



# 2020/2022 Strategic Plan Results

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Canadian Association of  
Optometrists



CANADIAN ASSOCIATION OF OPTOMETRISTS  
ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE DES OPTOMÉTRISTES

# Aspirations and Accomplishments: Reflections on CAO's Strategic Vision

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As I approach the end of my tenure as CAO President and reflect on the work of the association and the advancement of the profession, I'm struck by just how eventful this time has been. While not all changes were welcome, I'm proud of how we approached challenges like the COVID-19 pandemic and opportunities like the introduction of a national strategy for eye care, with resourcefulness, perseverance, and adaptability.

This year's report is more substantive as we highlight the milestones of the past year and provide an overview of the goals realized from our 2020-2022 strategic plan. The plan was driven by member priorities, reflecting a desire for CAO to support its members to achieve greater practice success. Our approach focused on four main areas: federal government advocacy, member engagement and support, public and stakeholder education, and technological leadership. Our objectives in these areas require adaptation as modes of practice, available technologies, and healthcare systems continue to change.

During the pandemic, CAO adapted to member needs and swiftly became a conduit for information gathering and dissemination ensuring members were informed on issues impacting their practice. The circumstances of the pandemic also prompted us to consider broader applications for new technologies, resulting in some positive changes, like the expansion of teleoptometry and discussions around beneficial applications of AI in optometric practice. We have also achieved significant federal advocacy advances, expanded interprofessional and stakeholder relations, and done extensive work preparing the organization and the profession for the future.

We approach our work with the intent of supporting members and advancing the profession in a variety of areas. Free membership for optometry students, adding a student representative to the CAO Council, and hosting events for students ensure we build a strong connection with the next generation of optometrists. Offering in-person continuing education at Congress and online through the CAO Learning platform allows ODs and CCOAs to expand their skill sets and connect with colleagues.

CAO has adapted our services and supports to respond to changing member needs. We have developed bilingual digital awareness campaigns for Vision Health Month and Children's Vision Month that are cost-effective and easily shared. The recently established editorial board for *the Canadian Journal of Optometry* is working hard to achieve indexation for the journal. And we have also expanded member offerings like the Canadian Certified Optometric Assistant (CCOA) Program to include our francophone members.

Representing my profession on the national stage has been a privilege. While progress can seem slow at times, reflecting on the growth and development of optometry in Canada, it is truly amazing to see just how far we have come. I could not be more proud to be part of a profession with such dedication and commitment.

This report stands as a testament to our collective achievements, highlighting the remarkable impact we have made as optometrists and as members of the CAO. As we look to the future, we can take pride in our accomplishments, and draw inspiration from our shared vision of healthy eyes and clear vision for ALL Canadians. After 75 years of service, CAO will continue to support its members for many years to come.



Dr. Harry Bohnsack,  
CAO President



# About CAO

The Canadian Association of Optometrists (CAO) is the national voice of optometry. Recognized at home and internationally as a leading advocate for the profession, CAO provides leadership and support to its over **7,900 members** (*Optometrists, Students, and Optometric Assistants*) to enhance the delivery of healthy eyes and clear vision for all Canadians.

## Vision

Healthy eyes and clear vision for all Canadians.  
For life.

## Mission

The Canadian Association of Optometrists is the national voice of optometry, providing leadership and support to its members to enhance the delivery of healthy eyes and clear vision for all Canadians.

## CAO Values

- Accountable
- Collaborative
- Impactful
- Innovative

## 2020-2022 Priorities, Pivots and Possibilities

CAO's 2020-2022 strategic plan was driven by member priorities, reflecting a desire for CAO to support its members to achieve greater practice success.

By engaging in meaningful dialogue with all system stakeholders to create industry change and influence policies that support optometry, the strategic plan was a blueprint for a future where optometrists are recognized by governments and other funders, industry, health system providers, and the public as “the” primary eye care provider, ensuring optimal eye health and vision care for all Canadians.





## Federal Government Advocacy

CAO's advocacy initiatives focused on promoting the important role of optometrists and collaborating with eye and health care partners and coalitions with the shared aim of improving eye health and eye care for all Canadians.

