

News Release

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## Young, rural Albertans need better access to optometrists: survey

*Improved vision and eye health among many benefits of expanding rural eyecare*

(Edmonton) - Improving access to optometry in rural Alberta, and allowing trained optometrists to treat conditions like glaucoma, are two easy, and affordable Alberta can strengthen its healthcare system.

“We know Albertans who live outside Edmonton or Calgary have to travel further and wait longer to access health care services - from day-to-day treatments and surgeries right up to seeing a specialist. Optometry offers a safe and effective solution to these challenges,” said Dr. Rob Kloepfer, President for the Alberta College of Optometrists.

The ACO regulates more than 880 optometrists who practice in more than 100 communities across Alberta. Optometrists provide the most broad-based, easily accessible, and cost-effective health services in eye care and do more than 80% of comprehensive eye exams in the province.

A recent survey of 754 Albertans commissioned by the ACO from One Persuasion found that:

- 21% of rural residents have to travel more than 50 kms to receive eye care, which is four times further than Calgarians and 10 times further than Edmontonians;
- 63% of rural residents agree their communities should have better access to eye care services than they do today;
- 88% of Albertans would prefer to receive specialized eye care in their local community and from optometrists; and
- Men and women between 18 and 34 experience the most significant barriers to accessing services.

Better access to optometry also reduces wait times across the health system, Kloepfer added. “Allowing optometrists to practice the full scope of their training frees up specialists like ophthalmologists to focus on the most serious conditions,” he said. “More Albertans get faster access to better services - everybody wins.”

The ACO is asking the Government of Alberta to expand its scope of practice to let optometrists help more people through limited laser and superficial skin procedures.

“Optometrists have the skills, training and safety protocols in place to treat many more people for conditions like glaucoma, cataracts and skin tags, right in their community,” Kloepfer said. “When it comes to eye health, Albertans look to their optometrists first.”

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[For more information on the Alberta College of Optometrists’ effort to help more Albertans, go here.](#)

**For interview requests, please contact:**

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