

Patient Information Guide

ACO Therapy and Counselling Funding Program

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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 for therapy and counselling sessions for patients who have experienced acts of sexual abuse and/or sexual misconduct. The purpose of this fund is to compensate the costs of therapy and counselling of patients who were subject to sexual abuse and/or sexual misconduct by an optometrist while that person was a patient of the optometrist.

The Alberta College of Optometrists (ACO) has established a separate 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 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 complaint to the ACO office 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, sexual nature and who qualifies as a patient is contained in the Sexual Abuse and Sexual Misconduct Complaints document as well as in the ACO Standards of Practice.

How much funding is available?

Each person who is approved for funding is allowed a maximum dollar amount equivalent to the cost of 100 hours of psychiatric counselling at the psychiatrist rate listed in the Schedule of Medical Benefits, calculated on the date your complaint was received by the ACO. This maximum does not change while you are eligible, even if the Schedule of Medical Benefits rates change.

You must make your first request for funding between the date of your complaint and five (5) years after any finding of unprofessional conduct based in whole or in part on sexual abuse or sexual misconduct. Once you have made your first request, you remain eligible for up to five (5) years from the date the ACO receives it.

Will my funding ever be cut off?

Possibly. Your eligibility for funding ends when the first of the following occurs:

- the maximum amount of funding has been paid;
- a Hearing Tribunal finds that the optometrist's conduct does not constitute unprofessional conduct based in whole or in part on sexual abuse or sexual misconduct;
- you withdraw your complaint;
- five (5) years have passed since the ACO received your first request for funding; or
- the Complaints Director dismisses your complaint after an investigation.

The ACO will notify you in writing within 15 days, explaining why your eligibility has ended. If the Complaints Director dismisses your complaint, the notice will also tell you:

- that your eligibility for funding has ceased as a result of the dismissal;
- that you may apply to the ACO Complaint Review Committee for a review of the dismissal;
- that, if you apply for a review, funding will resume retroactive to the date of the dismissal notice and may remain in place until the review is concluded; and
- contact information for community resources that may help you seek other support for treatment or counselling.

If the review is successful, your funding continues. If it is not successful, you are no longer eligible for funding. In either case, you may still request funding for treatment or counselling you received before you were notified that your eligibility had ended.

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

No. Once your written 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. If an optometrist is found to have committed unprofessional conduct based in whole or in part on sexual abuse or sexual misconduct, the ACO may recover the cost of funding from that optometrist.

Will the funding be paid to me directly?

Either. The ACO can pay your therapist or counsellor directly, on receipt of an invoice that describes and dates the service and is signed by both you and the provider. Alternatively, the ACO can reimburse you, on receipt of an original receipt that describes and dates the service and is signed by the provider. Payment is made within 15 days of the ACO receiving the invoice or receipt.

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 provided to you by the therapist(s) or counsellor(s) you have selected. Costs for accommodation, transportation, child care, meals, etc. are not covered by the ACO Therapy and Counselling Fund.

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

Yes. The choice of therapist or counsellor is up to you. You may choose any number, or any combination, of:

- a regulated health professional (for example, a psychologist, social worker or physician), in Alberta or elsewhere in Canada. The ACO will confirm with their regulatory college that they are in good standing; or
- a counselling professional who is a member of the Association of Counselling Therapy of Alberta (ACTA). The counsellor must confirm their ACTA membership in writing, and you must sign a form confirming that you understand they are not subject to professional discipline.

Before funding is provided, you must give the ACO the name and contact information of each therapist or counsellor you choose. You and each therapist or counsellor must also confirm in writing that you are not related (for example, as a parent, spouse or adult interdependent partner, child, grandparent, grandchild, sibling, or extended family member such as an aunt, uncle or cousin, including step-relations), and that funds will be used only for your treatment or counselling. Funding cannot be provided to a therapist or counsellor who is related to you.

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, ask 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.
- The number of sessions required will be recommended by your therapist or counsellor based on your requirements. If you exceed the maximum dollar amount or time limit imposed by our Funding Program, you will have to cover those additional costs yourself.
- Therapists and counsellors who are Regulated Members of a Health Profession Regulatory College. If you select a counsellor who is not a regulated member, they must be a member of the Association of Counselling Therapy of Alberta (ACTA), and you will be asked to sign a form confirming that you understand they are not subject to professional discipline.

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?

Yes. Funding may be provided for therapy or counselling you received before your complaint was made, as long as it was received after the incident that is the subject of your complaint. Original signed receipts are required (see "Will the funding be paid to me directly?").

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 a summary of your available funding every 90 days. The ACO will also notify you within 15 days when $500 or less remains, and when there is one (1) year left in your eligibility period, including the date your eligibility expires.

Contact Information

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