Throughout the COVID pandemic lockdown, CAO advanced our advocacy priorities through appearances at the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance, the House of Commons Standing Committee on Health, and in meetings with MPs, Senators, and senior bureaucrats.

The Extended Healthcare Professionals Coalition (EHPC), of which CAO is a member, issued a response to two federal studies on Health Workforce with recommendations. CAO also worked with EHPC to ensure that healthcare providers be recognized as essential workers and receive access to vaccines during the pandemic and asked banks for student debt relief.

An industry Working Group, including representatives from CAO, major Canadian manufacturers, and online sellers of corrective lenses was established in 2020 to address the quality and safety of online prescriptions. A full review of provincial and national regulations was conducted by consultants and members were surveyed about their views on the issue. Various options to address the quality and safety of online prescriptions were explored but interest and engagement from industry representatives was insufficient to continue and this Working Group was disbanded.

CAO continues to engage in collaborative activities and partnerships to amplify our advocacy efforts. To effectively communicate the need for federal vision policy, the CAO redeveloped its Federal Role Paper into an [advocacy infographic](#), with support from allied organizations such as the Canadian Council for the Blind, CNIB, Canadian Ophthalmological Society, Diabetes Canada, Fighting Blindness Canada, Opticians Association of Canada, Vision Loss Rehabilitation Canada , and Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists.

In June 2022, the introduction of [Bill C-284, An Act to establish a national strategy for eye care](#) by the Hon. Judy A. Sgro, marked a significant milestone after years of CAO advocating for vision policy at the national level. MP Sgro further demonstrated her commitment by attending the 2022 CAO Congress, engaging with delegates, and recognizing the crucial role of optometrists in primary care.





To support the establishment of a national vision strategy, CAO created a [Bill C-284 advocacy infographic](#) illustrating the importance and focus of the proposed legislation, conducted online advocacy training, organized a Live Chat event with MP Sgro, and facilitated 65+ meetings between CAO members and local MPs. CAO and our vision partners hosted two receptions in 2022, inviting parliamentarians and policymakers to learn about eye health and vision care in Canada. These events aimed to raise awareness and urge decision-makers to prioritize the passage of Bill C-284.

Additionally, the CAO provided [written submissions](#) for federal budgets, emphasizing the importance of establishing a Vision Desk at the Public Health Agency of Canada, improving access to vision care, and investing in research and ocular telemedicine.

CAO and FBC launched a [web-based letter-writing campaign](#) urging the public to contact their MPs and emphasize the importance of leadership in vision policy. Following the introduction of Bill C-284, the campaign was adapted to highlight the significance of the proposed legislation and encourage MPs to support it.

During Vision Health Month in 2021 and 2022, CAO contributed to supplements in *the Toronto Star* and *the Hill Times* which highlighted strategies for reducing preventable vision loss and providing enhanced support to individuals living with vision impairment to encourage the development of effective vision policy in Canada.

CAO is engaged in a long-term project with the Canadian Ophthalmological Society (COS) to track access to vision care in Canada. In 2022 we collaborated on a [joint access research survey](#) as part of our support for the federal government's progress toward creating a national vision health strategy.

As co-lead of the NIHB Vision Care Working Group, the CAO actively participates in meetings to discuss and share information in support of the program. We consulted with optometrists and Indigenous stakeholders to develop recommendations for improving the Vision Care program and presented them to the NIHB to close gaps in access and educate federal officials about the importance of including advanced components like retinal and OCT scans in comprehensive eye exams for priority populations and to facilitate improvements to OD registration and claim payments with Express Scripts.

Recognizing the value of collaborative advocacy, CAO joined [Research Canada](#), a national alliance dedicated to advancing health research and innovation.

Through these concerted efforts and partnerships, the CAO continues our work, positioning optometrists as primary eye care experts and advocating for a national vision strategy in Canada.

## International Advocacy

While our primary focus is Canadian optometry, CAO also engages in international initiatives to promote vision care and advocate for global eye health. As a signatory to [a letter](#) from the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness (IAPB), the CAO expressed its support for the appointment of a UN Special Envoy of the Secretary-General on Vision. We also contacted Canada's Ambassador to the United Nations, who pledged his support for this appointment and committed to advocating directly to the UN Secretary-General about the importance of international policy for preventing blindness.

