



STRATEGIC PLAN

2020

ALBERTA COLLEGE OF OPTOMETRISTS



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Contents

Mission Statement and Values _____	1
Executive Overview _____	2
Knowledgeable, Skilled and Competent Optometrists _____	3
Appropriate Registration Requirements _____	4
Responsible Investigation Processes and Complaint Resolution _____	5
Scope of Practice _____	6
Statistics and Health Metrics _____	7
Ethical & Professional Stewardship _____	8
Contact Information _____	9

MISSION STATEMENT AND VALUES

The Mission of the Alberta College of Optometrists is to ensure that the practice of optometry is regulated and conducted in the best interests of the public.

Values

- We value the privilege of self-regulation granted to us by the Government and the people of Alberta.
- We value honesty, fairness, reasonableness, transparency and effectiveness in our daily activities.
- We value improved patient outcomes supported by professional communication and collaboration with other health care providers, technological innovation, evidence-based research and implementation of new and improved models of patient care.
- We value individual practitioner responsibility for always striving to do what is in the best interests of the patient and meeting the ACO Standards of Practice.
- We value the personal and professional commitment required of competent, compassionate and caring practitioners to ensure they maintain their level of competence throughout their careers.
- We value flexibility, transparency, honesty and reasonableness in discussions and joint endeavors with all external stakeholders.
- We value feedback from patients, the provincial government, other regulatory colleges, other associations and all other interested stakeholders on our activities and performance.



EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW

The ACO will carry out its activities and govern its Regulated Members in a manner that protects and serves the public interest

The 2020 Alberta College of Optometrists (ACO) Strategic Plan is a roadmap to our desired future. In 2020, our organization will concentrate its efforts to:

- Work cooperatively with Alberta Health, Alberta Health Services and other stakeholders in an effort to control the COVID-19 pandemic crisis and protect the health and well-being of Albertans.
- Work collaboratively with the Alberta Government and other stakeholders towards appropriate scope expansion for Doctors of Optometry in an effort to improve access to vision care services throughout Alberta, decrease systemic health care costs, improve Health Quality metrics and improve patient outcomes.
- Review and revise the ACO Continuing Competence Program to:
 - a) Evolve the Practice Visit portion of the program into an unbiased and progressive Performance Assessment program.
 - b) Evolve the Continuing Education portion of the program to recognize that competent and skilled optometrists require lifelong educational and learning experiences in a variety of settings in order to maintain competence throughout their careers and positively influence patient outcomes.
- Continue to develop internal protocols and processes that allow our organization to appropriately and quickly respond to all patient inquiries, complaints and disciplinary matters.

As the time-honored protector of Albertans vision since 1921, the Alberta College of Optometrists continues to work in collaboration and cooperation with the public, our Regulated Members, the Alberta Government and other stakeholders to ensure that we continue to operate in an unbiased, accountable, transparent, appropriate and effective manner. The preferred and desired end-result of the 2020 ACO Strategic Plan is how we, as a regulatory body, ensures that our organization carries out its mandate as described in the *Health Professions Act*.

We encourage and value your feedback on our activities and performances.

KNOWLEDGEABLE, SKILLED AND COMPETENT OPTOMETRISTS

The Alberta College of Optometrists (ACO) recognizes that competent and skilled practitioners require lifelong educational and learning experiences in a variety of settings. In 2020, the ACO Continuing Competence Program will:

- Undergo a complete review and revision to allow it to evolve into an unbiased and progressive Performance Assessment Program that is designed to keep up with changes to the profession of optometry. This evolution will ensure that all Regulated Members maintain their skills, knowledge and competencies throughout their careers.
- Incorporate additional training for Competence Committee members, revise the chart analysis process and enact internal changes to improve transparency and remove any potential of bias.

The ACO Continuing Competence Program is designed to be: effective, valid, accurate, honest, fair, reliable, accountable, measureable, flexible, non-threatening, educational and contemporary. The ACO takes great pride in being recognized as administering one of the most innovative, robust and contemporary Continuing Education and Performance Assessment Programs of any provincial optometric regulatory organization in Canada.



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

APPROPRIATE REGISTRATION REQUIREMENTS

The Alberta College of Optometrists (ACO) accepts applicants who have passed the Optometry Examining Board of Canada (OEBC) entrance-to-practice competence exam for registration to our province. This psychometrically validated, comprehensive, bilingual assessment includes a written exam component as well as a clinical OSCE component.

The ACO also registers optometrists who transfer to Alberta from other provinces via the labor mobility provisions in the Canadian Free Trade Agreement. Internationally trained practitioners who have completed all of the requirements of the FORAC Credentialing Process, passed the International Optometric Bridging Program at the University of Waterloo and passed the OEBC exam are also eligible for registration. The ACO also works with the Fairness for Newcomers Office to ensure that all qualified individuals applying for registration do not face unfair processes or barriers.

