



CANADIAN ASSOCIATION OF OPTOMETRISTS  
ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE DES OPTOMÉTRISTES

## Canadian Association of Optometrists Pre-Budget Submission 2014

Presented to: House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance

Presented by: Canadian Association of Optometrists

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## About CAO

The Canadian Association of Optometrists (CAO) is the national voice of optometry and is dedicated to collaboratively advancing the highest standard of primary eye care through the promotion of optimal vision and eye health, in partnership with all Canadians.

## The Facts about our Vision Health Future

- Vision loss is the most feared disability for Canadians (69%).<sup>1</sup>
- Canadians in the 64+ population will double from 4.6 million in 2010 to 9.2 million by 2031.<sup>2</sup>
- 4 million+ Canadian adults have one of the leading ocular diseases... all of which are age related.<sup>3</sup>
- Within the next 20 years the number of Canadians with vision loss is expected to double.<sup>3</sup>
- Vision loss has the highest direct health care costs of any other disease.<sup>4</sup>
- The financial burden of vision loss in Canada in 2007 was estimated at \$15.8 billion. By 2032, vision loss is expected to cost Canadians \$30.3 billion.<sup>4</sup>
- Over 75% of vision loss is preventable.<sup>5</sup>

Doctors of optometry are the primary eye health and vision care medical professionals for Canadians. Optometrists diagnose, treat and manage eye care for patients with glaucoma, diabetes, cataracts and macular degeneration. With Canada's aging population, the cost of improperly managing age-related chronic conditions will be high.

The impacts of poor eye health and vision care are also felt by children. A recent survey commissioned by the Canadian Association of Optometrists reported that 61% of parents mistakenly believe they would know if their child was having difficulty with their eyesight. Many serious eye conditions do not have obvious symptoms and some eye diseases only become apparent when the condition is advanced and difficult to treat. Children accept their vision as normal because they have no point of comparison. They may simply assume everyone sees the way they do.

80% of all learning during a child's first 12 years is visual. Vision problems manifest themselves both in school and at play. Many parents are unaware that vision issues are common among children. CAO wants to impress upon them that one in four school-aged children has a vision problem of some kind that must be addressed for a child to reach their full potential. Doctors of

optometry can also help children to address any concerns they may have about their vision or the idea of wearing glasses.

When we look at the vision challenges facing our youngest and oldest populations, the impact this will have on their quality of life and the financial burden it places on our health care system, the need for better public eye health education becomes a very obvious one.

### **Recommendation: Establish a federally-funded public awareness campaign around the theme of, the importance of vision health**

A modest investment of \$25 million over a five year period towards a public awareness campaign would help inform Canadians, both young and old, of the importance of vision health and help save money in the future by focusing on prevention and assisting Canadians in identifying problems before they become a burden on the public health care system. Remember, over 75% of vision loss is preventable.

Most Canadians are not receiving the quality vision care that they require and as a result the prevalence and economic burden of the above-noted diseases are much higher and costlier than they should be.

Improving Canadians' knowledge about the importance of vision health would be a sound investment in the health and safety of our population and our economy in the long term.

1. Environics Research Group 2003
2. [www.statscan.gc.ca](http://www.statscan.gc.ca)
3. A Clear Vision: Solutions to Canada's Vision Loss Crisis, Canterbury Communications 2005
4. The Cost of Vision Loss, 2009, CNIB & COS
5. CNIB