

## **Albertans to benefit thanks to medically necessary eye health program**

June 23, 2010 – Barriers to accessing primary eye health care have been removed thanks to the medically necessary eye health program introduced by [Alberta Health and Wellness](#) and the [Alberta Association of Optometrists](#).

“Thanks to the introduction of the medically necessary eye health program, Albertans from all corners of the province will have quicker easier access to primary eye health care,” says Dr. Neepun Sharma, President of the AAO, adding that, “medically necessary services can now be provided by optometrists and the cost of the care will be fully covered by Alberta Health and Wellness.”

This joint-initiative, will allow Albertans to seek primary eye care services from any Alberta optometrist, instead of driving to the nearest hospital emergency or waiting to see a family doctor. “With optometrist in more than 80 communities throughout Alberta, the medically necessary eye health program will allow for quicker diagnosis and treatment of specific eye health conditions”, says Dr. Sharma, adding that “when treatment isn’t possible, they can speed referrals to the appropriate specialist”.

The coverage for medically necessary eye health services includes:

- Monitoring for [diabetes related issues](#), [glaucoma](#), and retinal disease
- Pre and post operative optometric care for [cataract](#) patients
- Eye infection or [injuries](#)
- Removal of foreign objects from the eye
- Sudden changes in vision
- Treatment of eye infections, inflammation, or injuries including the use of topical medications.

Dr. Sharma says the program enhances eye care for all Albertans. “Many patients, such as those with diabetes, have avoided regular and necessary eye health check-ups because they had to pay out of pocket for these services. This new coverage eliminates such barriers.”

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## BACKGROUNDER

### CATARACT

When the normally clear lens within your eye becomes cloudy and opaque, it is called a cataract. Cataracts vary from extremely small areas of cloudiness to large opaque areas that cause a noticeable loss of vision. Cataracts are most often found in persons over the age of 60, but they are also occasionally found in younger people, including newborns.

Fast Fact:

- In 2008/2009, there were 119,300 Albertans 45 years or older with cataracts.

[More on cataracts...](#)

### DIABETES & YOUR EYES

Diabetes and its complications can affect many parts of the eye. Diabetes can cause changes in nearsightedness, farsightedness and premature presbyopia (the inability to focus on close objects). It can result in cataracts, glaucoma, paralysis of the nerves that control the eye muscles or pupil, and in decreased corneal sensitivity. Visual symptoms of diabetes include fluctuating or blurring of vision, occasional double vision, loss of visual field, and flashes and floaters within the eyes. Sometimes these early signs of diabetes are detected in a thorough optometric examination. The most serious eye problem associated with diabetes is diabetic retinopathy.

Fast Facts

- In 2009, there were 144,832 Albertans with diabetes (84,950 male and 59,881 female).
- Cataracts and glaucoma are 2 to 5 times more likely for people with diabetes in Alberta.
- In 2007, only 60% of people with diabetes had an eye examination within 3 years of being diagnosed with diabetes.

[More on diabetes and your eyes...](#)

### GLAUCOMA

Glaucoma is an eye disease in which it is thought the internal pressure of your eye rises to a point that the optic nerve is damaged. The pressure that builds up is due to a problem in the production, flow or drainage of fluid normally produced in your eye. Glaucoma is one of the leading causes of blindness in Canada and most frequently occurs in individuals over the age of 40 and there is a hereditary tendency for the development of the disease in some families.

Fast Fact:

1. In 2008/2009, there were 30,143 Albertans 45 years or older with glaucoma.

[More on glaucoma...](#)

### EYE SAFETY

Metal, plastic or wood fragments, tools, particles, chemicals and harmful ultraviolet radiation cause most eye injuries. A recent survey found that in 60 percent of workplace injuries, the injured person wore no eye protection. [More on eye safety...](#)