As a member of the World Council Optometry, CAO has made significant contributions through representatives in various influential positions, including Dr. Michael Nelson (CAO Past President) as a North American representative on the [WCO Board](#), Dr. Luigi Bilotto (AOQ member) on the Education Committee, and Dr. Paul Geneau (CAO Past President) as a member of the WCO's Membership Committee.

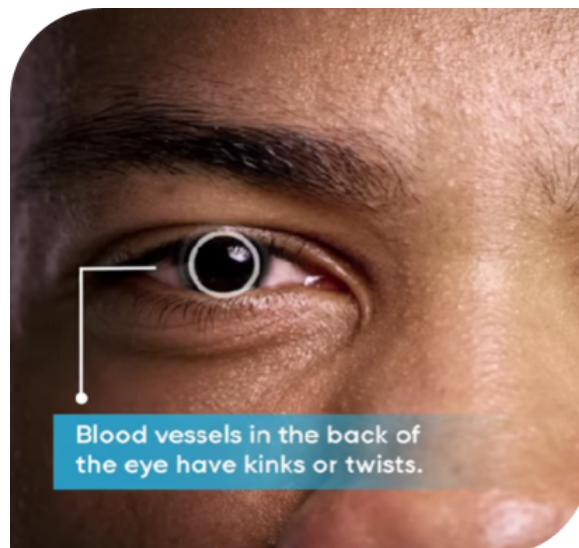


## Public and Stakeholder Education

Part of CAO's role as a national association is to position optometrists as primary eye care providers and promote regular visits through national, bilingual public education campaigns. Our stakeholder education work includes educating other healthcare providers on the role of optometrists and increasing referrals and addressing systemic issues like inadequate vision care coverage with insurance brokers and providers.

## Public Education

CAO ran contests focused on raising awareness during Vision Health Month in 2020 and 2021 and developed a series of "[My Optometrist Found](#)" videos, illustrating what eye exams can reveal about overall health, as part of the Get Eyewise campaign.



CAO joined eight provincial optometric associations in support of the Council for Healthy Eyes Canada (CHEC) [Think About Your Eyes](#) (TAYE) Campaign. This COVID-conscious digital campaign ran from June – October 2021.



CAO's [Specs Appeal](#) campaign was another aspect of CAO's overarching Get Eyewise digital awareness campaign. The contest ran during Vision Health Month in 2021 on Facebook and Instagram, aimed at getting Canadians to think about their eye health and vision care. The campaign challenged people to nominate a glasses or sunglasses-wearing friend who has #SpecsAppeal by tagging them on our posts and entering the into a draw to win a pair of sunglasses. The campaign (with support from Maui Jim) achieved 750,860 impressions, 317,213 engagements & video views, and 731 contest entries.

CAO collaborated with the Canadian Ophthalmological Society (COS) in 2021 on an animated video, [The Silent Thief of Sight](#) to raise awareness about glaucoma. This video promotes early detection and illustrates the importance of co-management between optometrists and ophthalmologists in effectively managing the disease.

Following the postponement of the 2022 TAYE campaign, CAO proceeded with a Get Eyewise-themed campaign and contest, previously run in 2020 and 2021 during Vision Health Month in 2022. This #GetEyeWise contest ran between May 1st and May 31st, 2022, with a main goal of contest entries (post comments) and a secondary goal of appointment bookings. We used updated "Everyday Mistakes" EyeWise collateral for the 2022 campaign and reached over 653K people (the number of people who saw the content), and received 85K post engagements (the number of people who liked, commented, shared or saved the content), including 8.5K people who clicked on [Find-A-Doc](#).



A more robust campaign was developed for Children's Vision Month in 2022 with a focus on myopia and the importance of [eye exams for children](#). This bilingual, national awareness campaign reached over 1.8 million people, 5.2 million impressions, and almost 200K engagements.

CAO also provided members with digital public education campaign collateral and resources from the Vision Health Month and Children's Vision Month Eyewise campaigns, allowing optometrists to spread the word to patients and the wider community, enhancing public awareness.



