

# 2023/2024 Annual Report

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## President's Message

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The past year was a significant year both for CAO and the profession. CAO celebrated its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary, launched a new 3-year strategic plan, and held a bilingual 38<sup>th</sup> Biennial Congress, offering the continuing education program in both English and French for the first time.

As I stepped into my new role as President of the Association, I was pleased to read that our members agree that CAO is effectively promoting the profession and the importance of the role of the OD as the primary eye care provider when asked in quarterly surveys.

As we commemorated the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Bill C-55 An act to incorporate the Canadian Association of Optometrists, another bill that promises to change the vision care landscape, was making its way through the legislative process. **Bill C-284: An Act to establish a national strategy for eye care** has been the primary focus of CAO's federal advocacy activities. It received unanimous support from the House of Commons! We will continue our advocacy efforts to bolster support among Senators and encourage swift passage of the Bill.

In the next decade or so, we expect significant changes in the way technology is used in optometry and other professions. Part of our work is exploring potential challenges and opportunities for the optometric profession, strategizing collectively, and advocating for legislation that reflects the appropriate use of technology. Our pan-Canadian working groups are doing important work in the areas of AI and Teleoptometry and emergency care, and we've strengthened our partnerships with extended healthcare professions that share similar challenges and interests to support and be part of a necessary transformation of our healthcare system. We also continue to engage with insurers and plan sponsors to modernize their plans and offerings, and to promote comprehensive eye exams and modern diagnostics as the standard of care.

Considering the next generation of optometrists is also a key aspect of planning for the future. CAO has broadened its connection with Canadian optometry students, including those studying in the U.S. to better understand their needs and priorities, provide effective support, and engage them in bringing new perspectives to our profession.

I'm consistently inspired by the passion and dedication demonstrated by our members, volunteers, and staff. Through collaborative efforts and the sharing of innovative ideas, we've significantly elevated the profile of optometry in Canada. CAO's Optometric Leaders Forum, federal advocacy work, and insurance modernization initiatives have not only increased our visibility but also resulted in our voice having a far greater impact and reach.

I look forward to building on this momentum as I move into my second year as CAO President. Thank you for your support and engagement. Your contributions of time, ideas, and constructive critiques are the fuel that drives the profession towards an even brighter future.

Sincerely,



**Dr. Martin Spiro,**  
CAO President



# 2023-24 Annual Report

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## > Moving forward with our 2023-2026 strategic plan

As a national association, we play a vital role in bringing together provincial perspectives. Our collaboration with provinces includes convening meetings of the Canadian Association of Optometric Executives (CAOE) and the Canadian Council of Provincial Presidents (CCPP), hosting events like the Optometric Leaders Forum (OLF) and the Biennial Congress and facilitating pan-Canadian working groups such as those focused on AI & Teleoptometry, Emergency Care or being part of Indigenous think tanks. Additionally, we work on expanding the scope of practice and offer member benefit programs to further support our members' interests and growth.

CAO's role expands into core activities, strategic priorities, and ultimately into adaptive and valuable activities that recognize an unmet need, revenue opportunities, or leverage to realize economies of scale for the benefit of its members.

Our core activities include engaging in federal advocacy and fostering stakeholder engagement to amplify optometry's role, conducting national awareness campaigns, managing the Canadian Certified Optometric Assistant (CCOA) program, convening Congress and OLF, writing position statements on key issues, and addressing drug shortages. We also publish the Canadian Journal of Optometry (CJO) to enhance research capability.

Additionally, we undertake strategic initiatives such as modernizing the insurance industry to improve vision care benefits, developing education programs on the CAO Learning platform for both optometrists and optometric staff, coordinating Pan-Canadian working groups, and serving as a knowledge broker for our members. Finally, we enhance access to care for marginalized communities.

While our Vision at Work occupational vision program continues to bring new patients into clinics in Ontario, we also offer members benefits tailored to their unique needs - encompassing a range of services from banking and financial assistance to insurance and private label frame and lens offerings, all aimed at supporting our members' successful practice.

Our **2023-26 strategic plan** addresses CAO's commitments in 4 key directions:

- Positioning optometry as the central pillar of eye health and vision care,
- Advancing practice conditions,
- Advocating for improved access to vision care and better outcomes, and
- Championing the integration of technology into optometric practice.

This annual report details the first year's achievements of our strategic plan.



