

Government Relations Committee Terms of Reference

Mandate

The Government Relations Committee (GRC) is an advisory committee of the Alberta Association of Optometrists (AAO). Its purpose is to support and strengthen AAO's advocacy with government, with a primary focus on the Government of Alberta, by enabling structured, credible, and strategically aligned engagement by Doctors of Optometry (ODs).

The Committee's mandate is to:

- Support AAO's grassroots advocacy efforts and relationships with elected officials on a non-partisan basis, during and between election cycles;
- Enable the structured involvement of ODs in advocacy through issue-based engagement, working groups, and targeted mobilization, consistent with Council-approved priorities;
- Contribute to clear, evidence-based, and system-relevant advocacy approaches that support AAO's strategic objectives;
- Help position ODs and the AAO as trusted solutions providers within Alberta's health care system and, where appropriate, beyond.

Advocacy Scope

The Committee's work is primarily focused on provincial government advocacy, including engagement with ministries, Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs), and relevant government agencies.

Where appropriate and with directions from the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), the Committee may:

- Support advocacy related to federal or municipal issues that directly affect optometry in Alberta;
- Coordinate with the Alberta College of Optometrists (ACO) on matters of mutual interest, subject to AAO Council approval and clear role definition.

Authority

The GRC operates in an advisory capacity only.

The Committee does not:

- Set AAO policy positions;
- Authorize advocacy activity;
- Speak publicly on behalf of AAO unless specifically authorized;
- Represent AAO independently in meetings with government, elected officials, or external stakeholders.

The Committee reports to the CEO, who serves as Chair of both the Steering Group and the full Committee.

All advocacy activity undertaken by the Committee or its members must be aligned with AAO's approved strategic priorities, Council direction, and messaging approved by the CEO or designate.

Structure

To balance strategic focus, grassroots engagement, and operational feasibility, the GRC is structured as follows:

Steering Group

A smaller Steering Group may be drawn from the full Committee membership.

The Steering Group may:

- Provide advice on advocacy approaches, sequencing, and priority files;
- Advise on OD engagement strategies for specific advocacy initiatives;
- Support continuity and institutional memory over time;
- Provide strategic advice to the CEO and, through the CEO, to AAO Council on advocacy priorities, approaches, and risks;
- Assist in identifying, monitoring, and analyzing emerging, urgent, and longer-term public policy issues that may impact optometry in Alberta;
- Support preparation for full Committee meetings, member engagement activities, and issue-specific advocacy efforts;
- Review the Committee's Terms of Reference and recommend changes to the CEO, or designate, every two years.

Full Committee and OD Engagement

The broader Committee membership supports grassroots and issue-specific advocacy activities.

The full Committee may be engaged to:

- Participate in grassroots advocacy activities, including meetings with MLAs, attendance at local events, constituency-based outreach, and practice tours;
- Provide structured input based on relevant expertise, geographic location, practice experience, or lived experience;
- Help identify local opportunities, stakeholder relationships, emerging issues, or regional concerns that may inform AAO's advocacy work;
- Support member-driven amplification of AAO-approved advocacy messages and calls to action.

Participation may be time-limited and purpose-specific depending on the advocacy issue or initiative.

AAO Support

The Association will support the Committee by:

- Coordinating Committee activities and meeting logistics;
- Supporting meeting preparation, agendas, minutes, and follow-up actions;
- Supporting the development of materials such as key messages, briefing notes, draft letters, presentation materials, and outreach resources;
- Engaging a government relations firm, where appropriate, to inform strategic development of Committee work and advocacy deliverables;
- Engaging strategic communications professionals, where appropriate, to support social media strategies, public-facing materials, and communication products;
- Providing direction to ensure Committee activities remain aligned with AAO's strategic priorities, Council direction, and approved messaging.

Membership

Committee members must be AAO members in good standing. Membership should reflect geographic representation across Alberta where possible.

Selection will also consider:

- Interest and capacity to engage in advocacy;
- Relevant practice experience, policy insight, or community connection;
- Ability to contribute constructively within a disciplined, Association-led advocacy approach;
- Willingness to support AAO-approved messaging and advocacy priorities;
- Ability to participate in meetings, outreach activities, or issue-specific working groups as required.

Members are appointed by the CEO, in consultation with Council, for terms determined by AAO policy.

Meetings

The Committee will meet at a frequency determined by the CEO based on advocacy priorities, government timelines, and operational need.

Meetings may be held virtually, in person, or by hybrid format.

The Steering Group may meet more frequently than the full Committee to support planning, issue monitoring, and time-sensitive advocacy work.

Additional meetings, working groups, or task-specific discussions may be convened as required.

Review

These Terms of Reference will be reviewed every two years, or sooner if required, to ensure the Committee continues to support AAO's advocacy priorities, governance expectations, and strategic direction.