Recognizing the importance of collaboration, CAO contributed an article titled "Optometry Working to End Preventable Vision Loss" to the Canadian Council of the Blind's (CCB) [White Cane magazine](#). The article emphasized the crucial role of optometrists as primary care providers and their efforts in preventing vision loss.

CAO has also demonstrated its commitment to providing reliable and up-to-date information through the [Eye Health Library](#) on its website. We are reviewing and updating the content regularly and making it easy to share, to ensure that people have access to accurate information and resources.

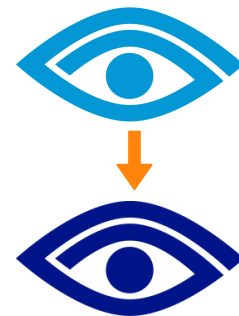
Additionally, CAO's President contributes a regular column in the monthly magazine, [Optical Prism](#), providing valuable insights and updates to eye care professionals. The column serves as a platform for the CAO President to address relevant topics, share expertise, and engage with the professional community.

## Increasing Referrals

Inter-professional relationships are essential to increasing awareness of the care optometrists provide, thereby improving the quality and efficiency of patient care. CAO has established a partnership with the Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists (CAOT) and delivered a CE session on improving collaboration between ODs and OTs to better serve patients at CAOT Conference.

## Enhancing CAO Brand

To enhance the CAO brand, the organization underwent a thorough brand audit, seeking input from both members and external stakeholders. The feedback received during the audit served as a catalyst for a comprehensive brand refresh, aimed at modernizing and elevating the CAO's brand identity to better align with its role as a national voice for optometry.



## Insurance Industry Initiatives

CAO's multi-year insurance industry engagement plan, focused on modernizing vision care benefits continues to make strides. The emphasis is on encouraging stakeholders to keep pace with clinical and technological advances in optometry and to enhance coverage of essential preventive and diagnostic services in comprehensive eye exams.



## The initiative takes a multi-pronged approach, which includes:

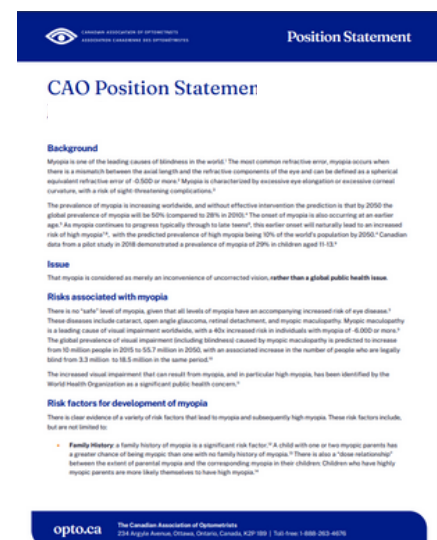
1. A digital social marketing campaign on LinkedIn. The digital campaign has gained considerable traction among insurance industry stakeholders. By refining and targeting our messaging strategies, the campaign has achieved a remarkable click-through rate of 55-70%, surpassing the industry standard of approximately 3% for similar marketing initiatives. This high engagement rate reflects the effectiveness of the campaign in capturing the attention and interest of insurance professionals.
2. Publishing articles in mainstream industry publications once or twice a year and monthly [blog posts](#) to further amplify the message and reach a wider audience.
3. [A podcast](#) series and twice-yearly webinars to educate stakeholders on the importance of updating vision care benefits. The podcast is an important resource for employers and those in the health benefits/insurance industry, focusing on the role of optometrists and the importance of adequate vision care coverage. Our webinars are well-attended with between 50 and 100 insurance industry stakeholders participating and receiving CE credit for attending.
4. One-on-one meetings with insurance executives. These individual meetings are an opportunity to discuss options and avenues towards eliminating hurdles to vision care benefits modernization in Canada.

To further support the insurance industry initiative, the CAO has actively engaged insurance providers, advisors, and brokers with over 40 presentations at conferences, webinars, and in-person meetings. These efforts have facilitated valuable exchanges of information and fostered collaboration to drive positive changes in vision care benefits. CAO has also presented to 79 insurance stakeholders on how to address potential fraud in vision care benefit programs.

