



Ontario Optometrists Rally to Demand Government Take Action on Ontario's Eye Care Crisis

After months of silence from the Ontario government, optometrists and optometry students gather to demand access to critical OHIP services.

October 6th, 2021

Toronto, ON – Today, hundreds of optometrists from across Ontario rallied on the lawn of Queen's Park to demand government action to ensure access to OHIP-insured eye services. Unlike other insured services, the Ontario government does not cover the cost of delivery of an OHIP-insured eye exam. As a result of this severe underfunding, access to quality eye care has been compromised for OHIP patients – children, seniors, and those with existing eye conditions.

For months, the Ontario Association of Optometrists (OAO) pursued this government with concerns about the integrity of Ontario's eye care system with two requests: a formal negotiation process with a dispute resolution mechanism and a commitment to an outcome that no longer requires optometrists to subsidize OHIP services. Since September 1, 2021, OHIP patients have been unable to access OHIP-insured services.

“Our team is not asking for increases that are beyond the scope required to deliver these essential exams. Unfortunately, the current government appears to be following in the footsteps of its predecessors and overlooking the needs of Ontario's most vulnerable,” said Dr. Sheldon Salaba, President of the Ontario Association of Optometrists. “It is neither fair nor reasonable to ignore the systemic nature of the funding problem by offering a one-time payment that does nothing to support care delivery in the future.”

After nearly eight months of radio silence from Ontario's government, a two-day slapdash mediation took place. This was followed by a surprising public offer by the government which resulted in a one-time \$39 million retroactive payment direct to optometrists. This payment averages to just over \$1 for each optometry service performed in the retroactive period. This payment was not negotiated with the OAO and the announcement came as negotiations for a new compensation agreement were reaching a standstill. Further, the Ministry of Health made the announcement with no notice to the OAO, delivered it directly to optometrists across Ontario, and widely publicized it in the media. Over 2200 optometrists have since written to Minister Elliott to say they do not offer their consent to receive this payment.

“The government’s current offer prioritizes saving face over saving access to eye care,” said Dr. Salaba. “It continues to make Ontario seniors and children receive the lowest funding rates for publicly-insured services across the country. Canadians in one province are not in more need of quality access to eye care than in another.”

The OAO believes the current offer fails to address the systemic nature of the crisis in eye care funding. This offer focuses on the past and does nothing to safeguard eye care funding for the coming years and decades. Based on publicly available information, to reach the level of the next lowest funded province in the country (Manitoba), a 65% increase in funding for publicly insured services is required.

“This is another typical “promise made, promise broken” from Premier Ford and this government. The government’s continued neglect only impacts those most in need in our communities. Ontario optometrists are committed to defending access to publicly-funded healthcare for our patients and we won’t stop until our patients receive what they deserve.”

The OAO has not heard from the government of Ontario since late August. The negotiation team remains at the bargaining table awaiting the government’s attention to this critical health care issue.

FACTS:

- In 1989, the Ontario government paid \$39.15 to an optometrist for a single eye exam. Since then, that figure has increased on average 17 cents a year.
- Ontario optometrists provide over 4 million OHIP-insured eye exams a year, making up over 70% of the patients at an average practice.
- Ontario laws make it illegal for optometrists to accept direct payment or alternate health insurance from OHIP-insured patients.
- Ontario physicians are the second-highest paid physicians in all of Canada; meanwhile, Ontario optometrists receive the lowest compensation rates across the country.
- An independent study commissioned by the OAO found the average cost to provide an eye exam in Ontario was \$75.51 in 2019.

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