



Alberta  
Association  
of Optometrists 

# Annual Report **2025**



# Our **Mission**

To provide leadership and support for our members to be every Albertan's first and continual access point for world leading eye care.

# Our **Vision**

Advancing the profession of optometry to deliver leading edge eye care for every Albertan.

# Our **Values**



**Accountable**



**Professional**



**Innovative**



**Visionary**



**Inclusive**

ON THE COVER: Dr. Kiani received the inaugural *Speaker of the Year Award* in recognition of her outstanding contributions to our public engagement efforts. Over the past year, she has represented the profession at numerous speaking engagements organized by the AAO in collaboration with a range of stakeholder organizations across Alberta.

Learn more about the *Speaker of the Year Award* on page 22.

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# President's **Message**

## **Dear Colleagues,**

It has been my privilege to represent our profession over the past year. The AAO's council, committees, volunteers, CEO, and staff members have continued to work hard in support of members and advance our shared goals. This report outlines the progress we have made, highlights key achievements, and demonstrates how your dues are being effectively utilized.

Our member survey earlier this year showed strong alignment with the AAO's vision and values. You, the membership, have identified fair remuneration and expanded scope of practice as top priorities, along with concerns about third-party barriers. You asked for stronger advocacy, increased public awareness, and new approaches to outreach. We are listening and we are doing. Together, we are strengthening the future for optometry in Alberta, while remaining committed to delivering the highest standard of care to our patients.

## **Advocacy**

This year tested our resilience, strengthened our advocacy, and reinforced the profession's role in Alberta's health system. With nearly 100 GRC members, the AAO maintained representation in 92% of ridings and remained active in discussions on scope expansion and fee negotiations.

Despite strong advocacy, Alberta Health implemented Opto 35 changes in February 2025. We thank

members for their support and outreach to local MLAs. This collective effort reached patients across the province, helping them better understand how that change impacts them.

On scope expansion, Cabinet has yet to decide. The AAO Negotiation Committee is ready to move forward once union health care professionals negotiations conclude. We also raised concerns about care at Euclid Telehealth, prompting a provincial investigation and the creation of a reporting channel for further issues.

In addition, we continue to monitor the Canada Health Act's reinterpretation letter and its impact on non-physician providers. Advocacy, education, and negotiation remain central to advancing and protecting our profession.

## **Member Programs**

The AAO's two established programs, Eyesafe™ and Eye See . . . Eye Learn™ (ESEL™), continued their growth in usage and public awareness, strengthening our role in eye safety and children's vision.

Eyesafe™ supported Alberta workers in accessing properly fitted, high-quality prescription safety eyewear throughout 2024. Feedback from employers and employees continues to be positive and in 2024, the program added 56 new clients and disbursed \$797,429 to participating optometrists.

Through ESEL™, information reached 65,000 kindergarten students across the province. As a result, 38% of five-year-olds received an eye exam, with more than 2,300 receiving free glasses. For almost 60% of these children, it was their first pair. We remain committed to increasing participation in this program to ensure no child falls behind due to an undetected vision problem.

## Public Awareness & Stakeholder Outreach

The AAO continues to lead in promoting optometry as Alberta's primary eye care profession, both to the public and within the broader health system. Over the past year, members represented the AAO at many events, sharing important messages about eye health. Our collective work is increasingly recognized by physicians and allied health professionals. We are also actively involved in teaching first and second year family medicine residents in Alberta to increase awareness of optometry's role and benefit within the health care pathways.

## Continuing Education

Careers in optometry are dynamic, and like many progressive professions, ongoing continuing education is essential. This past year, AAO members benefited from educational opportunities at the Annual Conference, Spring Symposium, and several virtual webinars. Our Continuing Education Committee continually seeks top speakers to deliver advanced sessions. High participation and satisfaction levels reflect both our members' commitment to world-class eye care and the quality of these programs.

## Shaping Tomorrow, Together

Doctors, thank you for your trust, your commitment, and your care. It has been an honour to serve. Keep showing up, doing good work, and taking care of one another.

**Dr. Sophia Leung**



Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S. Leung'.

**Dr. Sophia Leung,**  
AAO President

## 2024/2025 AAO Council

As the AAO continues to champion the profession and support the vital work of Alberta's optometrists, strategic planning remains a key focus for Council. Council plays a central role in shaping the direction of the organization, with regular reviews to ensure our priorities remain aligned with emerging opportunities and evolving industry trends.

The dedication and thoughtful leadership demonstrated over the past year have once again benefited our members and laid the groundwork for continued progress. Elected by the membership, Council is entrusted with guiding the AAO through both the professional and operational aspects of the Association, always with a forward-looking perspective.

Thank you to our Council members for their time, expertise, and commitment to representing the interests of our members and maintaining the AAO's strength as a dynamic and resilient organization.



**Dr. Sophia  
Leung**

President



**Dr. Andrea  
Lasby**

Past President



**Dr. Cristy  
Franco**

President  
Elect



**Dr. Monica  
Bell**

Director



**Dr. Pamela  
Giles**

Director



**Dr. Darren  
Wagner**

Director



**Dr. Karen  
Hayward**

Director



**Dr. Alia  
Cappellani**

Director



**Dr. Troy  
Brady**

CAO  
Representative

2024 AAO

# Committees

The AAO benefits greatly from the active participation of its members on numerous committees. Every year, dedicated volunteers invest significant time and effort to provide guidance and expertise that help drive the organization's ongoing success. With over 133 members contributing their diverse skills and knowledge, these committees form a strong foundation for the work we accomplish. Beyond committee involvement, many members have also represented the profession at medical, community, and industry events, helping to elevate the understanding of optometry's role in supporting eye health across Alberta.

This essential work relies heavily on the commitment of these individuals. We extend our sincere thanks to everyone who shared their time and expertise throughout 2024.



