



Canadian Association of Optometrists Pre-Budget Submission 2016

Growing our Economy Together
Addressing the Economic and Health implications of Vision Care for Canadians

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About CAO

The Canadian Association of Optometrists (CAO) is the national voice of optometry in Canada. Over 4,500 doctors of optometry and 400 optometry students comprise the membership of CAO, representing 83% of doctors of optometry (ODs) in Canada.

Doctors of Optometry are independent primary health care providers and represent the front line of vision health. The eye health and good vision of the public are the prime responsibilities of Canada's Doctors of Optometry, where ODs provide almost 90% of primary eye care across Canada.

The Canadian Association of Optometrists is dedicated to collaboratively advancing the highest standard of primary eye care through the promotion of optimal vision and eye health, in partnership with all Canadians.



Introduction

This submission presents two priority recommendations to the Finance Minister and the Department of Finance that not only address proper eye health and vision care for all Canadians, but goes further by recognizing the enormous economic costs of vision disorders. A 2012 CNIB comprehensive study on the cost of vision loss in Canada estimates the annual cost to be \$19.1 billion, which includes direct health costs of \$11 billion, and indirect costs of \$8.1 billion. (CNIB, 2015) In fact, vision loss costs Canada's economy more than diabetes, cancer and musculoskeletal diseases combined. (CNIB, 2015)

Canada's Doctors of Optometry (ODs) are seeking better and more efficient delivery of eye health and vision care services for all Canadians. Improving access to vision care and rehabilitation services is also a priority. In order for Canadians to have access to the quality eye care they deserve, vision health needs to become a priority in healthcare discussions.

CAO recommends:

Recommendation #1

That the government establish a federally-funded public awareness campaign around the theme of the importance of eye health and vision care.

Recommendation #2

That all governments commit to a National Framework for Action to Promote Eye Health and Vision Loss, where all Canadians can benefit from the elimination of vision impairment due to conditions that are preventable as well as through the modification of known risk factors.



Seniors and Children

Doctors of optometry are the primary care eye health and vision care medical professionals for Canadians. Optometrists diagnose, treat and manage eye care for patients with glaucoma, diabetes, cataracts and macular degeneration.

When considering Canada's aging population, the cost of improperly managing age-related chronic conditions will be very high.

At the other end of the life spectrum, the impacts of poor eye health and vision care are also felt by children. A recent survey commissioned by the Canadian Association of Optometrists reported that 61% of parents mistakenly believe they would know if their child was having difficulty with their eyesight. Many serious eye conditions do not have obvious symptoms and some eye diseases only become apparent when the condition is advanced and difficult to treat. Children accept their vision as normal because they have no point of comparison. They may simply assume everyone sees the way they do.

We know that 80% of all learning during a child's first 12 years is visually based. Vision problems manifest themselves both in school and at play. Many parents are unaware that vision issues are common among children. CAO wants to impress upon them that one in four school-aged children has a vision problem of some kind that must be addressed for a child to reach their full potential.

When we look at the vision challenges facing our youngest and oldest populations, the impact this will have on their quality of life and the financial burden it places on our health care system, the need for better public eye health education becomes a very obvious one.

A Healthy Workforce

While the direct costs associated with vision health and vision loss in Canada are exceptionally high at \$11 billion in 2012, the indirect costs are nearly just as high at \$8.1 billion. The overall single largest indirect cost is associated with **lost productivity** at 48%, or lost earnings for Canadians with vision loss estimated at \$3.9 billion annually. This can be attributed in part to the low employment rate among working-age people with vision loss. The transfer costs, also known as deadweight losses, refer to administration and other costs associated with raising additional tax revenues to cover lost income tax and initiatives such as disability support programs. Caregiving and support costs, averaging around 10%, refers to the value of lost productivity amount the family and friends who act as caregivers for people with vision loss, and other support services in the community as well as specialized library services.

These consequences can be avoided. We know that 75% of vision loss is preventable or treatable. We also know that most Canadians assume that the absence of coverage by government is an indicator that vision care is not important.



Recommendation #1

That the government establish a federally-funded public awareness campaign around the theme of the importance of eye health and vision care.

A modest investment of \$25 million over a five year period towards a public awareness campaign would help inform Canadians, both young and old, of the importance of vision health and help save money in the future by focusing on prevention and assisting Canadians in identifying problems before they become a burden on the public health care system. Keep in mind, over 75% of vision loss is preventable or treatable.

Other populations that are at particular risk of developing eye disease, include Aboriginal Peoples, people with a family history of eye disease, people with diabetes and marginalized and underprivileged groups.

The truth remains that most Canadians are not availing themselves to quality optometric vision care that they require and as a result the prevalence and economic burden of eye disease such as glaucoma, cataracts, diabetic retinopathy, low vision and macular degeneration are much higher and costlier than they should be.

Improving Canadians' knowledge about the importance of vision health would be a sound investment in the health and safety of our population and our economy in the long term. Raising general public awareness about eye health is the first line of defense in reducing the risk of avoidable vision loss, blindness and the prevention of eye disease.

Recommendation #2

That all governments commit to a National Framework for Action to Promote Eye Health and Vision Loss, where all Canadians can benefit from the elimination of vision impairment due to conditions that are preventable as well as through the modification of known risk factors.

With the emerging crisis in eye health and vision care facing many Canadian populations, it is crucial that a well-coordinated blueprint be developed. What is required is a nationally coordinated action where governments, health professionals, non-government organizations, industry and individuals will work in partnership towards the promotion of eye health and prevention of vision loss in general.

Rather than focusing on one specific eye condition, a National Framework would seek to cover the underlying issues that are common to the promotion of eye health and prevention of eye disease and vision loss. Ultimately, reducing the risk of eye disease and injury, increasing early detection, improving access to eye health care services, quality of care and the important evidence base would all be acknowledged and addressed through a National Framework initiative.

Within the next 20 years, the number of Canadians with vision loss is expected to double. CNIB estimates that over the next ten years, the number of Canadians with vision loss will increase by 29% to more than 619,500 people. In order to



appropriately respond to Canadians' vision health needs, this recommendation encourages strong committed leadership

from both government and involved stakeholders.

The Facts about our Vision Health Future

- Vision loss is the most feared disability for Canadians (69%).¹
- Canadians in the 64+ population will double from 4.6 million in 2010 to 9.2 million by 2031.²
- 4 million+ Canadian adults have one of the leading ocular diseases... all of which are age related.³
- Within the next 20 years the number of Canadians with vision loss is expected to double.³
- Vision loss has the highest direct health care costs of any other disease.⁴
- The financial burden of vision loss in Canada in 2012 was estimated at \$19.1 billion.⁵ By 2032, vision loss is expected to cost Canadians \$30.3 billion.⁶
- Over 75% of vision loss is preventable.⁷

1. Environics Research Group 2003

2. www.statscan.gc.ca

3. A Clear Vision: Solutions to Canada's Vision Loss Crisis, Canterbury Communications 2005

4. The Cost of Vision Loss in Canada, 2012, CNIB

5. Ibid

6. The Cost of Vision Loss 2007 in Canada, CNIB & COS

7. CNIB