



## Canadian Association of Optometrists Pre-Budget Submission 2018

Contributing to Canadian Economic Growth  
Vision Care for Canadians: The impact on productivity and competitiveness

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## **About CAO**

The Canadian Association of Optometrists (CAO) is the national voice of optometry in Canada. Dedicated to collaboratively advancing the highest standard of primary eye care through the promotion of optimal vision and eye health, we represent more than 5,000 doctors of optometry (ODs) and 400 optometry students across the country.

Doctors of Optometry are independent primary health care specialists who provide nearly 90% of primary eye care in Canada.



## Introduction

Canadian optometrists have much to contribute to help build a vibrant and growing economy. When considering economic competitiveness and productivity, governments must factor in the health of Canadians as a critical component for growth. Governments have a responsibility to ensure access to health for working Canadians and priority populations - children, seniors, Indigenous peoples and populations with a history of disease and conditions at increased risk of poor health - alike.

This access should include better and more efficient delivery of eye health and vision care. **Vision health, therefore, must be a priority in health care and economic discussions.** As independent primary health care providers representing the front line of eye health and vision care, Canada's Doctors of Optometry (ODs) recognize the connection between eye health and overall health and the economic advantage this enables. ODs want to contribute to the discussion.

Vision issues touch all Canadians, with 6 in 10 reporting having had a vision problem. Of these, almost one million Canadians have missed work or school or had their performance affected because of vision problems. Just under half of Canadians report that someone in their immediate family has had a serious vision problem, and 13 per cent said they had personally suffered a serious vision problem.<sup>i</sup> The real impact of vision issues touches Canadians in every walk of life.

The cost of vision loss extends across the economy. Higher absenteeism, lower employment rates, decreased salary, premature retirement, depression, and premature death are more common among those with vision loss.

In 2012, the direct costs associated with vision loss in Canada were incredibly high, at \$11 billion, while the indirect costs were nearly as high at \$8.1 billion.<sup>ii</sup> Lost productivity represented the single largest indirect cost, at 48% or \$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.

ODs recognize that these financial consequences can be avoided, since 75% of vision loss is preventable or treatable.<sup>iii</sup>



## **Vision care: the impacts of vision loss on productivity**

The realities of vision loss:<sup>iv</sup>

- Only one-third of Canadian working-age adults with vision loss are employed.
- Approximately half of Canadian working-age adults with vision loss are struggling to make ends meet on \$20,000 a year or less.
- People with vision loss are at greater risk of social isolation and reduced community participation.

Furthermore, most Canadians are faced with insufficient access to quality optometric vision care, thus the economic burden is much higher and costlier than it should be.

### **Children:**

We know that 80% of learning is visual.<sup>v</sup> Optometrists are also aware that most vision problems in children go undetected by parents and/or teachers.

### **Seniors:**

Vision loss has a significant impact on seniors' quality of life. Compared to people of the same age without vision problems, seniors with vision loss.<sup>vi</sup>

- have four times as many hip fractures
- are admitted to nursing homes three years earlier
- experience three times the incidence of depression
- experience twice the number of falls

Eye health and vision care are essential for healthy aging and facilitate the contributions seniors make to their families, communities, workplaces, and society. Ongoing treatment and prevention of eye disease are key to helping aging Canadians maintain healthy eyes and vision.

### **Indigenous:**

Indigenous Canadians represent the fastest growing segment of the Canadian population, increasing at a rate six times faster than non-Indigenous people.

Indigenous Canadians, particularly those living in rural and remote areas, experience a number of barriers to accessing optometric care. These access issues are the result of many factors, including inadequate transportation, financial constraints, and a lack of on-reserve care.<sup>vii</sup> Research commissioned by the CNIB found one-third of Indigenous people have not had an eye examination within the last two years.<sup>vii</sup> Equitable access to eye health and vision care for Indigenous Canadians should be a public health imperative.



## **CAO recommends that the Federal Government:**

### **Recommendation #1**

#### **Establish a federally-funded public awareness campaign regarding the importance of eye health and vision care.**

A lack of awareness of the full range of services provided by optometrists often leads primary eye care to be inappropriately and expensively delivered in hospital emergency departments, and by family physicians and ophthalmologists.

CAO recommends an investment of \$25 million over five years to roll out a public awareness campaign that informs Canadians about the importance of vision health. If 75% of vision loss is preventable or treatable, bringing public attention to this reality can result in proactive vision care, at a significantly reduced cost to the system.<sup>ix</sup>

Enhancing public awareness about eye health is the first line of defense in reducing the risk of eye disease, avoidable vision loss, and blindness. Improving Canadians' knowledge about vision health is a wise and prudent financial investment in the well-being of our population and by consequence, our economy.

### **Recommendation #2**

#### **Consistent with Canada's commitment to the World Health Organization (WHO)'s VISION 2020 global initiative,<sup>x</sup> the government commit to a National Framework for Action to promote eye health and prevent vision loss, so that all Canadians can benefit from the elimination of vision impairment due to preventable conditions and modifiable risk factors.**

Canada could consider Australia's 2005 *National Framework for Vision Health* as an example of a government-led initiative focused on eye health promotion and prevention of avoidable blindness and vision loss. Key goals of the framework include:

- reducing the risk of eye disease and injury;
- increasing early detection;
- improving access to eye health care services;
- improving the systems and quality of care, and
- improving the underlying evidence base.

