



CONTINUING COMPETENCE PROGRAM

*Originally published 2004, in accordance with the Health Professions Act
and revised in 2014 and 2015*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	3
ACO Code of Ethics	4
ACO Standards of Practice	4
Guidelines to the ACO Standards of Practice	4
Purpose, Criteria & Goals	5
Participation and Administration	6
Categories of Skills	7
Modes of Assessment	8
Self Assessment	8
On-Site Practice Visits	9
Amount of Active Practice	12
Continuing Education	12
Appeals	13
Competence Committee Communication	14

Introduction

The profession of optometry is a regulated profession under the Province of Alberta Health Professions Act (HPA); and as such, must comply with Part 3 titled “Continuing Competence and Practice Visits”.

This Part requires a continuing competence program:

- a) Must provide for regulated members to maintain competence.
- b) Must enhance the provision of professional services.
- c) May provide for practice visits of the regulated members.

The Alberta College of Optometrists is committed to providing, promoting and enforcing a Continuing Competence Program that enables and encourages lifelong learning and continuous professional development with the end result of improved health care for all Albertans.

No corporate, private or government money was or is used to develop, verify or fund this program. It is completely funded by Alberta optometrists.

The Alberta College of Optometrists defines competence as having the right skills to perform the right procedure to the right person at the right time.

The Alberta College of Optometrists is mandated to carry out its activities; and, govern and guide its regulated members in a manner that protects and serves the public interest.

Code of Ethics

Standards of Practice

Guidelines to the ACO Standards of Practice

ACO Clinical Practice Guidelines

The ACO Code of Ethics sets forth the basic moral and ethical principles of the profession of Optometry. This Code is a moral guide to which all optometrists are committed, and informs the public of the ethical principles by which professional behavior is assessed.

The ACO Standards of Practice are established under the authority of Section 133 of the Health Professions Act. They are considered the minimum standard of professional behavior that ensures that all optometrists provide safe, competent and ethical professional services to all patients at all times. They are to be interpreted in conjunction with the ACO Code of Ethics, the Guidelines to the ACO Standards of Practice, ACO Clinical Practice Guidelines and the ACO Advisories.

The Guidelines to the ACO Standards of Practice provide a guide as to the scope of services that an optometrist is authorized to provide and the manner in which the optometrist provides those services. It is incumbent upon each practitioner to exercise professional judgment and discretion when determining the individual needs of each patient.

The ACO Clinical Practice Guidelines provide guidance to Doctors of Optometry on clearly defined diagnostic, management and treatment regimens for specific areas of practice. They are based on the best available and most current optometric and medical clinical evidence and research.

Standards of Practice, Guidelines to the ACO Standards of Practice and Clinical Practice Guidelines are in constant evolution to reflect advances in optometric and medical science, development of innovative technology, updates to scope of practice and certification of new competencies.

As a precondition to becoming a regulated member of the Alberta College of Optometrists, all applicants must meet the required registration competencies, other registration requirements and be competent to practice in accordance with the ACO Standards of Practice.

Purpose, Criteria & Goals of the Continuing Competence Program

The ***purpose*** of the Alberta College of Optometrist's Continuing Competence Program is:

- To measure, assess and enhance the knowledge, skill and judgment of practicing optometrists;
- To ensure each practitioner meets the prevailing ACO Standards of Practice, Guidelines to the ACO Standards of Practice, ACO Clinical Practice Guidelines and ACO Advisories required to provide appropriate vision care to each patient; and
- To set an expectation that each member will practice in accordance with the ACO Code of Ethics.

The program is designed to work within the following ***criteria***:

- To be effective, valid, accurate, honest and fair;
- To be reliable, accountable and measurable;
- To be flexible and non threatening; and
- To be educational and contemporary.

The ***goals*** are that every optometrist will:

- Maintain the competence, knowledge and skills he/she needs to provide service to the public;
- Continually enhance the quality and delivery of optometric services; and
- Ensure his/her continuing educational development.

Participation and Administration

As per GL-1.3.1a in the Guidelines to the ACO Standards of Practice, participation in the ACO Continuing Competence Program is compulsory for all Regulated Members.

