

DIABETIC RETINOPATHY: A public health imperative

Diabetes exacts a very heavy burden on the health care system. **In 2016, 3.5 million Canadians had diabetes, a figure expected to rise to nearly 14 million by 2026.**¹ The associated costs of managing diabetes are currently estimated at \$3.4 billion, increasing to \$5B over the next ten years.²



IMPACT of Diabetic retinopathy (DR)

- The risk of blindness is 25 times higher for someone with diabetes³, making it the leading cause of blindness in Canada.⁴
- **Early detection and prompt treatment can prevent diabetes-related visual impairment⁵:**
 - Through comprehensive eye examinations at regular intervals, optometrists can uncover retinopathy at its earliest stages. This would allow for timely referral to a physician for treatment of diabetes, and result in lower system costs.
- Diabetic retinopathy is seen in 20% of cases of newly diagnosed diabetes⁶, which suggests that a person has been experiencing the damaging effects of the disease for four to seven years prior to diagnosis.⁷ With early detection, timely treatment and appropriate follow-up care, there is a 95% reduced risk of vision loss.⁸
- Biannual vision examination and treatment of diabetic patients is a cost savings measure compared to general practitioners delivering this service.⁹



SWIFT ACTION REQUIRED to address eye health and vision loss among diabetic patients

- Build a pan-Canadian Framework for Action, coordinated by a Vision Desk at PHAC, that:
 - Is patient-centered and ensures access to the right eye health provider at the right time.
 - Promotes national vision health guidelines including an annual, comprehensive in person eye exam for patients with diabetes.
 - Ensures the best outcome for diabetic patients by incorporating optometrists in collaborative care teams.
 - Approaches eye health as a population health priority, and encourages its integration into patients' preventive health care routine.
- Educate the public by promoting the value of comprehensive eye examinations to detect and help monitor diabetic retinopathy through a multi-stakeholder public information campaign.
- Fund research on diabetic retinopathy and preventative measures.

REFERENCES >