The Framework provides a blueprint for nationally coordinated action by governments, health professionals, non-government organizations, industry and individuals to work in partnership.



Building a made-in-Canada *National Framework for Action* would be an opportunity for Canada to join the WHO in recognizing that vision correction is one of the most cost-effective interventions in human and economic development, considered equal to immunizations in both importance and impact.

Research confirms the cost benefit of comprehensive eye exams in the early detection of vision problems. Research further demonstrates that primary eye care provided by optometrists, as contrasted with family physicians or ophthalmologists, is both cost effective and an efficient use of health resources. ODs are a key member of the primary care health team; beyond providing comprehensive eye care, they are able to identify other chronic conditions such as Crohn's disease, diabetes, hypertension and others during comprehensive eye exams in adults. Integrated eye care is a way to improve both eye health and overall health.

A national focus on eye health and vision care, as outlined in the *National Framework for Action* is imperative for all Canadians to achieve their potential and contribute fully to the country's economy.

#### Facts about our Vision Health Future

- Vision loss is the most feared disability for Canadians (69%).<sup>xi</sup>
- The share of persons aged 65 years and older will continue to increase and should account for 20% of the Canadian population by 2014.<sup>xi</sup>
- 4 million+ Canadian adults have one of the leading ocular diseases... all of which are age related.<sup>xii</sup>
- Within the next 20 years, the number of Canadians with vision loss is expected to double.<sup>xiv</sup>
- Vision loss has the highest direct health care costs of any other disease.<sup>xv</sup>
- The financial burden of vision loss in Canada in 2012 was estimated at \$19.1 billion.<sup>xvi</sup>
- By 2032, vision loss is expected to cost Canadians \$30.3 billion.<sup>xvii</sup>
- Over 75% of vision loss is preventable or treatable.<sup>xviii</sup>



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- <sup>i</sup> Nanos Research, Majority of Canadians have experienced vision problems; optometrists survey summary., Ottawa: CAO; March 2016
- <sup>ii</sup> CNIB. 2012. The Cost of Vision Loss in Canada
- <sup>iii</sup> World Health Organization. *Action plan for the prevention of avoidable blindness and visual impairment, 2009-2013*. Geneva: WHO; 2010. Available from: [http://www.who.int/blindness/ACTION\\_PLAN\\_WHA62-1-English.pdf](http://www.who.int/blindness/ACTION_PLAN_WHA62-1-English.pdf)
- <sup>iv</sup> CNIB. Fast Facts about Vision Loss. Accessed July 21, 2016 from <http://www.cnib.ca/en/about/media/vision-loss/pages/default.aspx>
- <sup>v</sup> Zaba et al., Children's vision care in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and its impact on education, literacy, social issues, and the workplace: A call to action. *Behavioural Optometry* 2011;22(2):39.
- <sup>vi</sup> The National Coalition for Vision Health. 2011. Vision Loss in Canada. Accessed online July 11, 2016 at [http://www.cos-sco.ca/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/VisionLossinCanada\\_e.pdf](http://www.cos-sco.ca/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/VisionLossinCanada_e.pdf)
- <sup>vii</sup> Brise LS, de Leeuw S. Seeing Clearly: A Community-Based Inquiry into Vision Care Access for a Rural Northern First Nation. *Can J Optom* 2015; 77(2):34-43
- <sup>viii</sup> CNIB. 2015. Vision Health and Eye care: The Canadian Perspective, page 18. Accessed October 14, 2016 at: <http://www.cnib.ca/en/get-involved/join-an-event/Vision-Health-Month/Documents/Vision-Health-Report-2015-English.pdf>
- <sup>ix</sup> World Health Organization. 2007. Vision 2020: The Right to Sight, p.6. Accessed July 21, 2016 at [http://who.int/blindness/Vision2020\\_report.pdf](http://who.int/blindness/Vision2020_report.pdf)
- <sup>x</sup> World Health Assembly 2003, Elimination of avoidable blindness, 56th World Health Assembly, Geneva, 28 May 2003, Resolution WHA56.26: Available at [56th World Health Assembly Resolution WHA56.26 Elimination of Avoidable Blindness](#)
- <sup>xi</sup> Environics Research Group 2003
- <sup>xii</sup> Statistics Canada. 2015. Canada's Population Estimates: Age and sex, July 1, 2015. Accessed July 21, 2016 at: <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/150929/dq150929b-eng.htm>
- <sup>xiii</sup> A Clear Vision: Solutions to Canada's Vision Loss Crisis, Canterbury Communications 2005
- <sup>xiv</sup> Ibid
- <sup>xv</sup> CNIB. 2012. The Cost of Vision Loss in Canada
- <sup>xvi</sup> Ibid
- <sup>xvii</sup> The Cost of Vision Loss 2007 in Canada, CNIB & COS
- <sup>xviii</sup> World Health Organization. 2007. Vision 2020: The Right to Sight, p.6. Accessed July 21, 2016 at [http://who.int/blindness/Vision2020\\_report.pdf](http://who.int/blindness/Vision2020_report.pdf)