



Eye Care is Primary Health Care

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

February 10, 2025 – Ottawa, ON - A comprehensive eye exam does more than test your vision, it could help save your life. Optometrists are at the forefront of eye care, and as primary care health professionals, they support ensuring better health outcomes for all Canadians. The Canadian Association of Optometrists (CAO) stresses the importance of regular comprehensive eye exams from infants to seniors, and the essential role of optometrists in ongoing discussions with legislators to shape a unified and integrated Canada's Health Workforce.

Optometry is an integral part of the healthcare system

For over a decade, optometrists have been active on multiple fronts in ensuring eye health for all Canadians calls for a comprehensive approach, making eye health, vision care, and rehabilitation essential components of Canada's public health agenda. However, there is more that our profession can do to support the provision of timely health services and the overall well-being of Canadians.

"While we applaud the Passage of Bill C-284 dedicated to a National Strategy for Eye Care, optometry has been overlooked for far too long as part of strategies aiming at strengthening an integrated health care system", says Dr. Martin Spiro, President of the Canadian Association of Optometrists. The recent report from Health Canada [Caring for Canadians: Canada's Future Health Workforce – The Canadian Health Workforce Education, Training and Distribution Study](#) embodies a narrow view of the Canadian health workforce. By omitting optometrists as resourceful expertise, along with other healthcare providers, this study fails to provide a complete picture of the primary care workforce.

The CAO is calling for a pivotal advancement to ensure that future studies reflect optometrists as crucial primary care providers. Our profession will continue to work collaboratively with all decision-makers and partners to promote care across the country and enhance access in rural and remote communities, which are chronically under-served.

Your optometrist sees more than your eyes

Your eyes are the windows to your overall health. Regular eye exams by your optometrist play an essential role in maintaining your overall health and could help detect symptoms of potentially life-threatening conditions. Optometrists diagnose, treat, and help prevent diseases and disorders affecting the visual system (the eye and related structures).

They also assist in identifying general health conditions that are often first detected through a comprehensive eye exam, provide referrals to specialists, and can help manage post-eye-surgery health. Comprehensive eye exams can uncover underlying and life-threatening health issues, such as a stroke, cardiovascular diseases, diabetes, hypertension, some cancers, brain injuries, and neurological conditions.



It is important for Canadians to make eye care a regular part of their healthcare regimen

Many people are not familiar with the role of optometrists or the importance of regular comprehensive eye exams and often overlook it until they notice obvious symptoms. As many vision problems have no external signs, and many serious eye conditions have no obvious symptoms, the Canadian Association of Optometrists recommends¹ comprehensive eye exams for children starting at six to nine months, then again between the ages of two and five years, and annually thereafter to age 19. After 19, eye development stabilizes, allowing check-ups every two years for healthy adults with no known eye conditions. However, after age 65, yearly exams are recommended once again due to the increased incidence and risk of eye disease.

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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 +8,300 members (Optometrists, Students, and Optometric Assistants) to enhance the delivery of healthy eyes and clear vision for all Canadians. For more information, visit www.opto.ca.

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¹ CAO Position Statement on [Eye Exam Frequency](#)