## Policy Committees

### Artificial Intelligence and Teleoptometry Subcommittee

Dr. Andrea Lasby, Chair  
Dr. Brendon Bjarnason  
Dr. Joel Baillargeon  
Dr. Ashley Olford

### Board Development and Nominations Committee

Dr. Andrea Lasby, Chair  
Dr. Troy Brady  
Dr. Pamela Giles  
Dr. Alia Cappellani

### Business Management Subcommittee

Dr. Pamela Giles, Chair  
Dr. Daryl Berger  
Dr. Heather Cowie  
Dr. Peter Laansoo  
Dr. Ranbir Sond

### Cosmetic Optometry Subcommittee

Dr. Colin Hobson, Chair  
Dr. Riaz Ahmed  
Dr. Natasha Chrenek  
Dr. Gene Edworthy  
Dr. Aleem Jiwa  
Dr. Aaron Yau

### Emerging Trends Committee

Dr. Cristy Franco, Chair  
Dr. Andrea Lasby  
Dr. Darren Wagner  
Dr. Karen Hayward

### Finance, Audit, & Risk Management Committee

Dr. Darren Wagner, Chair  
Dr. Colin Hobson  
Dr. Kent Manville  
Dr. T.H Poon  
Dr. Connor West

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## Policy Committees

*continued*

### Local Optometric Societies Committee

Dr. Pamela Giles, Chair  
Dr. Monica Bell, CSO  
Dr. Tatiana Cook, LSO  
Dr. Jade McLachlin, ESO  
Dr. Jodi Sehn, MSO  
Dr. Heather Van Haren, CAOS

### Vision Development and Rehabilitation Subcommittee

Dr. Cristy Franco, Chair  
Dr. Rachel Bryant  
Dr. Sabih Chaudhary  
Dr. Charlotte Forgie  
Dr. Jason Holtom

## Operational Committees

### Billing Committee

Dr. Amy Forrest, Chair  
Dr. Yogesh Patel  
Dr. Adam Reid

### Continuing Education Committee

Dr. Monica Bell, Chair  
Dr. Dylan Johnston  
Dr. Sheila Morrison  
Dr. Rima Sabbah

### New Grad Committee

Mr. Brian Wik, Chair  
Dr. Claudia Amaniampong  
Dr. Aysha Chaudhry  
Dr. Jonah Gilham  
Dr. Steven Ha  
Dr. Tracy Kitz  
Dr. Pearl Motkoski  
Dr. Jennifer Verrett



# Government Relations Committee

Mr. Brian Wik, Chair	Dr. George Day	Dr. Andrea Lasby	Dr. Brent Saik
Dr. Riaz Ahmed	Dr. Hazel Delong	Dr. Paul Lathrop	Dr. Jean Shen
Dr. Jonathan Akle	Dr. Nicole Deschamps	Dr. Sophia Leung	Dr. Brittany Shewchuk
Dr. Mohammad Al-Bekai	Dr. Kirandeep Dhaliwal	Dr. Allan MacKenzie	Dr. Tanya Sitter
Dr. Monzer Al-Bekai	Dr. Blake Dornstauder	Dr. Noufal Mais	Dr. Timothy Skwarok
Dr. Trent Allred	Dr. Benjamin Doz	Dr. Jeff Mann	Dr. Sara Starko
Dr. Ziad Al-Qishawi	Dr. Laura Dwernichuk	Dr. Jade McLachlin	Dr. Jared Steblin
Dr. Guy Ambrosio	Dr. Amy Forrest	Dr. Craig McQueen	Dr. Farah Sunderji
Dr. Dave Anderson	Dr. Cristy Franco	Dr. Craig Meckelborg	Dr. Pamela Syrota
Dr. Jennifer Ash	Dr. Pamela Giles	Dr. Harpreet Minhas	Dr. Chelsea Syverson
Dr. Jim Asuchak	Dr. Ranweet Grewal	Dr. Diana Monea	Dr. Shelly Taneja
Dr. Jaswinder Bains	Dr. Jackie Hagen	Dr. Brenda Mummery	Dr. Julie Theng
Dr. Sallie Barclay	Dr. Jamie-Lee Halabi	Dr. Eve Niedergesaess	Dr. Raman Thind-Gill
Dr. Ben Barrus	Dr. Chrissy Hines	Dr. Nimrit Nijjar	Dr. James Thompson
Dr. Monica Bell	Dr. Colin Hobson	Dr. Nobe Nijjar	Dr. Jay Torbeih
Dr. Troy Brady	Dr. Michael Hopper	Dr. Justin Norris	Dr. Kevin Tsen
Dr. Kim Bugera	Dr. Clark Hyde	Dr. Sherri Norris	Dr. Mona Ubhi
Dr. Aysha Chaudhry	Dr. Sumeet Jeerh	Dr. Jon Pack	Dr. Jade Ulmer
Dr. Theresa Checkley	Dr. Aleem Jiwa	Dr. Holly Parker	Dr. Christopher Vu
Dr. Laura Chisholm	Dr. Menka Johl	Dr. Jason Pearce	Dr. Darren Wagner
Dr. Nadia Clark	Dr. Shane Keddie	Dr. Shannon Pennifold	Dr. Tom Wilk
Dr. Mark Cloarec	Dr. Tracy Kitz	Dr. Darren Phillips	Dr. Mark Wood
Dr. Heather Cowie	Dr. Michael Kreuzer	Dr. Mark Pitcher	Dr. Michael Yu
Dr. Richard Cowles	Dr. Hudson Kroeker	Dr. Jimmy Prince	Dr. Ward ZoBell
Dr. Matthew Craig	Dr. Jennifer Langfield	Dr. Christine Russo	
Dr. Yen Dang	Dr. Cory Larsen	Dr. Stan Russo	



## The **Membership**

With 901 members, the AAO represents 94% of all optometrists in the province. There is strength in numbers, and the AAO is well positioned to meet the future needs of those practicing in Alberta through advocacy, building awareness, and being innovative. What is equally impressive is that there are four generations of optometrists practicing in the province. It is a profession that allows for continued growth through education and the opportunity to develop multi-generational clinics when mentorship is easily accessible. The AAO continues to be at the top of the list with the highest membership percentage in Canada — something we can all be proud of as members.



