



Eye health and vision care should be a public health priority

OTTAWA, May 11, 2017 – The Canadian Association of Optometrists (CAO) is calling on the Federal Government to exercise leadership and respond to what has become an emerging crisis in eye health and vision care.

More than 5.5 million Canadians have vision-threatening eye conditions, a figure projected to increase by nearly 30% over the next decade given our aging population. Vision loss has the highest direct health care costs of any disease category in Canada, and is expected to cost more than \$30 billion annually by 2032.

“When Canada signed the World Health Organization’s VISION 2020, it agreed to eliminate the main causes of all preventable and treatable blindness as a public health issue by the year 2020,” said Dr. Barry Thienes, CAO President. “Well, it’s 2017. What are we waiting for?”

CAO joined forces with the CNIB, the Canadian Council of the Blind and The Foundation Fighting Blindness to develop *The Federal Role in Eye Health and Vision Care*, a paper which outlines five recommendations for how the Federal Government can enhance health and vision care for all Canadians, while prioritizing the needs of children, seniors, and Indigenous peoples. These include:

- A pan-Canadian Framework for Action;
- Research funding across the eye health continuum;
- Enhanced access to care for Indigenous peoples;
- Funding for collaborative vision care pilot projects; and
- Public education on eye health as a core component of overall health.

Many Canadians have little or no awareness of the signs and risk factors for vision loss, which is of significant concern because 75% of all vision loss is preventable or treatable. CAO has engaged in public awareness around eye health and vision care for decades. It welcomes an opportunity to work collectively with all vision sector stakeholders – including the Federal Government – to ensure access to optimal eye health and vision care for all Canadians, because Canadians deserve better.

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About the Canadian Association of Optometrists

The Canadian Association of Optometrists (CAO) is the national voice of optometry, dedicated to collaboratively advancing the highest standard of primary eye care through the promotion of optimal vision and eye health. For more information, go to opto.ca.

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