



## CAO Statement on IRCC new immigration stream specific to health workers

The Canadian Association of Optometrists acknowledges [the new joint initiative by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada and Health Canada to fast-track permanent residency for qualified healthcare workers including doctors, nurses, dentists, pharmacists, physiotherapists, and optometrists](#). The CAO supports this initiative as an important step on Canada's path to alleviate health human resources shortages experienced in many parts of the country. The initiative will allow skilled refugees and other displaced workers to quickly integrate into Canadian society and contribute to improving the Canadian health system.

The CAO does not contend that there is a shortage of optometrists in Canada. The number of optometrists per 100,000 population is on par with several OECD countries – Just over 17 per 100,000, compared to 16.16 in the USA (2017) and 16.7 in New Zealand (2022.) Australia reports a range of between 13.8 and 19.5 optometrists per 100,000 (2021.) This is very comparable with what we have been observing in Canada over the past three years.

While we appreciate this initiative, we strongly encourage the Federal, provincial, and territorial governments to pay particular attention to the skewed distribution of health human resources (including optometrists) across the country – and to take measures, including creating incentives for Canadian graduates, established practitioners, and foreign-trained newcomers to serve the communities and population groups whom we know are underserved.

With [Bill C-284, An Act to establish a national strategy for eye care](#) moving through the legislative process, the Canadian Association of Optometrists anticipates that training and talent attraction would form an integral part of that strategy and which we would be happy to help implement.