## Student to New Graduate



**Dr. Aaron Yau**

In 2024, 92 early-career optometrists were navigating their first, second, or third year of membership with the AAO. Among them is Dr. Aaron Yau, a distinguished new grad whose path to optometry was anything but conventional.

As a child, a horseback riding accident left Aaron with a serious orbital injury, requiring surgery and years of follow-up care from ophthalmologists, optometrists, and vision therapists. After moving on from that chapter of his life, he developed an interest in architecture during high school, but it wasn't long before he found himself drawn back to eye care — not as a patient, but as a future provider.

With laser focus, he set his sights on the University of Waterloo. Eight years later, he is not only practicing in Calgary but also actively involved in the optometric community as a volunteer on the AAO's Cosmetic Optometry Subcommittee. This role allows him to pursue his passion for anterior segment disease, myopia control, and innovation in dry eye management. Dr. Yau also appreciates the social benefits of being a member, sharing, "I've come to realize just how small the optometry community is and how easy it is to meet new people. AAO meetings feel like a high school reunion in some ways when I see old friends and new colleagues."

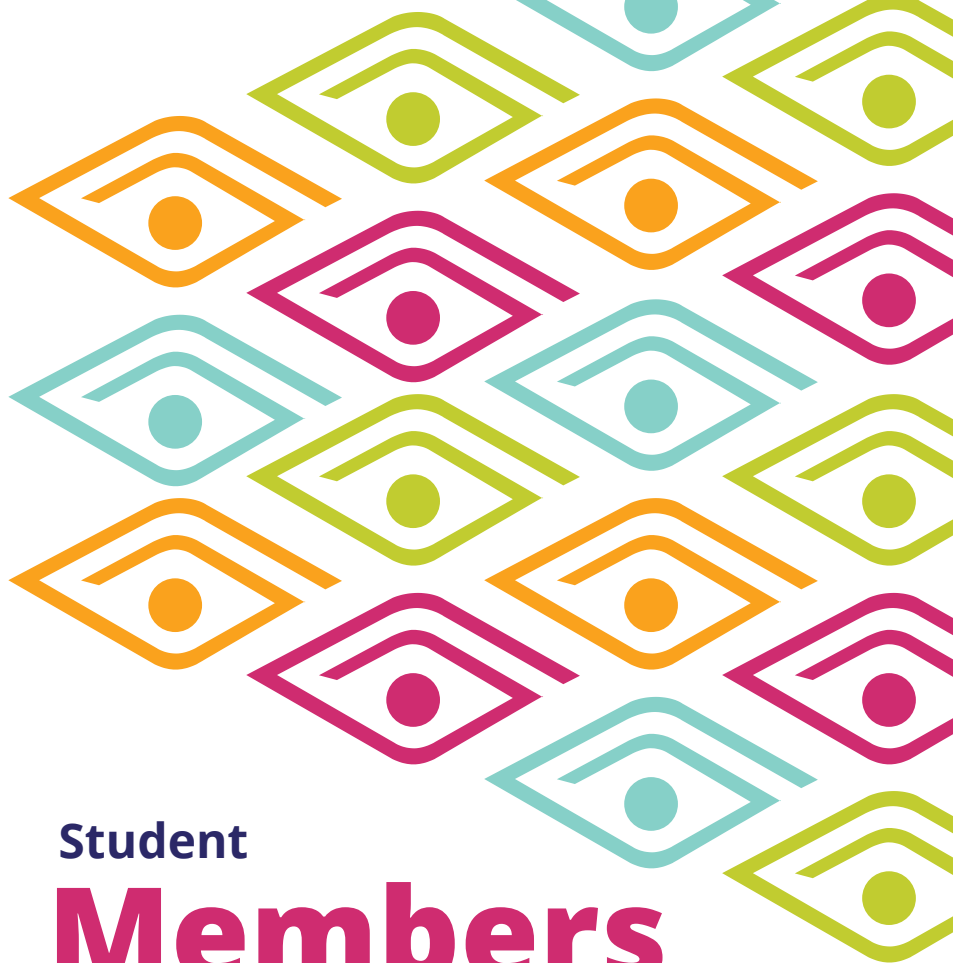
Dr. Yau describes the transition from student to new graduate as "an absolute roller coaster ride of learning." He credits the AAO's bi-weekly Billing Tips email for providing much-needed support during this time. The first two years of his practice

have enabled him to immerse himself in advanced dry eye therapies, join advisory boards, educate teachers and children in schools, attend various events, and build lasting relationships with colleagues across Calgary.

The experiences Dr. Yau has had early in his career are shaping the standards of care and patient experiences he aims to create. They have also instilled confidence. "The biggest change I've noticed in myself is that I've solidified who I am as a doctor and the values I stand for," he said. "No matter what, nothing beats the feeling of pride in your profession when patients break down and cry tears of joy in your chair." While embracing his new routine and priorities as a doctor, Dr. Yau admits that one student mindset lingers: he is still unlikely to turn down a free meal.

Dr. Yau encourages new graduates to carefully consider their employment agreements and not to feel pressured into signing. "After all, optometrists are in high demand, and as a new OD, you are a prized commodity – even if you don't feel confident enough yet," he advises.

*Thank you for your contributions to our profession, Dr. Yau. We are delighted to have you in our ranks.*



## Student Members

Today's students are tomorrow's leaders, and the AAO's student membership helps bridge that transition. With access to the same valuable resources as practicing members, student members gain a front-row seat to the profession in Alberta. From mentorship opportunities to networking with established optometrists, membership offers students a meaningful introduction to the realities of practice in the province. In 2024, 36 students took that first step by joining the AAO community.

25  
years

## 2024 Practice Award Recipients

Each year, the AAO is honoured to celebrate its members reaching 25 and 50 years of practice. It recognizes their dedicated service to the profession and to helping ensure Albertans have the best possible eye health care. Congratulations!



