



# ACO STRATEGIC PLAN

2022

ALBERTA COLLEGE OF OPTOMETRISTS



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## 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 2022 Alberta College of Optometrists (ACO) Strategic Plan is a roadmap to our desired future. In 2022, our organization will concentrate its efforts to:

- Work cooperatively with Alberta Health, Alberta Health Services, our Regulated Members and other stakeholders to continue to combat the COVID-19 pandemic crisis in the interests of protecting the health and well-being of all Albertans.
- Work collaboratively with the Alberta Government and other stakeholders towards appropriate scope expansion for Doctors of Optometry that will result in improved access to vision care services throughout Alberta, decreased systemic health care costs, better Health Quality metrics and improved patient health outcomes.
- Review and revise the ACO Continuing Competence Program (CCP) to:
  - a) Evolve the Practice Visit portion of the program into a non-biased, reliable, valid and progressive Performance Assessment program.
  - b) Review 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 that will allow them to maintain their competence throughout their careers.
- Work cooperatively with the Alberta Government and other health regulatory colleges to ensure that all mandated changes for all regulatory colleges as per Bills 30 and 46 are implemented in a timely manner.
- Continue to develop internal protocols and processes that allow our organization to appropriately and quickly respond to all patient inquiries, complaints and disciplinary matters in a transparent and unbiased manner.
- Continue to review and revise the ACO Clinical Practice Guidelines on a regular basis to ensure that they are based on the best available and most current optometric and medical clinical evidence and research.



## EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW

The Alberta College of Optometrists is extremely pleased to be honored as the primary protector of Albertans vision since 1921. As we celebrate 100+ years of regulating and governing our members in a manner that protects and serves all Albertans, we remember milestones of optometric achievement and public service:

- April 19, 1921 – Proclamation of the first Optometry Profession Act in Alberta and the formation of the joint Alberta Optometric Association and College.
- 1920's – Optometrists were the first practitioners to offer comprehensive low vision services to assist blind and visually impaired individuals. This was especially important for returning war veterans.
- 1930's – Developed continuing education requirements to ensure that all optometrists maintain their skills and competence throughout their careers.
- 1940's – Optometrists were the first practitioners in the province to fit rigid contact lenses.
- 1950's – Successfully negotiated the inclusion of the cost of a comprehensive eye exam in the provincial health care plan. In addition, optometrists successfully lobbied for mandatory eye exams for drivers licenses thereby improving traffic safety.
- 1960's – Created the first Occupational Vision Safety Program in Canada to better protect the eyes of all workers in the province.
- 1970's – Doctors of Optometry were the first practitioners in the province to fit the newly developed spherical and toric soft contact lenses. In addition, Doctors of Optometry regularly started to use diagnostic pharmaceuticals for comprehensive and medically necessary eye exams.
- 1980's – Doctors of Optometry were the first practitioners in Alberta to fit the newly developed extended wear, tinted and bifocal soft contact lenses.
- 1990's – The joint association-college organization was officially split into two separate organizations. Alberta became the first province in Canada to authorize Doctors of Optometry to use scheduled medications to treat eye disease.
- 2000's – Doctors of Optometry equipped their clinics with the latest 3-D and laser scanning diagnostic equipment to assist with disease diagnosis and improve patient health outcomes.



## EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW

- 2010's – Alberta became the first province in Canada to authorize Doctors of Optometry to independently treat glaucoma, order lab tests and prescribe all topical and oral medications to treat eye disease.
- 2020's – The ACO continued to work with government and other stakeholders on increasing access to safe, skilled and competent vision care services throughout the entire province by updating the *Optometry Profession Regulation*. These changes will decrease systemic health care costs, lessen the stress on Hospital Emergency Departments, improve Health Quality metrics and improve patient health outcomes.



The ACO will continue to work in collaboration and cooperation with the public, our Regulated Members, the Alberta Government and other stakeholders to ensure that our regulatory organization operates in an unbiased, fair, accountable, transparent, appropriate and effective manner.

The preferred and desired end-result of the 2022 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 DOCTORS OF OPTOMETRY

The Alberta College of Optometrists (ACO) recognizes that knowledgeable, skilled and competent practitioners require lifelong educational and learning experiences in a variety of settings. In 2022, the ACO will:

- Complete a detailed review and revision of the ACO Continuing Competence Program to allow it to evolve into an unbiased, reliable, valid and progressive Performance Assessment Program. 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 patient chart analysis process and enact internal changes to improve transparency and remove any potential program and/or reviewer bias.