All Regulated Members of the ACO and all applicants to the ACO must be Therapeutic Pharmaceutical Agent (TPA) and Advanced Scope certified. This certification ensures that all Albertans receive appropriate and safe care by skilled, knowledgeable and competent practitioners resulting in improved patient outcomes and enriched patient experiences.

Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic crisis caused the cancellation of the National Board Examinations for graduating optometry students. The ACO worked within its legislative limitations to offer appropriate registration options for these students until the National Board Exams can be held.



RESPONSIBLE INVESTIGATION PROCESSES AND COMPLAINT RESOLUTION

The Alberta College of Optometrists (ACO) continues to work with the general public, the Alberta Ombudsman, the Alberta Government and other stakeholders to ensure that our complaint investigation and resolution process is conducted in an impartial, objective, transparent, judicious and timely manner.

A detailed statistical summary of all complaints, investigations, dismissals and Hearing Tribunals is included in the ACO Annual Report to Government and the ACO Annual General Meeting Report to the membership.



In 2020, the ACO will:

- Review and update the ACO website to clearly inform the general public on how to lodge a complaint against an optometrist as well as full details on the complaint process and timelines.
- Mandate that all ACO Council, staff and select committee members complete a Trauma Informed Training for Regulatory Organizations and Sexual Abuse and Misconduct Education for Healthcare Practitioners training programs. These programs will also be opened up to all Regulated Members.
- Launch and post information on the ACO website on the ACO Patient Counselling Program Fund for patients of sexual abuse and sexual misconduct.
- Continue to provide the Minister of Health with requested information on the number and type of complaints received at the ACO office.

Finally, the ACO utilizes mediators who are located around the province to assist in timely and informal mediations for “consumer-related and communication” issues between optometrists and their patients.

SCOPE OF PRACTICE

In 2020, the Alberta College of Optometrists will work with the Alberta Government and other stakeholders to discuss and draft appropriate changes to the *Optometrists Profession Regulation* that will result in:

- Albertans from all across the province having access to safe, skilled and competent vision care services in their home communities. This is especially important for rural and indigenous populations who live far away from metropolitan centers.
- A decrease in systemic health care costs since both diagnosis and treatment services would be completed by the optometrist during the same office visit; and, by also eliminating the need for a referral to another health care practitioner (and subsequent additional billing to Alberta Health).
- Improved patient outcomes from patients being able to quickly access services from skilled and competent practitioners and not having to wait for a referral.
- Increased Health Quality Council of Alberta metrics such as shorter wait times in Emergency Rooms from optometrists providing these services in their community car clinics.
- Decreased stress load on family physicians and ophthalmologists.

The proposed changes to the *Optometrists Profession Regulation* are especially important in the new reality of possible increased future incidences of epidemics and pandemics. Albertans will benefit by authorizing more than one health care profession to offer diagnostic and treatment services if that profession has the education and clinical training to provide health services in a safe, skilled and competent manner.



STATISTICS & HEALTH METRICS

The Alberta College of Optometrists conducts a yearly survey of our members to collect information on our membership's practice patterns. This allows us to evaluate whether previously enacted scope expansion changes are being utilized by our members, whether Albertans are accessing these services and whether distinct improvements to the health care system are being realized. In the past four (4) years, the survey statistics show that:

- Optometrists are prescribing more topical and oral medications than in previous years thus relieving some of the stress on family physicians and Medicenters.
- Optometrists are diagnosing and treating more glaucoma patients than in previous years. This frees up ophthalmologists to concentrate on being able to offer more cataract surgeries as per their allotment numbers which also assists in decreasing wait times for cataract surgery (a nationally tracked Health Quality Metric).
- More optometrists are extending their hours of operation to include evenings and weekends thus relieving stress on Emergency Rooms. This statistic correlates with a concurrent drop in vision-related ICD coded services that were billed in Emergency Rooms over the past few years. The end result is assistance in decreasing wait times in an ER (another nationally tracked Health Quality Metric).
- More optometrists are adding new technologies, specialty services and professional equipment into their clinics every year that are not available at Emergency Rooms and family physician offices. These additions aid in quicker and more accurate diagnosis of eye and vision conditions as well as streamlining appropriate referral and treatment regimens which improves patient outcomes and enriches patient experiences.

On January 1, 2020:

- The ACO had a total of 829 registered members. This number exceeds the optimal international benchmark of 1 optometrist per 10,000 population which aids in allowing patients to access vision care services quickly. For full optometry manpower statistics, visit: www.collegeofoptometrists.ab.ca.
- Optometrists practice in 106 different cities and towns in Alberta ensuring a great distribution of manpower across the province. This ensures that all Albertans, regardless of where they live, are able to access an optometrist for diagnostic and treatment vision care services quickly and easily.
- Optometrists provide vision care services in 51 different languages catering to the diverse nature of our population.

CONTACT INFORMATION



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