**Dr. James Asuchak**



**Dr. Troy Brady**



**Dr. Wardell ZoBell**

**Members that received awards but were unable to attend the awards presentation:**

**Dr. Amy Bakelaar, Dr. Joanne Hope, Dr. Scott Lopetinsky,  
Dr. Brian Nakai, Dr. Brent Neufeld, Dr. Sean Wilson**

**50**  
*years*

2024 Practice Award

# Recipients

**Dr. Gerald Mezei**



**Dr. Craig McQueen**  
was not available  
for a photograph.

## Service

# Award

The 2024 Service Award goes to Dr. Tannis Rode, a Red Deer-based optometrist whose leadership and dedication have reached far beyond Alberta. She has played a crucial role in bringing regulatory oversight and expanded access to eye care to communities across Nunavut.

The AAO presents a Service Award annually to recognize an individual who has made a significant contribution of personal time and effort to advance the profession of optometry and support the

Association's work. Nominees must demonstrate exceptional leadership and a

commitment to promoting the values and mission of the AAO. This honour celebrates those who serve the profession beyond their clinical work, strengthening optometry through advocacy, collaboration, and vision.

Dr. Rode started meeting with Nunavut government representatives in 2022 to improve eye care access for the 25 communities in Nunavut. Routine exams in Nunavut have historically been provided by travelling ophthalmic technicians. In collaboration with the Nunavut Government and the Alberta College of Optometrists, Nunavut established a licensing framework for optometrists and adopted the Alberta scope of optometric care. Dr. Rode also assembled mobile equipment kits and personally recruited a team of optometrists from Alberta and across Canada to provide much-needed services in remote communities, demonstrating how grassroots leadership can spark meaningful, nationwide impact. Optometrists have now visited 23 out of the 25 communities in Nunavut, with a particular focus on pediatric eye care.

Thank you, Dr. Rode, for your exemplary leadership and dedication to advancing our profession and improving patient care in an underserved Canadian territory that desperately needed world-class optometric services.



**Dr. Tannis Rode**

# Honourary Member Award

The AAO Honourary Member Award is presented to an individual who, though not a member of the profession in Alberta, has made a significant and lasting contribution to the advancement of optometry in the province. This year, we are proud to recognize Dr. Stanley Woo for his outstanding leadership, dedication, and vision in shaping the future of optometric education and supporting the profession nationwide.

Dr. Woo earned his Doctor of Optometry degree from the University of California, Berkeley, followed by a master's in vision science and a residency in low vision rehabilitation at the University of Houston. He later completed an MBA with a concentration in medical and healthcare management at Rice University, leadership training that would shape his career in academic and organizational advancement.

Following his time as a faculty member at the University of Houston, Dr. Woo served as Dean of the Southern California College of Optometry at Marshall B. Ketchum University from 2013 to 2017. He was also President of the Texas Optometric Association.

While his resumé is impressive, it's the work Dr. Woo has accomplished since returning to Canada in 2017 — as Director of the University of Waterloo School of Optometry and Vision Science — that distinguishes him as a truly deserving award recipient. Over the past seven years, he has worked tirelessly to transform

Dr. Stanley Woo



the University of Waterloo into an institution prepared to meet the evolving demands of optometry.

He has been a driving force behind raising over \$29 million to expand the Waterloo Eye Institute, enhancing clinical training, enabling cutting-edge OCT imaging research, and advancing artificial intelligence tools created by optometrists for optometrists.

While injections have been part of the University of Waterloo optometry curriculum since 2011, the Alberta College of Optometrists helped the School introduce hands-on application of laser procedures by donating a YAG laser in 2020. By ensuring University of Waterloo graduates are ready to practice anywhere in North America, Dr. Woo has played a crucial role in supporting scope modernization efforts in Alberta. Not only has he been a key advocate for our province's progress, but he has played an instrumental role in building collaborative relationships across jurisdictions nationwide.

For this, and for his continued commitment to supporting optometrists beyond graduation, we are pleased to bestow Dr. Woo with the AAO Honourary Membership Award.



**Dr. Richard Cowles**

## Council Member **Award**

The Council Member Awards recognize individuals who have selflessly dedicated their time, expertise, and leadership as members of the AAO Council.

In 2024, Dr. Richard Cowles completed his term as Past President, marking 12 years of devoted service on the AAO Council. His tenure was defined by practical leadership, advocacy for diverse optometry practices, and a well-timed sense of humour that provided levity during even the most serious discussions. Dr. Cowles' comprehensive understanding of the profession stems from his extensive experience in various settings since graduating from Pacific University in 2003.

Dr. Cowles has dedicated his time to the AAO in various roles, including serving as Chair of the Low Vision Subcommittee. He began his presidency during the hybrid conference in 2020, one of the first optometry conferences in Canada to return to in-person meetings following the COVID-19 pandemic. He continued to guide the Council through the recovery phase until 2022. No matter the situation, Dr. Cowles consistently demonstrated enthusiasm and optimism for the future of the profession.

Colleagues highlight his commitment, noting that beneath his light-hearted demeanor lies a deep dedication to the field. Said one, "Richard has always been generous with his time, insights, and dedication, ensuring that optometry remained central in his thoughts and actions."

Thank you, Dr. Cowles, for your 12 years of service to the AAO.



# Council Member Award

Dr. Colin Hobson

In 2024, another dedicated Council member, Dr. Colin Hobson, concluded his term to focus on his increased responsibilities with the Eye Recommend Board. During his four years on the Council, he exhibited tremendous commitment and provided valuable insights, contributing openly and thoughtfully at meetings. He held multiple roles, including Chair of the Cosmetic Optometry Subcommittee, Chair of the Finance, Audit, and Risk Management Committee, and member of the Emerging Trends Committee for two years.

