



Emerging crisis in eye health and vision care requires a workforce to meet the demand

OTTAWA, May 22, 2018 – The future of eye health and vision care in Canada is a cause for significant concern, with the prevalence of vision loss expected to increase nearly 30%¹ in the next decade. Vision loss has the highest direct health care costs of any disease² and the financial burden of vision loss is expected to double, reaching \$30.3B by 2032.²

Meeting the Eye Health and Vision Care Needs of Canadians: A Workforce Analysis was commissioned by the Canadian Association of Optometrists (CAO) to examine the current and future eye health and vision care needs of Canadians, to ensure the ability of providers to respond to those needs so that patients see the right provider at the right time.

Current use of eye health and vision care by seniors (the fastest growing age segment of the population), and vulnerable populations including children, the Indigenous and those living in rural and remote areas of the province, is suboptimal. Recent research suggests that the eyesight of the general population is deteriorating and at a much younger age.³ The sheer numbers of Canadians with eye health and vision issues requires immediate action.

“Our interest is in providing patient-centred care that respects the continuum of eye health and vision care management,” notes Dr. Michael Dennis, President of the CAO. “We believe this Report represents the start of a discussion regarding inter-professional collaboration to optimize the overall contributions of the eye health and vision care workforce by using each provider most effectively.”

At present, there are four key provider groups – optometrists, ophthalmologists, family physicians (FPs) and nurse practitioners (NPs) who can respond to Canadians’ eye health needs. While FPs and NPs do provide some primary eye care, they have a limited scope of practice around eye care and treat patients for vision care issues less frequently than optometrists or ophthalmologists. In Canada, there are five times the number of optometrists than ophthalmologists. This group is increasing at three times the rate of ophthalmologists, suggesting that their role in primary eye care could be expanded. Their scope allows them to screen, diagnose and manage the four most common eye diseases in Canada. When the complexity of a patient’s condition warrants, they consult with, or refer, to an ophthalmologist.

The Report identifies nine strategies to meet the growing health and vision care needs of Canadians, including enhanced use of optometrists for primary eye care, enhanced interdisciplinary eye health and vision care services through other providers and the optimization of emerging technologies to facilitate delivery.

¹ CNIB. Fast facts about vision loss.

² Access Economics Pty limited. The cost of vision loss in Canada: summary report. CNIB and the Canadian Ophthalmological Society (COS); 2009.

³ Yang M, Luensmann D, Fonn D, Woods J, Gordon K, Jones, L, Jones D. Myopia prevalence in Canadian school children – a pilot study (Falcon). University of Waterloo – Centre for Contact Lens Research; 2016.



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About the Canadian Association of Optometrists

The Canadian Association of Optometrists (CAO) is the national voice of optometry, dedicated to collaboratively advancing the highest standard of primary eye care through the promotion of optimal vision and eye health. For more information, go to opto.ca.

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