The Alberta College of Optometrists Council reviews the Continuing Competence Program on a regular basis to ensure that the administration, Practice Visit process and appeal process is fair, accurate, honest, accountable, confidential and transparent.

The Competence Committee of the Alberta College of Optometrists is responsible for administering the Continuing Competence Program, performing the member's on-site Practice Visit, measuring the results, making recommendations to the ACO Council on improvements to the program and providing feedback to the individual members on the results of their Practice Visit.

The ACO Continuing Competence Program does not receive government or any other third party funding. The program is entirely funded by a portion of the annual membership dues collected by the ACO; however, individual members are personally responsible for any additional costs involved in performing follow-up Practice Visits following an unsatisfactory review decision.

Methods and tools used in the administration of the Continuing Competence Program may include:

- Written and oral questionnaires;
- Reviewer consultation;
- Patient record evaluation;
- Observation of techniques;
- Case presentations;
- Review of the practitioner's Continuing Education credits;
- Assessment of the practitioner's active time in practice;
- Written examinations;
- Practice facility appearance and instrumentation examination; and,
- Any other tools that may be recommended by the ACO Competence Committee.

Categories of Skills

The Continuing Competence Program is defined and measured through three skill categories:

- Clinical Knowledge and Skills
- Practice Management Skills, and
- Communication Skills

1. Clinical Knowledge and Skills

The acquisition and maintenance of appropriate Clinical Knowledge and Clinical Skills is essential to ensure practitioners are knowledgeable, competent and skilled when providing health care services. The basic premise of this category is the understanding that the patient has the right to assume an optometrist will perform any reasonable test, with the patient's consent, in order to detect and diagnose ocular disorders, conditions and/or diseases, and, ocular signs and symptoms of systemic disease. It is not the patient's responsibility to request a specific test; however it is the optometrist's obligation to perform all necessary procedures. The patient also has the right to assume that the optometrist will explain all possible treatment choices and engage the patient in the decision process.

2. Practice Management Skills

The utilization of appropriate Practice Management Skills is essential to the provision of efficient and effective health care services. Examples of measurable practice management skills may include, but is not limited to: practice marketing and promotion, participation in practice management seminars, efficient use of office staff and systems, investment in appropriate ophthalmic instrumentation in a suitable practice facility, appropriate use of time management and appropriate billing procedures.

3. Communications Skills

The ability to communicate verbally, in writing or in any other appropriate manner with other professionals, ancillary personnel, patients and the public is paramount to ensuring that patient's understand their condition(s) and comply with recommended treatments.

In order to assess a member's verbal skills, a reviewer conducting a Practice Visit may ask the member to describe, as some of the essential elements, testing procedures, diagnosis, prognosis, and treatment choices. Legible patient charts, prescriptions and concise referral reports to other professionals comprise some of the other essential elements of communication.

Types of Assessment

Competence may be assessed using four modalities:

- Self-Assessment Questionnaires and Surveys
- On-Site Practice Visits
- Amount of Active Clinical Practice
- Continuing Education Credits

1. Self Assessment

Self-assessment is an introspective exploration of personal development by each optometrist. The goal of any self-assessment is to assist the member in identifying his/her strengths and weaknesses in the four Skill Categories.

As self-assessments do not provide as high a level of competency assessment as on-site Practice Visits; the Alberta College of Optometrists will use this form of assessment on an ad-hoc basis.

When utilized, all Regulated Members will adhere to the following principles when completing self-assessments:

- All self-assessments require compulsory completion and return to the ACO office.
- All responses are considered confidential and kept on file at the ACO office after review by the ACO Competence Committee.
- Regulated Members will receive the results and recommendations of the ACO Competence Committee within 90 days of being reviewed by the ACO Competence Committee.
- Regulated Members are obligated to follow-up with any remediation or recommendation as decided by the ACO Competence Committee. Remediation and recommendations that are not complied with may result in further remediation or recommendations, or, referral to the ACO Complaint's Director.
- All self-assessment questionnaires and surveys will be revised and updated on a regular basis to ensure they reflect contemporary optometric practice as defined by the ACO Standards of Practice.

2. On-Site Practice Visits

On-site Practice Visits form an integral part of the ACO Continuing Competence Program, with the primary goal of assessing clinical knowledge and skills demonstrated in the members' clinical setting. Practice Visits are authorized under Part 3 of the Health Professions Act (Continuing Competence and Practice Visits).