## Advancing federal advocacy

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**Supporting a national vision strategy through the swift passage of Bill C-284 remains the primary focus of our advocacy efforts. We continue to actively engage with senior decision-makers within the federal government on behalf of our members and the profession. To empower our members, we provided online advocacy training and facilitated meetings between members and MPs and Senators in their constituencies, enabling direct engagement with policymakers on a local level.**

### **Bill C-284**

Bill C-284, ***An Act to establish a national strategy for eye care***, sponsored by the Honourable Judy Sgro, MP, presents a significant opportunity to prioritize vision care in Canada and position optometry as the central pillar of eye health. The Bill has already passed through the House of Commons and passed the Second Reading in the Senate. Throughout 2023 and into this year, CAO has actively supported the Bill by participating in various events on Parliament Hill, engaging with MPs, Senators, and policymakers to garner support.

Our advocacy efforts are now focused on bolstering support for the Bill among Senators, including those on the Social Affairs, Science, and Technology (SOCI) committee. CAO is optimistic about Bill C-284's successful completion of the legislative process and achieving Royal Assent in the near future.

During Children’s Vision Month in October, we organized an Eye Read and Play event on the Hill, where we engaged with elected and non-elected officials to underscore the importance of eye health, particularly in addressing the rise of myopia in children.

Additionally, the CAO participated in an Eye Education Clinic event in the riding of Hon. Judy Sgro, MP for Humber River-Black Creek. Local optometrists discussed eye health and vision care issues with attendees, and in recognition of MP Sgro’s dedication to establishing a vision strategy at the federal level, CAO presented her with the 2023 Vision Champion Award.

We also took part in pre-budget consultations initiated by the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance and the Finance Department, developing **Pre-Budget Submissions** in August 2023 and February 2024.

**Our recommendations highlighted the need to prioritize vision care for Canada’s rural, remote, and Indigenous communities, advocating for optometrists to be included in the list of eligible occupations under the Canada Student Loan Forgiveness Program and to allocate funding for much-needed vision research tailored to the specific needs of Canadians.**

We also supported and shared a petition with members calling on the federal government to act swiftly and prioritize the passage of Bill C-284.

## **Canadian Vision Stakeholders**

In February, we joined forces with Canadian vision stakeholders, industry players, and other supporters of Bill C-284 for a Lobby Day on the Hill. The focus was on emphasizing the urgent need for the Bill’s swift passage in the Senate, coinciding with AMD Awareness Day on February 13, 2024. The day’s activities included a Vision Forum Reception attended by elected and non-elected officials.

Building on these efforts, Canadian vision stakeholders sent letters to Senator Don Plett and 94 other Senators, urging them to prioritize and expedite the passage of the Bill in the Senate.

# Advocating for improved eye health, vision care access, and outcomes

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CAO's advocacy and awareness initiatives focused on promoting the key role of optometrists as primary eye care providers and collaborating with eye and health care partners and coalitions with the shared aim of improving eye health and eye care for all Canadians.

## Advocacy Collaborations

In addition to being part of the Canadian Vision stakeholders, CAO plays an active role in both HEAL (Organization for Health Action), and the EHPC (Extended Health Providers Coalition), where CAO holds the chair position. Through these memberships, we engage in discussions concerning health human resources, focusing on areas such as retention, recruitment, planning, and innovation.

In addition to our individual efforts, EHPC has been advocating for the expansion of the Canada Student Loan Forgiveness Program to include optometrists and other healthcare practitioners. EHPC has also expressed strong support for Bill C-284 by sending a letter to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Health.



Read the full letter to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Health

The annual Health Workforce in Canada report, published by the Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI), offers valuable insights into the state of healthcare professionals in the country. When EHPC learned of a pause in data collection for this report, we acted by writing to the President of CIHI. In our letter, we emphasized the importance of continued data collection efforts and offered our support for this endeavor. In a follow-up meeting last spring, CAO was pleased to learn that CIHI has resumed data collection for the Health Workforce in Canada Report.

Read the full letter to the Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI).



On October 17, 2023, CAO participated in The Canadian Council of the Blind's Virtual Conference: The State of Vision Health in Canada. This conference delved into the current state of vision health in Canada and anticipated developments as we transition into the post-pandemic era. Dr. Martin Spiro, President of CAO, addressed the conference, highlighting the crucial role of comprehensive eye exams in Canada's vision health landscape.

