



June 16, 2016

The Honourable Dwight Ball, M.H.A.
Premier of Newfoundland and Labrador
Chair, Council of the Federation Confederation Building, East Block
PO Box 8700
St. John's NL A1B 4J6
premier@gov.nl.ca

The Honourable Darrell Pasloski, M.L.A.
Premier of Yukon
Vice-Chair, Council of the Federation
PO Box 2703
Whitehorse YK Y1A 2C6
premier@gov.yk.ca

Dear Premiers:

Vision issues touch us all: six in ten Canadians report having had a vision problem. Of these, almost a million Canadians have missed work, school, or had their performance affected because of vision problems.¹ Within the next 10 years, the number of Canadians with vision loss is expected to increase to 29 percent.² Nearly half of Canadians reported that someone in their immediate family has had a serious vision problem and 14 percent said they had personally suffered a serious vision problem.³

The cost of vision loss is an enormous burden – far ahead of most other diseases at \$19.1 billion annually, representing one percent of GDP.⁴ Older Canadians are singularly affected and are at a higher risk of a number of eye conditions and sight-threatening diseases.

It is not all bad news. We know that 75 percent of visual impairment is preventable if detected and treated early enough. A comprehensive eye exams can do more than test vision, they can save lives. Optometrists can sometimes see indicators before a disease is formally diagnosed. Examples include conditions such as diabetes, thyroid disease, brain tumours and high blood pressure.

Despite the staggering human and economic costs of vision impairment, Canada does not have a national approach to eye health.

.../2



The Canadian Association of Optometrists believes the time has come to fill the gap. Premiers, we are writing you to consider mandating the Health Care Innovation Working Group to address vision health. This will set the stage for the development of a *National Framework for Action towards Preventing Avoidable Blindness and Promoting Vision Health*. Key elements of the framework could include patient-centered, integrated, and collaborative delivery models of eye care integral to primary health care with an initial focus on seniors, children, and indigenous populations.

We believe the Council of the Federation should lead the dialogue on primary eye care to better meet the changing needs of Canadians.

We would be pleased to work with your officials and our provincial and territorial associations of optometrists in defining the scope of such an undertaking.

Sincerely yours,

Dr. Barry Thienes, President, CAO

cc. Provincial Premiers
Federal Health Minister, Hon. Jane Philpott

-
1. Nanos Poll, February 2016
 2. Cost of Vision Loss, CNIB, 2012
 3. Ibid
 4. Ibid