



## Optometrists can do more

Doctors of Optometry practice in more than 100 cities and towns across Alberta and provide the most broad-based, easily accessible, and cost-effective vision care services in our province.

Our members are educated and clinically trained to provide skilled and competent care. They are committed to public safety, the preservation of sight and mitigation of vision loss for all Albertans.

The Alberta College of Optometrists is seeking a responsible expansion to the legislated optometry scope of practice.

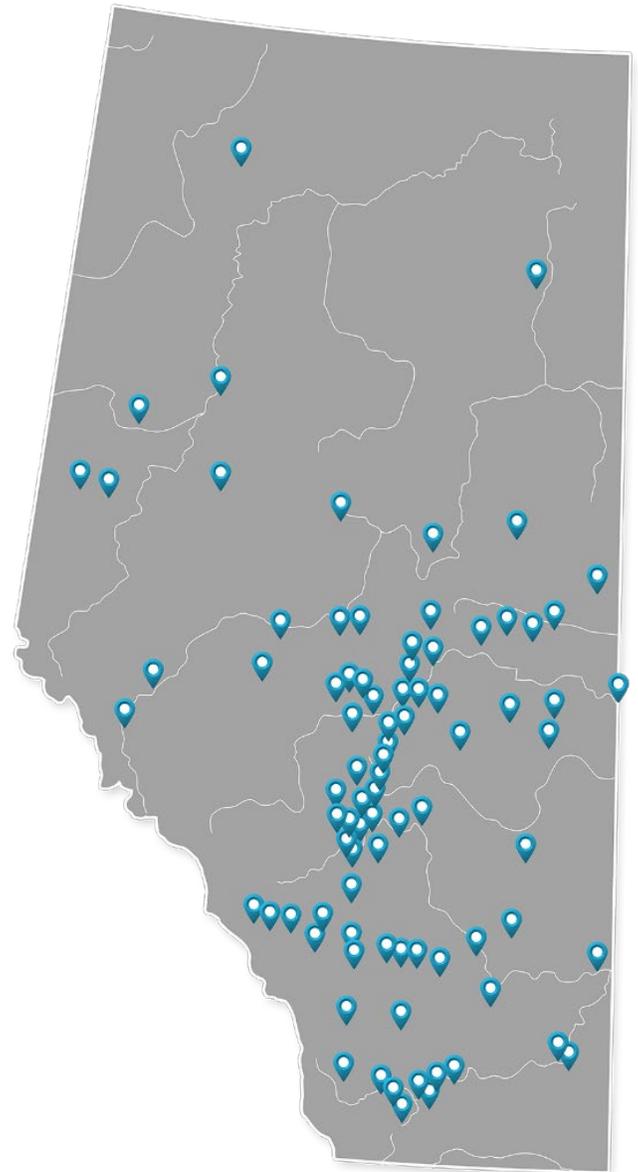
The requested scope expansion includes authorization to perform minor laser treatments and superficial skin surgical procedures such as the removal of skin tags, warts and other surface lesions.

All clinics offering these procedures must ensure that their laser equipment is registered, inspected, and maintained according to standards.

Optometrists authorized to offer these services will have completed a rigorous certification course or program approved by the College.

Benefits of this scope expansion request include:

- Greater access to vision care services in all areas of the province. This is especially important to rural, remote and Indigenous populations.
- Reduced doctor billings to Alberta Health Care from the elimination of mandatory referrals for treatment. This will result in greater efficiencies and real cost savings in the health system.
- Reduced government payments for glaucoma medications for seniors.
- Improved health outcomes.
- Reduced pressures on family physicians and Walk-In Clinics.
- Reduced pressures on Emergency Departments. This is especially important during the COVID pandemic.



Practice locations in Alberta

1921-2021

Celebrating 100 Years

The Alberta College of Optometrists is extremely pleased to celebrate 100 years of protecting the public interest while providing highly skilled and competent vision care services to Albertans.

For more information please visit:

Website: [www.collegeofoptometrists.ab.ca](http://www.collegeofoptometrists.ab.ca)

Telephone: 780-466-5999

Toll-Free in Alberta: 1-800-668-2694

Twitter: @ACO\_Eyecare

# Optometrist Training

Advances in the education and training of Alberta optometrists have outpaced their existing scope of practice. Doctors of Optometry are educated and clinically trained to practice at a higher level than legislated.