**CAO continues to address concerns and challenges with the NIHB program, advocating for various improvements, including the approval of new tests such as Fundus imaging and OCT, fee negotiations, simplification of the administration process, a new framework for on-reserve vision care, and clarification of "balance billing" rules in each province.**

On October 17, in Saskatoon, SK, The Assembly of First Nations (AFN) hosted the first of its two-day Dialogue Sessions, focused on addressing concerns and challenges identified by Non-Insured Health Benefits (NIHB) Navigators, with an emphasis on the hurdles and limitations within the NIHB program itself. CAO and the Saskatchewan Association of Optometrists presented on Bill C-284, highlighting the importance of First Nations' access to eye health and vision care services.

We have also corresponded with Interim Federal Health Branch (IFHB) program officials regarding concerns and challenges faced by member ODs enrolled in the program. These include issues such as ambiguity in fee schedule criteria, lack of alignment with provincial health insurance rates, unclear descriptions of optometry services, stagnant fee grids since 2015-2017, and challenges with the prior approval process. We have emphasized the need for resolution to ensure efficient and equitable healthcare provision, expressing a willingness to engage in constructive dialogue to address these concerns collaboratively.

## **World Council of Optometry**

Manitoba optometrist and former CAO President Dr. Michael Nelson currently serves as the Representative for North America on the Board of Directors of the World Council of Optometry (WCO). The WCO is dedicated to advancing the field of optometry globally, advocating for eye health and vision care as a fundamental human right. Through initiatives in advocacy, education, policy development, and humanitarian outreach, the WCO supports optometrists in promoting eye health worldwide.



# Enhancing the voice of optometry to the public

## CAO Resources

- CAO Solar Eclipse Safety Toolkit
- CAO Eye Health Library Article : Solar Eclipse Safety
- CAO Solar Eclipse Safety : Social Media Guide

## Solar Eclipse Safety

Last summer, CAO began preparations for the partial solar eclipse on October 14, 2023, and the total eclipse on April 8, 2024. We supported the AAS task force and collaborated with Dr. Ralph Chou to curate eclipse education and safety resources, seven educational video clips available on YouTube. We developed a bilingual Eclipse Safety Toolkit for CAO members, which included a social media guide with creative assets and key messaging featured in CAO's weekly member newsletter, Contact, to ensure widespread dissemination.

We created a dedicated webpage on solar eclipse eye safety, available in both English and French, issued a press release in September 2023. Between January 1, and April 8, 2024, the webpage received a total of 209,012 visits (101,232 EN / 107,780 FR). CAO facilitated media interviews with Dr. Chou, Dr. Spiro and Dr. Bohnsack in both English and French, leading to over 100 media mentions highlighting CAO and our eclipse resources.

Read the new Eye Health Library Article



## Eye Health Library

To ensure the information on CAO's public website is current, we completed the second phase of our Eye Health Library refresh, reviewing and updating 25 pieces in the library and adding a new one: *"Six Quick Tips to Protect Against Poor Air Quality and Wildfire Smoke"*.

Read past issues of Optical Prism Magazine



CAO provides a monthly column authored by the CAO President or a guest contributor for Optical Prism magazine. This column serves as a platform to address pertinent topics, including myopia and the significance of children's eye exams, increasing UV awareness, the importance of eye health for individuals with diabetes, and preventing vision loss. It also allows us to share expertise and engage with the professional community.

## Position Statements

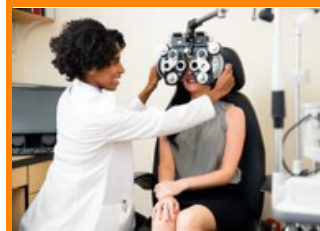
Recognizing the importance of policy supported by evidence-based research, CAO has developed or updated several of our position papers, including:



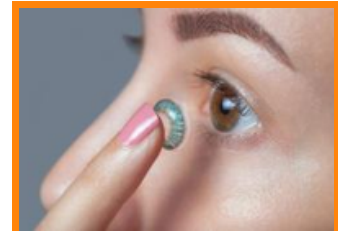
**Position Statement:**  
Vision Therapy



**Position Statement:**  
UV and Eye Protection

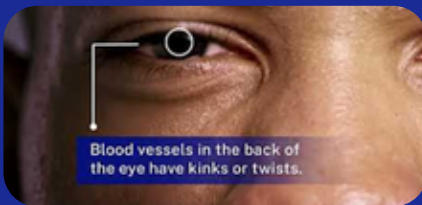


**Position Statement:**  
Eye Exam Frequency



**Position Statement:**  
Non Corrective Cosmetic  
Contact Lenses

## Promoting comprehensive eye exams



### Your Eyes Tell a Story

Canadian Association of  
Optometrists

▶ [Play all campaign videos](#)

In May, we launched a bilingual awareness campaign for Vision Health Month on social media with two main themes: **"My optometrist helped me..."** and **"My optometrist detected..."**. The campaign reached more than 678,000 people and generated over 1.2 million impressions. There were 105,571 link clicks to the GetEyeWise landing page and 5,905 conversions to CAO's Find a Doc search directory. To further expand our social media strategy in supporting members and raising awareness about eye health among Canadians, CAO launched an **Instagram account** to support the campaign.



