

CAO Position Statement on Mobile Eye Care

Policy Issue

Doctors of Optometry have offices in most cities and communities across Canada. Having a local optometrist as a primary eye care provider gives patients the best access to comprehensive eye care services and continuity of care. In some instances however, geographical location, poor mobility, or other restrictions may prevent patients from having an in-office eye exam. Mobile eye care services can be valuable in these circumstances to provide access to comprehensive eye care for all Canadians. The standard for mobile eye care is the responsibility of provincial optometric colleges.

Due to the transient nature of mobile services, provincial optometric college guidelines should be followed to ensure public protection.

Policy Position

The CAO supports optometric services provided to underserved populations in our country by mobile clinics. Underserved populations may be more prevalent in remote locations, however they may also exist in urban centres where mobility, economic, or cultural factors preclude groups from accessing optometric care.

The CAO supports the use of complete and comprehensive optometric eye examinations for all Canadians including those examined in mobile clinics. When patients require additional optometric testing, follow up visits, or a referral to another health care provider, appropriate recommendations and/or referrals should be made.

The CAO strongly encourages mobile clinics to establish working relationships with local optometric clinics and to utilize local optometric human resources as much as possible. These relationships allow continuity of care and follow up, as well as ongoing record accessibility.

The CAO recognizes that all optometric patients, including those served in mobile clinics, have a right to know the identity of their optometrist and have access to the information in their optometric records.

The CAO recommends that access to treatment services such as eyewear should also be considered by mobile clinics, and if possible, made accessible to the patients served by the mobile clinics.

Guidelines

Provincial optometry regulatory authorities are ultimately responsible for establishing standards for optometric care in their respective jurisdictions. CAO recommends the following guidelines also be taken into account when an individual optometrist is considering providing mobile care:

- The guardianship of the records is the responsibility of the optometrist who delivers the care.
- Proper storage of records is still required for exams conducted in a mobile setting.
- In the situation of a third-party mobile eye unit which may conduct some administrative work on the optometrist's behalf, the optometrist remains responsible for obtaining consent if exams are performed on children or incapacitated adults.
- The mechanisms for referrals, when needed, must be established and remain the sole responsibility of the examining optometrist.
- When patients are children or incapacitated adults and a responsible guardian is not present, a mechanism to communicate diagnoses and treatment plans to that person must be established.
- Patients who have a regular optometrist, and therefore access to care, should not be prioritized in a mobile care visit.
- Consider the patient selection criteria and ensure that for each patient seen in this setting, mobile care is the best option for that patient.
- When involved with a third-party mobile eye unit, optometrists should refer to their provincial guidelines with respect to contractual obligations, in order to avoid any conflict of interest.
- Optometrists providing optometric care in any jurisdiction must be licensed and a member in good standing in that jurisdiction.

Conclusion

The Canadian Association of Optometrists (CAO) supports mobile clinics for underserved populations. The CAO believes all Canadians should have access to a comprehensive eye exam by a qualified optometrist. However, due to geographical, mobility, and other restrictions, not all patients are able to have an in-office visit. Mobile clinics can give underserved populations access to a comprehensive eye exam. The CAO recommends optometrists in mobile clinics follow the guidelines above to protect the public and ensure the best standard of care possible in these settings.

Developed: October 2016

Related CAO position statement

Sight Testing 2013