Updating the Optometrists Profession Regulation to maintain a closer pace with modern education and clinical training offers more efficient care to Albertans, improved health outcomes, reduced costs to the government and continued protection of the public interest.



Adding scope also builds on the benefit of private sector optometry clinics offering new services in urban and rural settings outside of Alberta Health Services facilities.

Doctors of Optometry receive 7-8 years of training followed by an optional 1-year post-graduate residency in a variety of subspecialties. Students also complete clerkship placements under the direct supervision of a Doctor of Optometry or ophthalmologist, outside of the university optometry clinic.

The College will mandate that all currently registered Doctors of Optometry who wish to provide any newly authorized activity participate in and successfully complete a rigorous, validated certification course and final exam.

No “grandfathering” of any Regulated Member will occur. Newly graduated applicants to the ACO will have completed the Advanced Procedures certification course syllabus during their optometry program and must successfully pass the national board exam before a Practice Permit is issued.

Advanced Procedures certification courses:

- Are created, accredited, and administered by accredited universities. Currently, the University of Waterloo School of Optometry and Vision Science and the Northeastern State University Oklahoma College of Optometry offer these post-graduate certification courses.
- Are taught by certified ophthalmologists and optometrists.
- Augment what students and practitioners have learned during their professional degree program, clerkship placements, previous Advanced Scope certification courses and previously completed Continuing Education courses/wetlabs.
- Refresh the clinical knowledge and skill sets while updating the Doctor of Optometry on new best practice modalities and protocols for treating any potential complications following the provision of these procedures.

The current 32.5-hour Advanced Procedures certification course content is split between injections, minor surgical and laser modules. It incorporates both didactic lectures and hands-on clinical wet labs with an emphasis on the hands-on components.

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## Benefits of scope expansion



The threat of eye disease and permanent vision loss increase with age. Albertans will require better access to skilled and competent eye care providers in the coming decades. Doctors of Optometry are the most accessible and affordable providers of this care. Optometrists authorized to diagnose and treat a greater range of conditions are essential to the future planning of Alberta's health system.

Only those optometrists who have successfully completed a rigorous certification course/final exam or a program of study accepted by the College would be authorized to provide any of the proposed new activities.

Although, family physicians do not provide ophthalmic laser procedures, they do provide some minor surgical and injection procedures. Approval of the requested authorizations for Doctors of Optometry will reduce pressures on family physicians and walk-in clinics by diverting patients who require vision care services to optometrists that are trained and technologically equipped to diagnose and treat eye disorders, diseases, and injuries. This will then allow family physicians to concentrate on other patient health issues and assessments, that they have been thoroughly and expertly trained to treat.

Approval of the proposal will result in all Albertans benefitting from evidence-based, outcome-focused, cost-effective health care in a timely manner.

This proposal is aligned with the Government of Alberta's commitment to expand the scope of practice of optometrists, the recommendations of the Blue Ribbon Panel on Alberta's Finances, the Ernst & Young AHS Performance Review, the Budget 2020 Business Plan and Health Ministry Outcomes, and the objectives of government's Red Tape Reduction legislation.

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# Selective Laser Trabeculoplasty (SLT)

Selective Laser Trabeculoplasty (SLT) is now considered the first treatment of choice for some forms of open angle glaucoma. It is also a valuable treatment for patients who cannot afford glaucoma medications, or for whom medication is not appropriate.

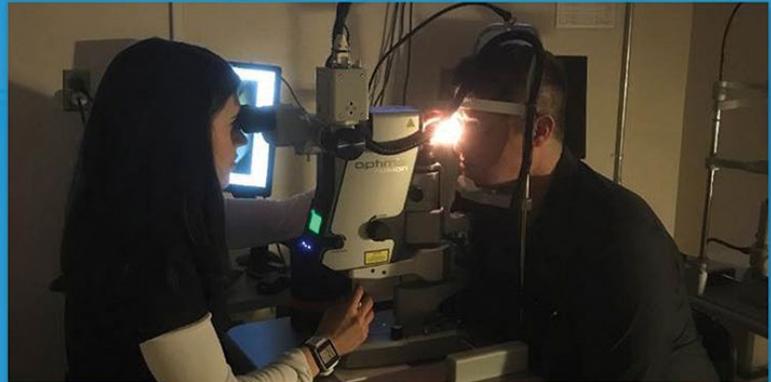
It is a valuable glaucoma treatment that preserves vision and limits vision loss.