After graduating from the University of Waterloo in 2012, Dr. Hobson began his practice in Fort Saskatchewan. His passion for the profession led him to join the AAO Council in 2019, where he was known for gently encouraging fellow members to consider perspectives they might not have previously explored. The Council greatly benefited from his viewpoints and dedication to advancing the AAO's goals.

Thank you, Dr. Hobson, for your four years of service to the AAO.





**Dr. James Asuchak**

## President's Award

This year's President's Award is presented to two individuals whose dedication and service have made a lasting impact on optometry in Alberta: Dr. James Asuchak, recognized for 13 years of steadfast leadership within the AAO, and Dr. Kevin Hesterman, honoured posthumously for his enduring contributions to the advancement of the profession.

After receiving his optometry degree from the University of Waterloo in 1999, Dr. James Asuchak — known as Jim to his colleagues — established a clinic called The Optical Studio in Lethbridge, bringing him closer to his hometown of Fort Macleod. Shortly thereafter, he joined the AAO Council, serving from 2007 until 2020, when he concluded his term as Past President.

During his tenure, Dr. Asuchak drove impactful changes for the profession and our organization. In 2010, he advocated for the AAO to create the New Grad

Orientation program, inspired by his own experience transitioning from student to doctor. He understood the uncertainty many new graduates face regarding their expectations and available resources to enhance their practice. This program has successfully guided new grads since its inception, ensuring they and their practices thrive.

He was also a tireless national leader for the Think About Your Eyes campaign, a partnership among various provincial associations across Canada that leveraged industry funding to promote the importance of eye exams. Dr. Asuchak positioned Alberta at the forefront of this initiative during a time when optometry lacked a united national campaign. His relentless advocacy ensured Alberta's voice was prominent, yielding significant returns on our marketing efforts during those years. He was the glue that held the program together until its dissolution in 2020.

Dr. Asuchak's pivotal role in transitioning the AAO Council from an operational board to a full governance model set him apart as a deserving recipient of the President's Award. This shift allowed our Association to operate at a high level, enabling Council members to focus on strategic planning rather than day-to-day issues. Under this governance model, the board has become significantly more productive, with clearly defined responsibilities monitored regularly.

Empowering and transforming our board to operate at the level we benefit from today is a notable and unique achievement. For this, and for his 13 years of outstanding service to the AAO, we are pleased to honour Dr. Asuchak with the President's Award.

We are also honoured to posthumously recognize Dr. Kevin Hesterman, an optometrist who served patients for over 20 years at EyeCare Centre in Red Deer, where he was a partner. Originally from Regina, he graduated from the University of Waterloo in 2000 and chose to establish a home and career in Red Deer with his wife, Rhonda, and their children.

Dr. Hesterman was an exceptional president of the Red Deer Society of Optometrists before serving on the AAO Council from 2014 to 2020. During his tenure, he held various roles, including Chair of the Member Education and Conference Committee, member of the Political Action Committee, and Chair of the Finance, Audit, and Risk Management Committee, consistently sharing his expertise with new and junior Council members.

Additionally, he contributed to several negotiation committees, including those for social services, non-insured health benefits contracts, and government remuneration. In 2014, he played a critical role in the successful negotiations for OCT, photos, and B900 codes.

Beyond his professional accomplishments, colleagues admired Dr. Hesterman's willingness to volunteer and fully commit to every task he undertook. Even after being diagnosed with terminal glioblastoma and stepping back from active Council participation, he

remained a strong supporter of the AAO and the field, frequently reaching out to commend the Council for their work.

Dr. Hesterman made a profound impact on his family, friends, and the Red Deer Community. He is remembered for his infectious passion for life, which extended into his professional work.

As his wife, Rhonda, reflected while accepting this award on his behalf, Kevin would return home after the longest workday with a smile, eagerly sharing stories from his day. "Even after 20 years of practice, behind the slit lamp, he still found wonder in the intricate beauty of a patient's iris, often getting lost in a moment of awe before snapping back to the task at hand," she shared.

"If Kevin were here today, I believe his advice would be simple yet profound: view your career as a blessing — not just for yourselves, but for the patients you serve. Embrace the everyday joys, celebrate your triumphs, and remember that beauty can often be found in the daily grind."

A portrait of Dr. Kevin Hesterman, a man with short brown hair, wearing a dark suit jacket, a white shirt, and a red and white striped tie. He is smiling slightly and looking towards the camera. The portrait is set against a dark background and is framed by a light blue curved border.

**Dr. Kevin Hesterman**

## Speaker of the Year Award



**Dr. Salma Kiani**

We are excited to announce the inaugural Speaker of the Year Award, established to recognize exceptional public speaking efforts by an optometrist who has gone above and beyond in representing our profession across the province. This year, we proudly present the award to Dr. Salma Kiani, whose commitment, clarity, and impact have made her a prominent voice in our outreach initiatives.

Over the past two years, Dr. Kiani, based in Edmonton, has participated in numerous community, healthcare, and media events, significantly raising awareness about the importance of eye health among diverse audiences. Here's a closer look at her contributions and the reasons she is so deserving of this honour.

In 2023, Dr. Kiani spoke at various events, including at the Edmonton Matheson House Seniors Residence, the Edmonton North Primary Care Network, the City of Leduc's Safety and Health Week, the Edmonton Central Lions Seniors Association, and the University of Alberta's Optometry Academic Day for Family Medicine Residents. Her speaking engagements continued into 2024, featuring a presentation at the Alberta Health and Safety Conference at NAIT and an appearance on CTV Morning Live where she discussed infant eye exams.

Audiences have provided glowing feedback on Dr. Kiani's presentations. One attendee shared, "This was a very helpful and practical. I learned a lot and saw the retina during my physical exam for the first time!" Another said, "Great overview on eye health!"

Thank you, Dr. Kiani, for your dedication to advocating for our profession through inspiring and informative speaking events.

# On Being an **Award Winner**

Each year, AAO members are invited to nominate individuals who have demonstrated excellence in the field of optometry or have made meaningful contributions in support of the profession.

