



# ACO THERAPY AND COUNSELLING FUNDING PROGRAM

Effective April 1, 2019



# ACO Therapy and Counselling Funding Program

The *Health Professions Act* requires all health regulatory colleges in Alberta to create and administer a Program of Funding to compensate the costs of therapy and counselling of patients who were subject to sexual abuse and/or sexual misconduct by regulated health care professionals while that person was a patient of the health care professional.

The Alberta College of Optometrists (ACO) has established a designated fund for this purpose and application forms are available for individuals who wish to request funding for therapy and counselling.

To assist patients in understanding this program and how to access the funding, we have prepared this easy-to-follow Q & A Guide. If you have any other questions that are not addressed in this guide; or, if you wish to discuss the program or the process of filling out a funding application form, please contact the ACO office directly. Contact details are listed at the end of this document.

## **Who is eligible for funding?**

Any person who submits a written, signed complaint to the ACO Complaints Director that alleges sexual abuse and/or sexual misconduct by an optometrist while the person was a patient of the optometrist is potentially eligible for funding. The specific definitions of sexual abuse, sexual misconduct, activities of a sexual nature and who qualifies as a patient is contained in the [Sexual Abuse and Sexual Misconduct Complaints Information Guide](#) as well as in the ACO Standards of Practice.

## **How much funding is available?**

Each person who is approved for funding is allowed to access funding by any therapist or counsellor of their choice (psychologist, certified counsellor, psychiatrist, etc.) up to a maximum dollar amount that is equivalent to the current Schedule of Medical Benefit rate for 100 hours of psychiatric counselling. In addition, funding must be used within a maximum of five (5) years of being approved for funding.

## **Will my funding ever be cut off?**

Possibly. Funding will stop immediately if the Complaints Director dismisses your complaint due to insufficient or no evidence of unprofessional conduct; or, if your case is dismissed by a Hearing Tribunal. After any dismissal, the ACO will provide you with a letter outlining:

- That your eligibility to receive funding has ceased as a result of dismissal of the complaint.
- That you have the right to appeal the dismissal.
- That should you decide to appeal and if the appeal is successful, funding will resume immediately and will remain in place until the appeal or hearing is resolved.
- Additional community resources (e.g. Sexual Assault Center, etc.) that may be accessed directly by yourself.

**Do I have to wait for an Investigation to start receiving funding?**

No. Once your written, signed complaint is received by the ACO office and the funding request is approved by the ACO Registrar, funding for therapy or counselling can start immediately while the matter is being investigated and processed.

**If my Complaint is dismissed, do I have to pay any previously accessed funding money back to the ACO?**

No. The Alberta College of Optometrists (ACO) will not request that you pay back any funding already accessed and used.

**Will the funding be paid to me directly?**

No. The ACO office will make arrangements with the therapist or counsellor of your choice to pay them directly.

**Are there any restrictions on how I use the funding?**

Yes. The fund may only be used to cover the costs of therapy or counselling related to experiencing acts of sexual abuse, sexual misconduct or of a sexual nature while that person was a patient of the optometrist. Costs for accommodation, transportation, meals, etc. are not covered by the ACO Therapy and Counselling Fund.

**Are there any restrictions on which therapist or counsellor I use?**

Yes. Although, the choice of therapist or counsellor is totally up to the patient, we have placed the following minor restrictions on this choice:

- The therapist or counsellor cannot have any business, personal or family relationship with you.
- The therapist or counsellor cannot have been found guilty of unprofessional conduct or professional misconduct for sexual abuse or sexual misconduct.
- The therapist or counsellor cannot have been found guilty of any acts of a similar nature.

**How do I select a good therapist or counsellor?**

The ACO office does not recommend specific therapists or counsellors as we feel that the specific choice should be left to the patient. We do, however, recommend that you consider the following points:

- Therapists and counsellors with previous training or experience in treating the effects of sexual abuse or sexual misconduct.
- The location, transportation access and clinic hours to make it convenient to attend your sessions.
- Therapists and counsellors who are Regulated Members of a Health Profession Regulatory College. If you select a therapist or counsellor who is not a Regulated Member of a Health Regulatory College, the ACO will require you to sign a form to confirm that you understand that no avenues for professional discipline exist for unregulated practitioners.

**What happens if I go over my allotted fund amount or time limit?**

If you exceed the maximum allowed dollar amount or time limit imposed by our Funding Program, you will be required to cover these additional costs yourself.

**Can I use more than one therapist or counsellor?**

Yes. The ACO will process the invoices from different therapists or counsellors as they arrive at the ACO office. The total amount of funding available will then be split between the various practitioners accessed by the patient. Additional funding is not available if additional therapists or counsellors are used.

**Will I be reimbursed for previous therapy sessions?**

Possibly. Under very specific circumstances, the ACO may reimburse patients for previous therapy or counselling sessions. To qualify:

- The therapy or counselling must have taken place after the reported sexual abuse or sexual misconduct.
- The patient must provide receipts of previously paid therapy or counselling sessions that were not covered by other insurance or funding programs.
- The therapy or counselling must be related to the specific complaint against the optometrist. Therapy or counselling for unrelated incidents will not be covered by the ACO Therapy and Counselling Fund.

**How will I know how much money is left in my allotted amount?**

The ACO will keep track of all statements and payments and will send you and/or your therapist or counsellor periodic reports on the status of your account.

**Contact Information**

Dr. Gordon Hensel  
Registrar, Alberta College of Optometrists  
#102 8407 – Argyll Road NW  
Edmonton, Alberta T6C4B2

email: [registrar@collegeofoptometrists.ab.ca](mailto:registrar@collegeofoptometrists.ab.ca)

telephone: 780-466-5999  
telephone: 1-800-668-2694  
fax: 780-466-5969



ALBERTA college  
of OPTOMETRISTS