The procedure lowers eye pressure by applying a low-energy laser to the trabecular meshwork of the eye. This stimulates a biochemical response that increases eye drainage.

The procedure has been used since the mid 1990s and takes between 10 and 15 minutes to complete.

## Scope Expansion: Limited Laser and Superficial Skin Procedures

### Selective Laser Trabeculoplasty (SLT)



Typical SLT Laser set-up for the optometrist and patient

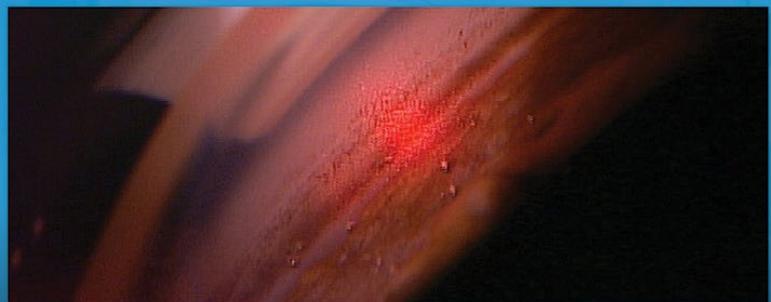


Photo of trabecular meshwork where low level laser energy is being applied

# Peripheral Iridotomy

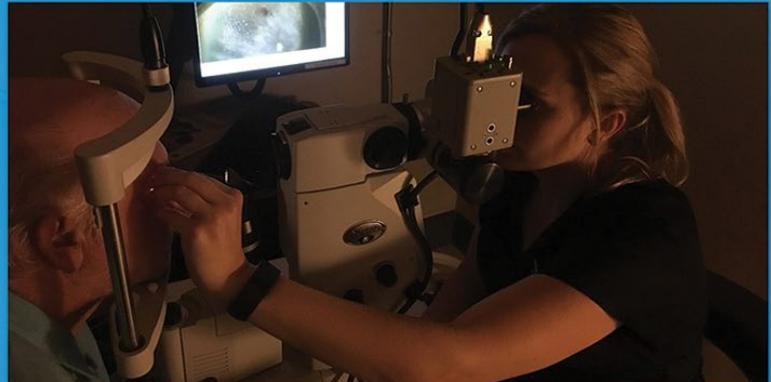
Peripheral Iridotomy is the standard first-line treatment in closed angle glaucoma and in eyes at risk for this condition.

A laser is used to make a tiny opening in the iris to allow fluid to flow from behind the iris to outflow channels. No external opening to the eye is made, just a small internal bypass.

This procedure preserves vision and prevents glaucoma damage by lowering eye pressure and the potential for damage to the optic nerve. This laser treatment has been performed since the early 1980's and takes between 5 and 10 minutes to complete.

## Scope Expansion: Limited Laser and Superficial Skin Procedures

### Peripheral Iridotomy (PI)



Typical laser PI set-up for the optometrist and patient



Opening created in the iris to allow fluid to drain more easily which lowers eye pressure

# Nd:YAG Capsulotomy

Nd:YAG Capsulotomy is a procedure that eliminates eye cloudiness that sometimes follows cataract surgery. This laser procedure has been performed since the early 1980's.

This treatment addresses the most common complication of cataract surgery, which is the clouding of parts of the eye lens capsule after cataract surgery. This is called posterior capsule opacification. It can occur months or years after cataract surgery and can impair vision more significantly than the initial cataract.

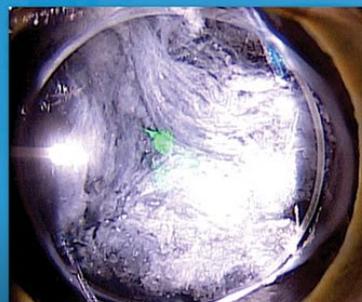
YAG laser capsulotomy helps patients see clearly again by using a laser to create an opening in the clouded area of the lens capsule to allow light to pass through to the retina and restore clear vision. The procedure takes approximately 5 minutes to complete. Nd-YAG describes the elemental makeup of the specialized crystal used to create the laser (neodymium-doped yttrium aluminum garnet).