The Optician of the Year and Optometric Assistant of the Year awards recognize those who go above and beyond in their roles. These awards celebrate individuals who exhibit exceptional leadership, provide outstanding patient care, and are highly regarded by the teams they work with in clinic settings.

At the 2024 Awards Luncheon, the AAO was proud to present these awards to Joanne Jenner, Optician of the Year, and Jennifer Gano, Optometric Assistant of the Year.

*Congratulations to these two dedicated professionals for their remarkable contributions!*



# Optician of the Year Award

Every clinic has a heartbeat — the one person whose steady presence, tireless dedication, and quiet strength help everyone around them thrive. For 18 years, Joanne Jenner has been that individual at Viewpoint Eye Care in Canmore. Calm, cool, and endlessly committed, Joanne

has built not only a loyal patient base but also the unwavering respect of her colleagues.

She is always the first to step up, the last to leave, and never one to shy away from a challenge. For these reasons and more, we are proud to recognize Joanne as our 2024 Optician of the Year.

Many years ago, Joanne was inspired to become an optician after visiting a friend who worked in the field.

Intrigued by the profession, she inquired at Viewpoint Eye Care about how to break into the industry. Impressed with her determination, they interviewed her and ultimately offered her a part-time job while she attended school. “And then I never left!” she recalls.

Joanne genuinely loves her patients and looks forward to seeing her regular customers. “It’s nice to see patients grow up and progress over the years,” she says. The staff at her clinic have also become like family, and she has immense respect for how her colleagues care for patients. One of her favourite moments was with a two-year-old girl who initially resisted wearing glasses. Once the little girl realized she could see clearly with them on, she loved them so much that she refused to take them off, even for adjustments.

Joanne was both surprised and moved to learn she had won the AAO’s Optician of the Year Award. If she could offer advice to others in the field, it would be to be honest with patients about what looks good on them, “You want to ultimately let them make their own decision but be confident to give them your advice.”

Thank you, Joanne, for embodying the very best of what it means to serve with integrity, humility, and heart. Congratulations on your award!



**Joanne Jenner**

# Optometric Assistant of the Year Award

When Jennifer Gano learned she had won the Optometric Assistant of the Year, she was heading to her annual sisters' weekend — and rerouted the trip to Banff to celebrate. It was a fitting way to mark the moment for someone who has dedicated over two decades to treating both colleagues and patients like family, fostering deep and lasting relationships that have become the heart of the Sherwood Park Eye Centre (SPEC). "My sisters shared in the celebration," she said. "It was a wonderful day!"

Her colleagues recognize Jennifer for her unwavering dedication, hard work, and loyalty, all of which have played a crucial role in the success of their eye clinic. Beyond her strong work ethic and commitment to treating everyone with respect, her ability to build genuine connections with patients sets her apart. "From the very beginning, she has exhibited a maturity beyond her years, making everyone feel welcome and valued," said one nominating colleague. "I feel privileged to have worked with her and learn from her."

Jennifer's warm approach to patient care is rooted in the advice she received many years ago from an optometrist she still works with: "Slow down and take the time to really listen to the patient. Get to know them. Find out what they like to do and what their interests are," she recalled. "Fast is not always better."

Taking this advice to heart has helped Jennifer cultivate lasting relationships with patients who request her by name, not only for her knowledgeable optometric support but also to share personal updates and seek her advice. "They tell me stories about their families, grandchildren, and travels. It's an honour to be requested by them, and I enjoy hearing what's new in their lives," she said. "It's rare to have that kind of connection in a medical or retail setting."

For bringing consistency, compassion, and connection to SPEC and our profession, we congratulate Gano on receiving the Optometric Assistant of the Year Award. Thank you for all that you do!



**Jennifer Gano**

## A Legacy of Leadership in **Communications**

In this year's report, we are proud to recognize an individual who has played a pivotal role in shaping the AAO's communications and public presence: Janice Archbold. After nearly eight years as our Communications Manager, she retired in June 2024, leaving behind a remarkable legacy. Since joining the Association in 2016, she brought decades of experience, strategic insight, and unwavering dedication to her role, helping elevate the voice of optometry across Alberta and beyond.

With a background in event planning, public relations, and advertising campaigns, Jan enhanced every communication initiative at AAO, whether internal or external. From presentations and publications to impactful PR campaigns across various media, she consistently raised the bar and ensured we met or exceeded industry standards.

Under her guidance, our expanding communications team successfully connected and engaged with a variety of stakeholder groups that had previously been neglected by the optometry profession. Our outreach targeted not only allied healthcare professionals but also medical school students, senior organizations, multicultural groups, primary care networks, and health and safety organizations. Jan spearheaded numerous successful initiatives over the years.

Thank you, Jan, for all you have done for AAO and our members. We wish you the very best in your retirement.



**Janice Archbold**

# Continuing Education

In 2024, we sharpened our focus through continuing education opportunities designed to keep Alberta optometrists at the forefront of patient care. Drawing insights from the annual survey conducted for AAO members, the Continuing Education Committee organized engaging and informative events tailored to our members' evolving needs.

Our professional development opportunities were well-attended and received high ratings. In 2024, we hosted three webinars: one on Fabry disease, another discussing the future of artificial intelligence in optometry, and a presentation on imaging techniques and emerging therapies for geographic atrophy. We were also pleased to have GSK, a pharmaceutical and biotechnology company, present a webinar program on navigating adverse corneal events related to antibody-drug conjugates in oncology. As the number of cancer patients receiving targeted treatments increases, optometrists can expect more referrals from oncologists for managing ocular side effects. Therefore, educating optometrists on assessment and management strategies is crucial for providing optimal care to oncology patients.

In addition to virtual events aimed at helping our members deliver top-tier optometric care, our committee also organized virtual sessions focusing on achieving operational and financial excellence. For this purpose, we hosted a three-part professional banking webinar series, presented by TD Canada Trust, to enhance essential banking skills and financial strategy knowledge for optometrists at every career stage. Furthermore, our partner, Peninsula Canada, a leading global human resources (HR) firm, provided a series of webinars on various HR topics.