## Policy Development

CAO has developed several new position papers, including:

- **COVID-19: Insurance Coverage Position Statement (March 2020)**
- **Myopia Management (January 2022)**
- **Diabetic Retinopathy and Artificial Intelligence Screening (April 2021)**
- **Mandatory COVID-19 Vaccination of Health Care Providers (updated August 2021)**
- **The Use of Teleoptometry in Post-COVID Practice (October 2021)**





## Technological Leadership

New technologies, teleoptometry and artificial intelligence are shaping the practice of optometry and more and more so it's important that optometrists utilize these innovations in a way that's effective for both their patients and their practice. CAO's role is to ensure our members are informed and prepared to embrace the future of optometry. In addition to position papers developed by staff about new technologies (see above), CAO developed ongoing mechanisms to identify future disruptive technology trends and approaches for addressing them. This resulted in CAO's [Teleoptometry and Artificial Intelligence Discussion Paper](#) and in establishing one of the pillars of the 2023-2026 strategic plan.

Each January CAO hosts the Optometric Leaders Forum (OLF). The OLF brings together representatives from provincial associations and regulators, academics, and industry stakeholders to explore the challenges facing the profession, and to plan and prepare for the future of optometry in Canada.

The 2021 OLF was held virtually and featured both national and international panellists guiding discussion on topics that included the WHO's World Report on Vision and its implications for Canada, scope of practice, and access to care.

Plans were in place for a return to an in-person OLF in 2022, but a new wave of COVID resulted in postponement until 2023. This year's OLF in Ottawa saw over 100 leaders coming together to examine how to drive change from within the profession, opportunities to enhance patient care with AI and Teleoptometry, and the importance of improving collaboration.



CAO's, AI and Teleoptometry Working Group presented highlights from CAO's [Teleoptometry and Artificial Intelligence Discussion Paper](#) and breakout discussions explored the OD's role in improving access to vision care, including, the challenges and opportunities of Teleoptometry, AI in healthcare, access to remote, rural, and Indigenous regions and access to marginalized communities in urban centers.



## Member Engagement and Support

CAO continues to develop and enhance our offerings to members, including our weekly newsletter *Contact*, the launch of new member benefit programs, an online learning platform and professional development opportunities. Additionally, efforts have been made to enhance the profile of optometry in Canada and promote research dissemination through the [Canadian Journal of Optometry \(CJO\)](#).

### Member Communication

During the first and second waves of COVID-19, CAO accelerated its advocacy, communications, and policy work (teleoptometry) to advance the interests of members impacted by the pandemic. To ensure timelier dissemination of information, CAO moved *Contact* from a monthly to a daily publication during the peak of COVID, serving as a clearinghouse for information. *Contact* is now published weekly and includes updates on advocacy, stakeholder activities, public education resources and updates on issues affecting optometrists across the country, such as ophthalmic drug shortages, and our insurance industry modernization campaign.

Recognizing the importance of engaging with members, the CAO prioritizes attending provincial Annual General Meetings (AGMs) across the country and student events at the two schools. These events provide an opportunity to update members on the CAO's latest activities and initiatives.

### Student Engagement

CAO has implemented a comprehensive engagement plan to foster student membership and encourage active participation among students attending the UM, UW, and American schools with CAOS chapters. This plan includes targeted email outreach, organizing in-person and online student events, and providing opportunities for networking and professional development. These efforts have yielded remarkable results, with a significant 75% increase in [student membership](#).



As part of our ongoing commitment to supporting optometry students, CAO sponsors the annual White Coat ceremony at both Canadian schools, symbolizing the students' transition into their professional journey and in 2022 we developed the CAO Leadership Award, given annually to a 4th year student at UM and at UW to recognize commitment and professionalism, in alignment with CAO's values of responsibility, collaboration, innovation and impact.

Additionally, CAO contributes to the CAOS publication, [Aperture](#), and actively participates in key student events such as the Canadian Optometry School Research Conference (COSRC), which serves as a unique collaborative platform between the two Canadian schools of optometry. Through these initiatives, CAO demonstrates its dedication to engaging and empowering the next generation of optometrists, fostering a vibrant and supportive community for students in the field.