## Scope Expansion: Limited Laser and Superficial Skin Procedures

### Nd-YAG Capsulotomy



Typical Nd-YAG Capsulotomy Laser set-up for the patient and optometrist



Before



After



# Limited Injection, Surgical and Laser Procedures

The college is requesting authorization for appropriately certified and registered Doctors of Optometry to perform injections, limited superficial skin surgical and therapeutic laser procedures on and near the eye.

Minor surgical procedures would be performed with scissors, blade or radio frequency (in-office) under local anesthesia (topical and injectable) for the removal of benign minor skin lesions such as: skin tags, papilloma, verrucae, seborrheic keratosis, cyst of moll, cyst of Zeiss, sebaceous cyst, epidermal inclusion cyst and incision/curettage of chalazion.

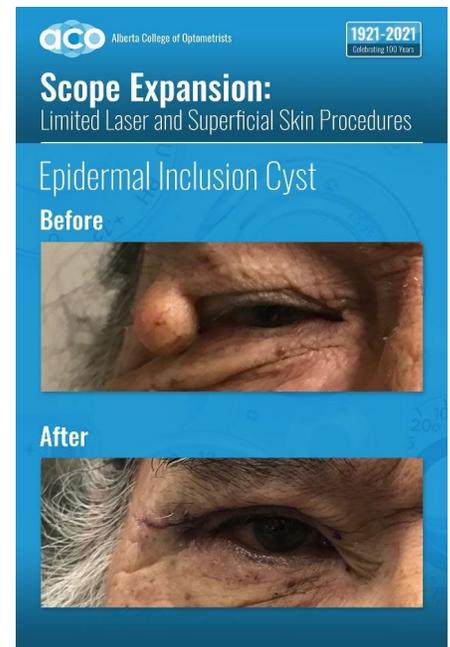
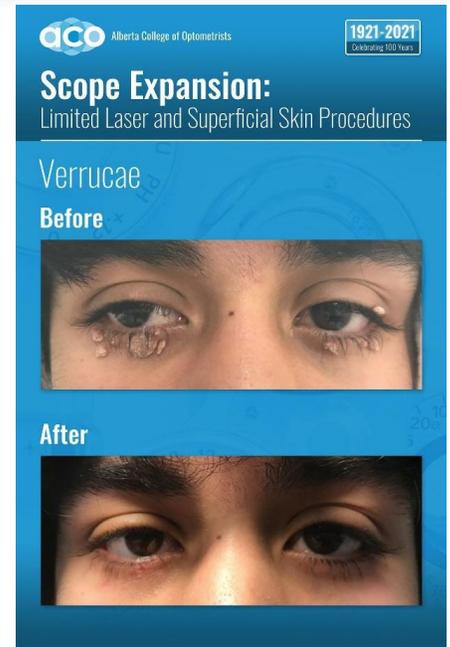
The preferred surgical technique is left to the professional judgment of the practitioner based on the patient's condition and potential for a positive health outcome. All suspicious lesions must be biopsied and sent to a lab for analysis. All malignant lesions must be referred to a physician.

Doctors of Optometry practicing in the United States have been performing the same injections and minor surgical and laser procedures requested by the College in a safe and skilled manner for many decades now:

- Currently twenty (20) States authorize Doctors of Optometry to treat “lumps and bumps” via minor surgical procedures such as scissors, blade or Radio Frequency.
- Currently, thirty-nine (39) States authorize Doctors of Optometry to provide injections.
- The first State that authorized Doctors of Optometry to perform these procedures occurred approximately forty-five (45) years ago.

Approval of this authorization would prevent patients from potentially harming themselves with over-the-counter products that contain flammable and combustible dimethyl ether and propane (e.g. Dr. Scholl's Skin Tag and Wart Removal). Applied incorrectly, these products can damage healthy peri-ocular and ocular tissue.

All proposed minor superficial skin surgical procedures are for superficial, non-intraocular conditions that would be performed under local anesthesia (topical and injectable). None of these procedures require general anesthesia.



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