In 2024, our in-person gatherings brought Alberta's optometry community together to connect, collaborate, and stay current in a rapidly evolving field. We held our annual conference in Banff, themed "Reaching New Heights." The event featured a range of speakers and sessions designed to help Alberta's optometrists continue delivering world-class eye and vision care. For another consecutive year, the Optifair trade show during the conference was sold out, allowing AAO members to connect with numerous service providers. Overall, attendees rated the conference a 4.5 out of 5.

In early 2025, we also held our Spring Symposium in Calgary, which included lectures, workshops and demonstrations focused on providing solutions for visually impaired patients. Additionally, we hosted our inaugural Banff Vision Summit, bringing together members and colleagues from across North America for networking, learning, and enjoyment while exploring the stunning Rocky Mountains. These in-person events offered valuable opportunities to strengthen professional networks, exchange ideas, and engage in focused learning.



# Member Programs

For Dr. Travis Turgeon, the Eye See . . . Eye Learn™ (ESEL™) program was more than an introduction to pediatric care – it served as a platform for building lasting relationships with families and becoming a trusted part of his community from the very start of his career.

Dr. Turgeon first joined the program as an intern at Capital Vision Care in Morinville. After presenting to many classes in the area, he noticed that many children came in for eye exams afterward. Helping these children resolve their vision problems was gratifying, as was the opportunity to educate their parents on the importance of regular eye care. Making connections within the community proved invaluable. "I really find the ESEL™ program a perfect fit for a new graduate looking to build their practice," he says.

In addition to examining children, their siblings, and parents in his clinic, the program has allowed Dr. Turgeon to establish relationships with kindergarten teachers, who now visit him with their families for regular eye exams. Their growing awareness of the importance of eye exams has benefited the children in their classrooms. "The teachers have been instrumental in identifying visual struggles among their students and advising parents to schedule eye exams," he says.

One of Dr. Turgeon's notable success stories involved helping a young girl with autism who required a significant correction for astigmatism. After providing her with glasses for the first time – thanks to the ESEL™ program – her parents noticed a marked improvement in her behaviour and schoolwork. The entire family booked their eye exams soon after, and Dr. Turgeon continues to see them regularly. "Their daughter will be starting high school next fall. Time sure flies!"

Dr. Turgeon strongly advocates for recent graduates to join the ESEL™ program. "It's a fantastic way to build your practice, become part of the community, and reach many families who may not realize that there is Alberta Health coverage towards children's eye exams," he says. The best part? "You can help many children see clearly for the first time."



**Dr. Travis Turgeon**



The Alberta Association of Optometrists gratefully acknowledges funding support from the Government of Alberta.



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# Member Programs

In a place like Fort McMurray, where industrial work is common, optometrists like Dr. Chelsea Syverson see the value of Eyesafe™ firsthand. This initiative not only allows her to support patients who work in trades or industrial settings but also to educate patients who come to her through the program on their eye health and encourage them to consider personal eyewear for use outside of their jobs. "Joining Eyesafe™ just made sense," she says. "I want to care for my patients' vision both at home and in their workplaces."

Understanding that one frame does not fit all faces, Dr. Syverson values the program's flexibility, allowing employers and employees to select the eyewear that works best for them. By providing a wide range of eyewear options – whether for work or personal use – patients can

enjoy the convenience of shopping in one location. Says Dr. Syverson, "My patients are happy to have just one place to shop for all their eyewear needs."

Being part of the Eyesafe™ program has also brought unexpected yet positive business to Dr. Syverson's practice. As more patients recognize the specialized care that optometrists provide, they are increasingly turning to her office for services such as foreign-body removals and treatment for eye injuries, rather than visiting emergency rooms where doctors may lack the necessary training to handle eye issues.

Supporting clients in these moments aligns with Dr. Syverson's commitment to expanding her capabilities as an optometrist in a remote northern city, enabling her to provide more comprehensive care and reduce her patients' need to travel long distances for advanced treatment.

Given the benefits of Eyesafe™ for her practice and her patients, Dr. Syverson is a strong advocate for the program. She encourages optometrists and local organizations to connect with the Eyesafe™ team and join the program. With enhanced workplace eye safety and vision health at the forefront of Eyesafe's offerings, everyone benefits. "I appreciate our AAO council, executive staff, and other OD volunteers for their time in creating the programs we have now and those that will come."



# Government Relations

The ancient Greek philosopher Heraclitus famously said, "The only constant is change." That sentiment has never been more true than when advocating to government in 2024. We maintained a consistent presence with elected officials and departmental staff, even as significant changes took place around us.

However, what remained unchanged in 2024 was the effort made by the GRC members, the AAO Council and staff throughout the year.

One of our ongoing priorities was supporting the Alberta College of Optometrists (ACO) scope modernization request with Alberta Health, while also ensuring we engaged with officials to talk about our fees that have not changed in years.

The year began with GRC members reaching out to their MLAs to provide corrective information that refuted what an Alberta ophthalmological organization

had falsely spread about our scope expansion to government members and the bureaucracy.

Additionally, GRC members were able to reinforce with MLAs the strenuous oversight, safety and CE training optometrists obtain surrounding scope expansion.

Throughout the year, we also provided information to optometrists, by constituency, when there was an event in the riding they lived in where they could interact with their MLA to discuss the value of optometry and the good work done by the profession. AAO Council members also engaged with the Premier, Minister of Health, and other cabinet ministers advocating for the government to allow the scope expansion to take place.

While efforts were taking place at the political level, Council members and the AAO's CEO were engaged with Alberta Health departmental staff



discussing issues related to fees and items around scope expansion.

Quarterly news updates were provided to all government MLAs throughout the year keeping them abreast of optometry's activities in the community and across the province.

Additionally, we also sent out to MLAs the AAO's annual report and Holiday Greeting Cards (through GRC members) in December.

