



CANADIAN ASSOCIATION OF OPTOMETRISTS
ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE DES OPTOMÉTRISTES

Canadian Association of Optometrists
Presentation to the Standing Committee on Finance
September 28, 2017

*Contributing to Canadian Economic Growth:
Vision Care for Canadians -
The Impact on Productivity and Competitiveness*



Good afternoon.

Thank you for inviting us to appear before you today. My name is Dr. Michael Dennis; I am the President of the Canadian Association of Optometrists and practice in Prince George, British Columbia. I am joined today by, Laurie Clement, the Chief Executive Officer for the Association.

The national voice of optometry in Canada, the Association represents more than 5000 optometrists and 400 students, dedicated to collaboratively advancing the highest standard of *primary eye care* through the promotion of *optimal vision and eye health*.

Optometrists are independent, primary health care specialists who provide nearly 90 per cent of primary eye health and vision care in Canada. They specialize in the examination, diagnosis, treatment, management and prevention of disease and disorders of the eye.

As both health care professionals and small business owners, 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 - including the *eye health* - of Canadians as a critical component for growth. We want to be a part of the solution.

We know there is an emerging crisis in eye health, vision care and rehabilitation in Canada. We also know that the realities of vision loss on *productivity* in Canada have a profound effect on the economy.

For example, only one-third of working-age adults with vision loss are employed. According to the most recent Statistics Canada data, people living with vision impairment or loss had an unemployment rate of 13.0 per cent. They also are at greater risk of social isolation and reduced community participation.

An estimated 5.5 million Canadians have vision threatening eye conditions. The number of Canadian adults with one of the leading ocular diseases will double in the next 20 years. Age-related eye disease is set to skyrocket.

Data from the Public Health Agency of Canada shows that vision loss accounts for approximately eight per cent of the *economic burden of illness* in Canada. Vision loss has the highest direct health care costs of any



disease category in Canada – more than diabetes, cancer, mental disorders, respiratory diseases, arthritis or cardiovascular disease.

The total *cost of vision loss* is expected to cost Canadians more than \$30 billion annually by 2032.

However, the good news is that 75 per cent of vision loss is preventable or treatable. Preventative primary eye care *can make a difference*.

While many Canadians have access to vision care, this is not the case for everyone. The main factors influencing *timely access* include public awareness, availability and regularity of services (particularly in rural, remote and Indigenous communities), technological support, affordability and physical accessibility.

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 eye health is a wise and prudent financial investment in the well-being of our population and by consequence, *our economy*.



Therefore, the Canadian Association of Optometrists recommends that the **government establish a federally-funded public awareness campaign addressing the importance of eye health and vision care.**

Nobody in Canada should be needlessly visually impaired. Those with unavoidable vision loss should be supported to achieve their full potential. Comprehensive eye care services should become an integral part of our primary health care and health systems development.

Australia's 2005 *National Framework for Vision Health* provides a blueprint for nationally coordinated action by governments, health professionals, non-government organizations, industry and individuals to work in *partnership*.

A made-in-Canada *Framework* would provide an opportunity for Canada to join the W.H.O. in recognizing *eye health as a public health imperative* and *vision correction* as one of the most cost-effective interventions in human and economic development, considered equal to immunizations in both importance and impact.



A Framework that includes vision as part of the population health agenda and community programs would be a first for a Canadian government and would allow Canada to honour its commitment as a signatory to the W.H.O's Global Action plan by 2020. It would maximize the health, independence and economic participation of its citizens. *It's 2017, what are we waiting for?*

The Committee also invited input on what federal measures would help Canadian *businesses* be more productive and competitive. The Association concurs with the Finance Minister that an economy that works for the middle class means a country that works for everyone. We agree that supporting entrepreneurs and an innovative economy encourages competitiveness and growth. To that end, we would recommend a full and *careful review* of the implications of passive investment on **all** private corporations, large and small. We would further implore the government to *extend the current consultation period* and do a deep dive into the consequences of the proposed changes.

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today, and I would like to remind the Committee that October is Children's Vision Month.



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