The ACO Continuing Competence Program is designed to be: effective, valid, accurate, honest, fair, reliable, accountable, measurable, flexible, non-threatening, educational and contemporary. The ACO takes great pride in being recognized for creating and 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 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. 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) certified and Advanced Scope certified. This certification ensures that all Albertans will receive appropriate and safe care by skilled, knowledgeable and competent practitioners resulting in improved patient health outcomes and enriched patient experiences. Full details on the ACO certification requirements are available on the ACO website at:

<https://collegeofoptometrists.ab.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Treatment-Management-of-Ocular-Disease-April-2021-2.pdf>

Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic crisis continues to cause Nation Board Exam scheduling issues for graduating optometry students. The ACO works within its legislative limitations to offer appropriate Intern registration options for these students until the National Board Exams are held and final exam marks are released.





# RESPONSIBLE COMPLAINT INVESTIGATION AND RESOLUTION PROCESSES

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 Tribunal decisions are included in the ACO Annual Report to Government and the ACO Annual General Meeting Report to the membership.



In 2022, the ACO will:

- Continue to gather feedback to improve 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 course for regulatory organizations and a Sexual Abuse and Misconduct Education for Healthcare Practitioners Training program. These courses and programs will also be offered to all ACO Regulated Members.
- Update the ACO Patient Counselling Program Fund for patients of sexual abuse and sexual misconduct to make it easy to access this program on the ACO website.
- Continue to provide a yearly summary to the Minister of Health on the number and type of patient complaints received at the ACO office.

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

## SCOPE OF PRACTICE

In 2022, the Alberta College of Optometrists will continue to 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.
- Decreased 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 health 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 Hospital Emergency Departments for vision care issues as optometrists would provide these services in their local community car clinics.
- Decreased stress load on family physicians and ophthalmologists.



The proposed changes to the *Optometrists Profession Regulation* are especially important in today's new reality of potential increased incidences of epidemics and pandemics in the future. Albertans will benefit by authorizing more than one health care profession to supply specific diagnostic and treatment vision care services as Doctors of Optometry have the didactic education and clinical training to provide these specific vision care services in a safe, skilled and competent manner.

## STATISTICS AND HEALTH METRICS

The Alberta College of Optometrists conducts regular surveys to collect data on the delivery of eye care services in Alberta. This allows us to evaluate whether previously enacted optometric scope expansion changes are being accessed by Albertans and whether distinct improvements and efficiencies to the health care system are being realized.

Should updates to the *Optometrists Profession Regulation* be proclaimed in 2022, the ACO will continue to collect data to evaluate whether all Albertans are able to realize the many advantages and benefits that will be realized.

### **Practitioner Demographics**

As of January 1, 2022:

- The ACO had a total of 864 Regulated Members. This total number includes 461 female practitioners (53.3%) and 403 male practitioners (46.7%). For full optometry practitioner demographics, visit: <https://collegeofoptometrists.ab.ca/information/current-manpower-stats/>
- 53.9% of our members were trained in the United States, 41.5% were trained in Canada and 4.6% were trained internationally.
- The average age of all optometrists in Alberta is 40.6 years old.
- Optometrists practice in over 100 different cities and towns in Alberta ensuring an excellent distribution of optometric manpower across the province. This guarantees that all Albertans, regardless of where they live will be able to access an optometrist for diagnostic and treatment vision care services quickly, easily and in their local community.
- Optometrists provide vision care services in 51 different languages catering to the diverse nature of our provincial populations.



## CONCLUSION

The ACO is honored and privileged to be granted self-governing status as established under the *Health Professions Act*, *Optometrists Profession Regulation* and ACO Bylaws. As we celebrate 100 years of guiding, regulating and governing our members in a manner that protects and serves all Albertans:

- We will continue to act decisively and be a leader in mandating appropriate and safe infection prevention controls and protocols in optometric clinics.
- We will champion vaccinations for all Doctors of Optometry and their staff. This will assist Albertans in being able to receive vision care services at their local optometry community care clinics in a safe environment.
- We will continue to offer transparent, unbiased and timely patient complaint investigation and resolution processes.
- We will complete the revision of the ACO Continuing Competence Program and ACO Continuing Education Requirements.
- We will work with the Alberta government and all external stakeholders to enact changes to the *Optometrists Profession Regulation*, ACO Bylaws and ACO Standards of Practice that were mandated by the proclamation of Bills 30 and 46.
- We will continue to explore risk management and governance policies implemented by other progressive and dynamic health care organizations before reviewing, revising and administering our own policies and procedures.



The ACO Council will continue to monitor effectiveness of all ACO activity via Monitoring Reports, other reports and monthly financial statements that are tabled at each Council meeting. These reports and financial statements contain appropriate performance metrics that detail completed activities, future deliverables, required action items, potential issues and a detailed analysis of our organization.



## CONTACT INFORMATION



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