The following areas are assessed during a Practice Visit:

- Practitioner Information
- Whether all ACO Standards of Practice are being followed
- Whether minimum professional equipment requirements are met and in good working order
- Whether practitioners are abiding by the ACO Infection Prevention and Control Policy
- Whether patient information is collected, used, maintained and disposed of in an appropriate manner
- Whether appropriate diagnostic tests, discussions and treatment plans for that particular patient were conducted for various areas of optometric practice.

The on-site Practice Visit selection process is as follows:

- All newly registered practitioners are automatically entered into the selection system to have a Practice Visit within their first year of practice in Alberta.
- All currently registered optometrists who receive two satisfactory Practice Visit decisions in a row are reviewed in 8-10 years time. All others are reviewed in 4-5 years time.
- All currently registered optometrists who fail their Practice Visit are reviewed within 180 days. Optometrists who subsequently receive a satisfactory decision on their 180-day Practice Visit are reviewed in 4-5 years time. Optometrists who fail their 180-day Practice Visit are automatically referred to the ACO Complaints Director.

Assignment of CC reviewers will follow the following rules:

- At the start of each year, a list of all Regulated Members to be reviewed that year is generated by the ACO office.
- Regulated Members are assigned to individual ACO Competence Committee (CC) members by the ACO Competence Committee Chairman. These assignments are based on close geographical location to CC members.
- Each CC member will review their list of Practice Visits and identify any possible conflicts such as family member, business partner or any other reason that might influence their ability to conduct a fair, accurate and honest practice review.
- The Chair will reassign all potential Practice Visit conflicts to other members of the CC Committee.

- The ACO office will send an official Notification of Review and Conflict of Interest form via regular mail, courier, FAX or email to all Regulated Members who were selected for a Practice Visit along with the name of their selected reviewer.
- Regulated Members have 30 days from the date of the Notification of Review letter to complete and submit a Conflict of Interest form to the ACO office to request that a different reviewer be assigned to them along with the reason for requesting the change. After review of the reasons given for the reviewer change and possible discussion with the Regulated Member, the CC Chairman may designate another member of the CC Committee to conduct that Regulated Member's Practice Visit. If a change is made, the Regulated Member must accept the newly assigned reviewer as no further changes are allowed. The ACO office will inform CC members of any Practice Visit change granted by the CC Chairman.

The Practice Visit review process will follow the following rules:

- CC Members will contact the Regulated Members on their Practice Visit list to find a mutually agreeable date and time to conduct a Practice Visit. They will also agree on the Practice Visit location for those members who practice out of more than one office.
- Once the location, date and time have been agreed, the CC reviewer will inform the ACO office so that an official Confirmation Letter of Notification of Practice Visit can be sent to the Regulated Member via regular mail, courier, FAX or email, the CC reviewer and the CC Chairman. Should, for any reason, a change be required in any of the specifics of the Practice Visit, the CC member will inform the ACO office of the required change so that a revised Confirmation Letter of Notification of Practice Visit can be sent.

The reviewer will respect the confidentiality of any information reviewed whether it be patient personal information, business information or any information concerning the practitioner, in accordance with the confidentiality rules of the Health Professions Act.

During the Practice Visit, the member may be requested to allow the reviewer to:

- Perform patient chart audits;
- Enter and inspect any place where the member provides professional services, including follow-up assessments at other satellite offices and locations;
- Interview a member about his/her professional services and observe the member providing professional services, providing the patient gives consent;
- Interview or survey patients, clients, office consultants, staff and co-workers about the provision of professional services;

- Review, examine and copy documents including patient records, billing statements, appointment books and any other items that are related to the provision of professional services by the member (whether that specific item is owned or under the control of the member); and,
- Assess the safety and condition of equipment and other technology used by the member in the provision of professional services.

At the completion of the on-site practice visit, the member and the reviewer should discuss any concerns or objections about the methods used or information taken during the on-site review. These should be noted in writing at that time on the member's On-Site Practice Review Report form.

Discussions and decisions regarding the member's competence will not be undertaken during the on-site practice visit, as it is the Competence Committee as a whole which will make this determination.

