO Membership (As of December 2025)

OD Members
6,196

Optometry Student Members
500

Certified Canadian Optometric Assistants
(CCOAs)
1,850

University of Waterloo : 213
University of Montreal : 131
International: 95

English: 1,728
French: 122

72.8%

of CAO members reported being satisfied with the membership services they received.

CAO Award Recipients

CAO President's Award:

Dr. Stanley Woo

CAO Honorary Memberships:

Dr. Dorothy Barrie

Dr. Michelle McKenzie
(honoured posthumously)

All CAO Past Presidents

Leadership Awards:

Supriya Aryal - University of Waterloo

Isabella Duguay - Université de Montréal

 Congress, meetings, provincial engagement

CAO’s 39th Congress 2025

680 ATTENDEES
JULY 2-5, 2025, HALIFAX, NS

The 39th CAO Congress saw the return of the Scientific Poster Show and a successful dedicated OA Day.

Listening nationally. Representing optometry federally.

As Canada’s national optometry association, CAO showed up across provinces, regions, schools, and partner forums to hear local priorities directly and bring those perspectives into national advocacy, programs, and strategy.

2025-26 ENGAGEMENT AT-A-GLANCE

- 9 Provincial association events and AGMs
- 14 Student and school engagement events
- 5 National vision-health and partner forums
- 8 U.S. optometry and cross-border student events
- 3 CAO Congress and Leadership events

IMPACT FOR OD MEMBERS:

CAO’s presence across Canada and the U.S. strengthened relationships, surfaced regional and student perspectives, and helped ensure national advocacy reflects the realities of members in every part of the country.

Healthcare Community Collaboration

CAO helped keep optometry at the forefront of national health policy discussions by chairing key coalitions, shaping shared advocacy priorities, and ensuring eye health was represented in broader health-sector conversations.

CAO Chaired:

-  The Extended Healthcare Professionals Coalition (EHPC) and its Advocacy Committee
-  Vision Health Partners Coalition

CAO Memberships:

-  HEAL Organizations for Health Action
-  Research Canada

IMPACT FOR OD MEMBERS:

Through these leadership roles and memberships, CAO helped shape the agenda with national health partners and ensured optometry had a strong voice in discussions affecting access to care, health policy, and the future of Canada’s health workforce.



CAO membership is included when you join your provincial association.

CAO Council



Financial Statements

