



Sight Testing

The Policy Issue

The concept of “sight testing” was developed to describe a refraction (a procedure that measures prescription of the eye) when it is administered independently from a comprehensive eye health examination and used to generate a record from which to dispense glasses or contact lenses. While refraction is an essential component of a comprehensive eye examination, it is but one of several factors considered by optometrists in the determination and maintenance of eye and vision health. Visual acuity can be addressed by corrective lenses, some other form of vision rehabilitation or further medical evaluation.

A sight test does not offer the comprehensive level of preventive eye health care that is needed to address incidences of asymptomatic eye disease and other health problems, including some life-threatening diseases.

Clinical Evidence

The Canadian Association of Optometrists “Sight Testing Position Paper” (The Canadian Association of Optometrists, April 1, 2013) brings together evidence that supports the need to maintain sight testing as a component of a comprehensive eye examination, rather than as a stand-alone procedure. While a sight test can measure refractive error, it does not provide any information about the cause for the acuity change. A change in refraction can indicate ocular disease. Although the blurred vision can sometimes be improved with corrective eyewear, if the cause is an undetected disease, only a full eye health examination by a qualified eye health practitioner such as an optometrist or ophthalmologist can diagnose the problem.

Early diagnosis of many conditions can prevent irreparable harm as well as the high cost to society resulting from vision loss. A Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB) study in 2009 entitled “The Cost of Vision Loss in Canada” identified that the cost of vision loss amounted to \$15.8 billion in 2007.

Policy Position

The Canadian Association of Optometrists (CAO) is opposed to the disassociation of a refraction or “sight test” from a comprehensive eye examination as the source to inform a dispensing record for corrective eyewear, including contact lenses. This position on sight testing is in line with the long standing and primary concern doctors of optometry have always maintained for patient eye health. CAO, further, encourages its corporate members to oppose any effort to permit refractions to be performed independent of an eye examination unless the professional judgment of the optometrist or ophthalmologist indicates otherwise.

Reviewed: July 31, 2013