Our year-end Holiday Open House was extremely well attended with several MLAs from all parties coming out and engaging with AAO and ACO council members. It was a valuable opportunity to connect informally with MLAs and celebrate the accomplishments this past year.

By way of fee payments from the Government of Alberta to optometrists for insured services under the B650 and B900 codes, in the provincial government's 2024/2025 fiscal year, optometrists were paid \$131 million and saw approximately 1.165 million discrete



patients. The payments were up by 7.99% and number of discrete patients seen was up by 6.6%.

While all of this activity was taking place, Alberta Health took steps to restructure Alberta Health Services into Acute Care Alberta, Primary Care Alberta, Assisted Living Alberta, and Recovery Alberta. In addition

to the above, there were also a number of changes with staffing within the Department of Health. All of this to say, while advocating to government we had to be aware of the changes, adapt our messaging, and find those who needed to be educated about the value of optometry's services to Albertans.

The AAO is extremely proud of the efforts made by the GRC members across the province. Our ability to keep optometric issues in front of decision makers comes from our providing to MLAs and department staff factual, up-to-date information about vision health and optometry. We greatly appreciate the GRC members and individual ODs who took the time to contact or write to their MLA to help amplify our message.

# Communications

Building Awareness



Each year, the AAO runs an integrated public awareness campaign to educate Albertans about eye health. This year's campaign focused on increasing awareness of optometric services covered by Alberta Health, including exams for children under 19, seniors, and urgent or medical care appointments.

In 2024, we launched "Eyes Need Care Too," a campaign that highlights how easy it is to make eye care part of a regular healthy routine. It compares real-life challenges people face with how simple it is to book and attend an annual eye exam.

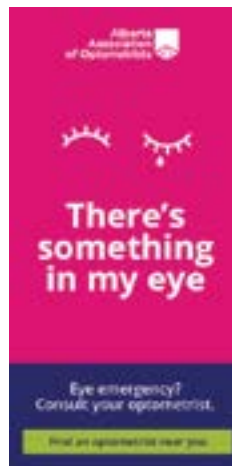
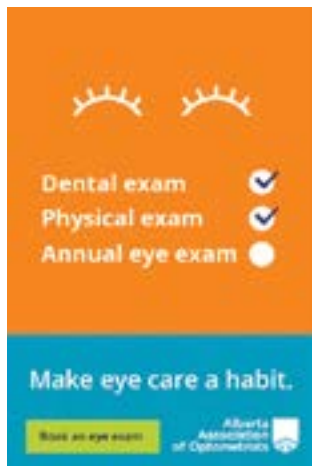
Our research showed that while most people value their eyesight above other senses, only a small number actually schedule their yearly eye exam. The campaign aims to close that gap by showing how much effort people put into caring for other senses and encouraging them to treat their eyes the same way.

The campaign uses digital, audio, print, and outdoor advertising to reach a wide audience across the province. "Eyes Need Care Too" works to remove

perceived barriers and make eye healthcare more accessible to all Albertans.

We continue to grow our social media presence and outreach. In 2024, we achieved over 60 million impressions on our social media content, resulting in more than 1 million meaningful engagements across our platforms. This year we began exploring influencer relations efforts to create a greater online impact and forge meaningful partnerships. We also launched our TikTok account to prioritize reaching a wider audience through video content, including a new series called "Eye Health FAQ" featuring Alberta's optometrists. This content is cross-promoted across all our social channels to boost engagement.

This year, alongside our wide-reaching public awareness initiatives, the AAO partnered with Windspeaker News and its radio stations to connect with Indigenous communities across the province, supporting eye health and vision awareness. Recognizing the higher rates of diabetes within these





communities, we developed a targeted campaign to address their specific eye care needs. Additionally, advertisements promoting general eye health and the importance of regular exams were featured in Alberta Native News.

In our inaugural year of offering webinars for allied health professionals, we laid the foundation for an expanding education program designed to strengthen

collaborative care. Over 100 participants attended sessions focused on key topics such as children's vision, diabetic eye health, seniors' vision, and general eye care. We look forward to expanding this initiative in the coming year.

We also participated in various educational events for stakeholders, including medical residents, health professionals in primary care networks (PCNs), and



seniors' serving professionals. At the University of Alberta, the AAO hosted a workshop for family medicine residents to engage with and learn from our optometrists. A special thanks to Dr. Toor, Dr. Kiani, Dr. Hong, and Dr. Chai for representing the AAO at this event. Although this informational workshop was optional for residents, there is a mandatory optometry session for students in 2025. This comprehensive primer on primary optometric care will include background knowledge and practical experiential workshops, ensuring that all family medicine residents receive this critical training.

In 2024, we visited 10 seniors' centres and multicultural groups, and participated in 11 trade

shows, including events with the Rural Health Professions Action Plan (RhPAP), Alberta Occupational Health Nurses Association, Alberta Primary Care Nurses Association, Lamont County, the City of Calgary, and the ENMAX Rodeo and Safety Expo, among others. Thank you to the many volunteers who made this extensive communications outreach possible.

Together, these efforts reflect our commitment to making eye health a visible, valued, and integrated part of everyday healthcare in Alberta. As we build on this momentum in 2025, we remain focused on expanding our reach, deepening partnerships, and ensuring every Albertan understands the essential role of optometrists in their health journey.



# Find an Optometrist

The **Find an Optometrist** feature on the AAO website continues to be a valuable tool for Albertans who don't have a regular optometrist. It allows individuals in need of eye care to easily locate member optometrists by entering their postal code. The tool also includes filters to search for optometrists who participate in the Eye See . . . Eye Learn™ and Eyesafe™ programs. In addition, agencies and medical practitioners can use the feature to help support patient care.



Dr. Nadia Clark

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Dr. Minesh Kutlerywala  
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Dr. Emily Leung	Dr. Brian Mah	Dr. Craig McQueen	Dr. Shaelen Morrison
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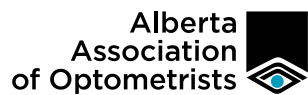
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