Member Review and Recommendations for Remediation

The results of the practice visit assessment will be presented at a meeting of the Competence Committee. The member will be identified by a numerical identifier, allowing for anonymity during the discussion and assessment. The Competence Committee will determine the disposition of each reviewed member and make recommendations consistent with the results.

The member undergoing the assessment will be advised of the Competence Committee's recommendations within 90 days of the practice visit.

Be it that the goal of the Continuing Competence Program is to provide every member with tools to improve his/her existing level of competence, all members will be provided with reasonable remedial recommendations in areas that are deemed to be weak.

A member who is deemed to fall below the expected competence standard will be advised as to compulsory remediation in the designated skill area. This may include re-assessment within a given time period, development of a learning program, attendance at continuing education seminars, or demonstration of a satisfactory level of skill to a Competence Committee member.

Failure to comply with recommendations of the Competence Committee may result in further mandatory actions on the part of the practitioner, including successful completion of a written exam, attendance at a specified continuing education program, completion of a Certification Course, restrictions to their practice of optometry, or referral to the ACO Complaints Director.

Possible Committee Recommendations

- Satisfactory Review Letter #1 – No changes are required in the member’s practice.
- Satisfactory Review Letter #2 – The member will immediately make the itemized changes and no further follow-up is required.
- Satisfactory Review Letter #3 – The member will immediately make the itemized changes and send written confirmation to the ACO office within 30 days of their disposition letter. Failure to submit written confirmation within the 30-day limit will result in immediate referral to the ACO Complaints Director.
- Unsatisfactory Review Letter #1 – The member will immediately make the itemized changes and be scheduled for a follow-up review within 180 days of their disposition letter. The CC chair will designate a different reviewer to conduct the follow-up review. If a member does not receive a satisfactory grade on their follow-up review, they are immediately referred to the ACO Complaints Director for further action.
- Unsatisfactory Review Letter #2 – The member will be immediately referred to the ACO Complaints Director for further action.

All Practice Visits are conducted at no direct cost to the member except for 180-day follow-up reviews and any additional Practice Visits ordered by the ACO Complaints Director or Hearing Tribunal which are billed directly to the member.

3. Amount of Active Practice

All Regulated Members must practice a minimum of 750 hours in each 3-year competency period. This amount will be pro-rated for those practitioners who register with the ACO in year 2 (500 hours) and those who register in year 3 (250 hours) of the 3-year competency period.

Verification of active practice will occur during the member’s on-site Practice Visit.

4. Continuing Education

The Alberta College of Optometrists recognizes that competent and skilled practitioners require lifelong educational and learning experiences in a variety of settings that contribute to their continuing professional development.

All Regulated Members must obtain the minimum number, or greater, of Continuing Education credits in each 3 consecutive year competency period in a manner, type and number as detailed in the ACO Continuing Education Advisory.

Appeals

Appeals can be addressed to the **Competence Committee Chairman** c/o the ACO office in the following situation:

1. A member perceives, or is aware of a conflict of interest with the assignment of a specific reviewer for the purpose of a Practice Visit. The member must file a Conflict of Interest form and return it to the ACO office no later than 30 days after the Notification of Review letter has been sent and before any review is conducted.

All other appeals should be addressed to the ACO office and will be heard by the **Council of the Alberta College of Optometrists** in the following situations:

1. To challenge the decision of the Competence Committee or Registrar regarding accreditation of Continuing Education credits or amount of active practice. Appeals must be submitted in written form to the Alberta College of Optometrists no more than 30 days after written notification is sent regarding the Continuing Education credits or amount of active practice being refused or revised.
2. To challenge the manner in which a Practice Visit was conducted by a member of the Competence Committee. Appeals must be submitted in written form to the ACO, no more than 14 days from the date the Practice Visit was conducted.
3. To challenge the decision of the Competence Committee upon completion of a Competence Review. Appeals must be submitted in written form to the ACO no more than 30 days after the date of the disposition letter regarding the Competence Committee's decision of that member's Practice Visit.

Competence Committee Communication

The Competence Committee will publish annual tabulations of the general performance results of the membership as a whole. In this manner, the success of the Continuing Competence Program will be constantly monitored and adjusted to provide for improvement where and when necessary.