### Beware the Blur!

Canadian Association of  
Optometrists

▶ [Play campaign videos](#)

October's bilingual Children Vision Month campaign, **"The Blur"** campaign focused on myopia in children. The campaign performed well on all social media platforms, reaching more than 2.8 million people with over 7.2 million impressions. There were 60,471 link clicks to the GetEyeWise landing pages and 2,050 conversions to the Find a Doc search directory.

Read the press release



Last summer, CAO joined The Global Myopia Awareness Coalition (GMAC), a coalition of leading ophthalmic companies and eye health associations with a mission to increase public awareness about the growing prevalence and consequences of myopia, especially in children. GMAC develops messaging campaigns for the public and works with healthcare professionals and allied organizations.

## Advancing practice conditions



### Supporting provincial efforts to enhance scope

CAO conducted a thorough environmental scan of optometry's scope of practice in Canada. This included a survey of all regulators regarding current scope and plans for expansion, an analysis of the curricula at the two Canadian schools of optometry, and a review of scope and expansion efforts in the USA and New Zealand, known for their broad scopes and successful expansion initiatives in recent years. The report is an invaluable resource for provincial scope expansion efforts.



### Promoting the modernization of vision care benefits

Read the handbook on modern vision care best practices



The Don't Lose Sight campaign, aimed at modernizing vision care benefits, is making significant progress as CAO actively engages with insurers and plan sponsors. We have revamped the [dontlosesight.ca](https://dontlosesight.ca) website to provide in-depth and easily accessible information. Additionally, we have created a new information package for stakeholders focusing on comprehensive eye exams, the cost-benefit associated with preventing ocular and related systemic diseases, and the gaps in vision care coverage that private payers should address.



### Developing and providing education on supporting dispensing revenues

After consulting various stakeholders in dispensing, we determined that creating a micro-credential/digital badge in Dispensing would be valuable for the Optometric Assistant (OA) community. CAO is currently seeking funding and expertise to review, update, and validate content before bundling and selling as a package.

## Addressing drug shortages

In response to ongoing ophthalmic drug shortages, CAO participated in Health Canada's consultation to strengthen the supply of drugs and other health products in Canada. We also met with Health Canada's lead manager on drug shortages, emphasizing the critical need to address shortages of ophthalmic drugs. Both organizations expressed a strong commitment to collaborating to eliminate ophthalmic drug shortages in Canada. To ensure members have current information on the status of shortages, CAO shares a monthly report in Contact with the latest information from Health Canada.

## Sharing practice information and resources

Read the PFAS information sheet



We hosted a free Negotiating Commercial Leases & Renewals webinar for members and developed an information sheet on PFAS (Per- and poly-fluoroalkyl substances), also known as "forever chemicals," in response to consumer media coverage of PFAS in some contact lenses, to better inform our members.

### **Canadian Certified Optometric Assistant (CCOA) Program**

The CCOA program provides practical, comprehensive, up-to-date training for optometric staff. CCOA membership has seen impressive growth, with 2,115 currently certified assistants and 178 (153 EN, 21 FR) OAs enrolled in this year's full course and 86 (78 EN, 8 FR) in the On-demand program.

This year, we expanded our offerings in French to include the CCOA individual module program and the OA Basics module for staff who are new to optometry or would like more preparation before enrolling in the full CCOA program.

There are now more options for continuing education for CCOAs on the CAO Learning Platform. We updated the Myopia Management modules with support from Cooper Vision for the translation cost and launched the HR Management and Ocular Nutrition modules in French.

Additionally, we renewed our CE-sharing agreement with the Opticians Association of Canada and launched a new CE-sharing agreement with OptikConEd.com to expand the range of continuing education opportunities available to CCOAs.



## Vision at Work Program

The Vision at Work (VAW) program has expanded its reach, now encompassing 405 participating optometrists. We have intensified our communication and collaboration with safety vision program counterparts nationwide to exchange information and share best practices. In the past year, we disbursed over \$78,000 in payments to participating optometrists, and we welcomed eight new OD practices into the program.

