

Building a better Alberta



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Province reaches new deal with Alberta optometrists
Coverage for medically necessary eye care expanded to all age groups

Edmonton... Members of the Alberta Association of Optometrists (AAO), Alberta's eye doctors, have ratified a new 3-year agreement with Alberta Health and Wellness to provide publicly funded services.

The new agreement expands coverage for medically necessary optometry services to **all** Albertans under the Alberta Health Care Insurance Plan. Optometry services covered by Alberta Health and Wellness are expected to cost \$42.5 million in 2011/12; up from approximately \$39 million in 2010/11.

"The substantial health benefits resulting from this coverage more than justify extending it to all Albertans regardless of age," said Health and Wellness Minister Gene Zwozdesky. "This agreement shows we are taking action to improve access to quality care, which supports goal #1 in our *5-Year Health Action Plan*."

"This agreement will enable more Albertans to get timely medical services for eye ailments," noted Dr. Jason Pearce, AAO President, "This is important, as eye care and the prevention of eye disease is critical to every Albertan's well being. It has been very encouraging to work with Alberta Health and Wellness towards a common goal of improved eye health for all Albertans."

Since October 2007, Albertans between 19 and 64 years of age who required medical treatment for eye-related diseases and illness had been covered under the Alberta Health Care Insurance Plan. Starting this October, that coverage expands to include **all** Albertans, no matter what their age, who need an optometrist to provide certain medically required services. Examples of treatments include the following diseases/conditions: diabetes mellitus; glaucoma; cataracts; removal of foreign bodies from the eye; retinal detachments, defects, and other retinal disorders; and disorders of the eye, globe, eyelids and cornea.

Previously, Albertans 65 years of age and older or 18 years of age and younger, would have had medically necessary treatments paid for through a mix of Alberta Health Care Insurance Plan coverage or private insurance plans. (Routine eye exams for these 2 age groups will continue to be covered under the Alberta Health Care Insurance Plan.)

The new agreement also confirms government's continued support for the Eye See...Eye Learn program, which is operated by the AAO and backed by several industry sponsors. This program encourages the examination of kindergarten-age children and provides a free pair of eyeglasses to children registered in kindergarten who require a prescription. In 2010, more than 1,200 free eyeglasses were distributed to kindergarten children.

The new agreement will run from April 1, 2011 to March 31, 2014. Fees paid to optometrists for providing government-funded optometric services will remain unchanged during years 1 and 2 of the agreement and will increase by 3% in year 3 (i.e. 0, 0, and 3%). There are approximately 530 optometrists currently practicing in Alberta.

The Alberta government is working to build a better Alberta by fostering economic growth, strengthening our health and education systems, investing in infrastructure, supporting safe and strong communities and ensuring a clean and healthy environment.

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