## Continuing Education

CAO is committed to providing high-quality continuing education opportunities for its members, most notably at the CAO Congress. The 37th CAO Congress, rescheduled from 2021 to 2022 due to the ongoing pandemic, was held in St. John's, NL last July and drew over 600 attendees, including optometrists and exhibitors.



Additionally, we launched [CAO Learning](#), an online platform for Canadian Certified Optometric Assistants (CCOAs) and Optometrists. The platform features COPE-accredited continuing education modules such as "Skin Diseases and the Eye" and a three-part myopia management course, developed with support from CooperVision. These courses have received positive feedback, with over 500 members enrolling in the myopia management courses.

In addition to developing our own CE offerings, we partnered with Optocase to provide members with a 15% discount on Optocase's Annual Memberships and/or its OCT Certification Program. collaborated with MDBriefcase on a COPE-accredited course on Optimizing Glaucoma Management. Recognizing the importance of professional development beyond clinical knowledge, the CAO hosted a valuable webinar on negotiating commercial leases and renewals, offering guidance to members in this aspect of their practice.

CAO also supports the [Winter Learning Resource Centre \(WLRC\)](#) at the University of Waterloo School of Optometry and Vision Science, which offers free information services and resources for CAO members and alumni, contributing to the advancement of optometry education and research.



## CCOA Program

To ensure a practical and robust [Certified Canadian Optometric Assistant \(CCOA\) program](#), we released updated modules for the English CCOA program, ensuring the content remains current and aligned with industry standards.



In 2022, we further expanded the program, offering the full program, on-demand program, and OA Basics course in French for the first time for French-speaking OAs nationwide.

To provide CCOA members with expanded professional development opportunities, we partnered with the Opticians Association of Canada (OAC) approved their content for CE credit for CCOA certification renewal.

## Member Benefits Program

In 2022 we developed a national extended health benefits program for members through our mandated broker HUB. The [HUB insurance program](#) launched in New Brunswick and Ontario in 2022 and expanded to PEI, Nova Scotia, and Newfoundland in 2023.

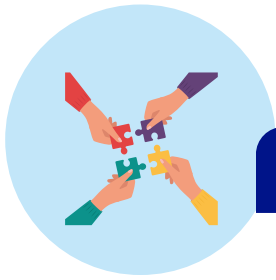
In 2023 we finalized a partnership with [Otto Optics](#), a Canadian e-commerce platform designed specifically for the optical industry. The Otto Optics platform offers a range of features in a customizable webstore, including refill reminders and automated rebate management, to save staff time while elevating the patient experience.

## Canadian Journal of Optometry (CJO)

Published on a quarterly basis, CJO is available both in printed (shipped to CAO members) and digital format. The [online version](#) is fully bilingual.

We moved the CJO to the University of Waterloo's Open Journal System to encourage wider readership and the Editorial Board is currently reviewing processes and policies to facilitate indexation. CAO staff is working with Maracle, the CJO's publisher, on a submission to the Web of Science's Core Collection as a precursor to submitting the Journal to Medline, the National Library of Medicine's premier bibliographic database.

In support of indexation of the *Canadian Journal of Optometry (CJO)*, past editions of the publication have been digitized and will be added to the Open Journal site. Each issue now contains 6 articles (case reports).



## CAO's 2023-2026 Strategic Plan

As the profession has grown, so have our ambitions. As we tackle more complex issues a consistent, long-term approach is required to see these goals realized. Our updated strategic priorities were shaped by member and stakeholder input and designed to employ CAO's organizational strengths to address external forces in healthcare and changes in optometry. [CAO's 2023-2026 Strategic Plan](#) builds on the progress of the previous plan and prioritizes four strategic directions: Positioning optometry as the hub for eye health and vision care, advancing

practice conditions for optometrists across Canada, advocating for improved eye health and vision care access and outcomes for all people in Canada and championing beneficial integration of technology into optometry practice

As we look ahead to the future, we acknowledge that our work is far from done. The rapidly evolving landscape requires continuous adaptability, innovation, and collaboration. CAO objectives are expansive, but our intent is singular; to provide leadership and support to our members to enhance the delivery of healthy eyes and clear vision for all Canadians.



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