VAW appointed Optik Lab (Optik K&R) as our designated supplier for Optical frames from Armourx and On Guard, our current two frame suppliers. This strategic move promises to significantly enhance the turnaround time for dispensing, particularly with the On Guard Frames.



## Supporting students and early career ODs with their transition to practice



Our support for optometry students continues through free CAO membership for students, ongoing sponsorship of White Coat ceremonies, and recognition of a 4th-year student at UM and UW, demonstrating alignment with CAO's values with the CAO Leadership Award.

Our collaboration with CAOS includes contributing to CAOS's magazine Aperture, hosting events for students at UM, UW, and US optometry schools with CAOS chapters, and in 2023 the CAOS registration form included an opt-out box to become a member of the CAO, streamlining the process at UW.

We renewed the funding agreement for the OPTOM 380 Practice Management Course for 3rd-year students at UW. The course outline and projects were presented to a group of young ODs to gather input on existing content and explore additional topics for development post-graduation. The feedback received was positive and supportive of the CAO's ongoing assistance, and valuable suggestions were offered for improvement.



## Enhancing competencies and fostering collaboration

### CAO Biennial Congress

Our 38<sup>th</sup> Biennial Congress in Quebec City had over 860 attendees. It was the first fully bilingual Congress organized by CAO. The attendee surveys showed high satisfaction with the CE program. A Memorandum of Understanding has been signed with NSAO and Vision Therapy to cooperate on the 39th biennial CAO Congress on July 2-5, 2025, in Halifax, and planning is underway.



### Emergency Care Working Group

CAO created and convened an pan-Canadian Working Group to promote the role of optometrists in treating eye care emergencies to reduce wait times. The inaugural meeting was held in late 2023. The working group will focus on exploring avenues for engaging optometrists in the treatment of urgent and emergent ocular cases to reduce wait times.



## Expanding research capability

### Canadian Journal of Optometry (CJO)

Read the revised author's guidelines



The Medline Indexation project has made significant strides, marking progress through several completed steps. In the summer of 2023, Dr. Diane N. Sayah from the University of Houston joined the editorial board as a new member. Additionally, bilingual CJO postcards, available in both printed and digital formats, have been developed and distributed among CJO editorial board members to bolster manuscript submissions and the authors' guidelines were updated to enhance clarity and effectiveness.

Support has been enlisted through contracted services to ensure smooth operations and an efficient peer-review process. This support aims to facilitate the management of the project, garner editorial board backing for consistent online content review and copy editing, and facilitate the application to prominent databases such as PubMed Central, DOAJ, Scopus, and Google Scholar.

CAO renewed support for the **Witer Learning Resource Centre (WLRC)** at the University of Waterloo School of Optometry and Vision Science, which offers free information services and resources for CAO members and alumni, contributing to the advancement of optometry education and research.



## Championing the beneficial integration of technology

In recognition of the rapid development of AI and the advancement of technologies, CAO is committed to exploring the implications for optometric practice in Canada advocating for using it in ways that are beneficial for both practitioners and patients.

### AI (Artificial Intelligence) and Teleoptometry

CAO has built a Pan-Canadian working group on AI and teleoptometry. The working group is meeting to discuss developing a framework for enhancing and facilitating the adoption of teleoptometry and AI in clinical practice across Canada.

### Optometric Leaders Forum 2024

Each January, CAO hosts the Optometric Leaders Forum (OLF), which brings together representatives from provincial associations and regulators, academics, and industry stakeholders to explore the challenges facing the profession and to plan and prepare for the future of optometry in Canada. The theme for the 2024 OLF was AI and teleoptometry. Speakers included Canadian subject matter experts and international leaders from four international optometric associations, exploring the emerging applications of AI and telehealth in the optometric context.

Read the 2024  
OLF Summary  
Report 



Breakout discussions explored future scenarios ten years ahead, with a particular focus on Teleoptometry, scope of practice, specialization, and the use of AI in optometry to detect and monitor systemic diseases, as well as advancements in education. CAO prepared a summary report for members with highlights of the event.

**With a clear focus on supporting our members through federal advocacy and the promotion of comprehensive eye care, CAO continues to position optometry as the central pillar of eye health and vision care in Canada. As we navigate through ongoing challenges and opportunities, and the integration of technology into optometric practice, we are dedicated to championing the interests of optometrists and ensuring awareness of and access to quality vision care for all Canadians.**