



Alberta
Association
of Optometrists



Annual Report **2024**

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



Innovative



Inclusive



Professional



Visionary

ON THE COVER: Dr. Andrew Krein. See the New Grad article on page 12. Dr. Krein has just published a chapter on lesion removal in the textbook "The Ophthalmic Office Procedures Handbook" as he is fully trained in this area. He is also working with the Alberta College of Optometrists on the expanded scope request submitted to government, which would more fully allow optometrists to practice within their profession.

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President's Message

Change comes quickly in our industry. As our profession evolves and technologies improve, it is more important than ever to ensure the public, our optometry colleagues, and our partners in healthcare provision understand the critical role Optometrists play in the daily lives of our patients.

Our government relations committee (GRC) was busy this year following the provincial election in May 2023. Thank you to our GRC members who worked tirelessly to reach out to their local candidates before the election, and again in the months since. The relationships you've built with your MLAs on a local level have an immense impact on our support of the ACO's scope expansion request. We continue to lean on you in the months to come to maintain your trusted relationships as Alberta's primary eye care providers.

Overall, we had over 130 active committee members this past year. Thank you to those who provided their expertise, hard work, and time away from work and families to help the AAO continue to be a leader in Canada. We had members speak to various audiences on behalf of the AAO promoting eye health, vision, and

the various services offered by Optometrists. I had the privilege of making several presentations to various health care providers in partnership with Alberta Health's strategic clinical networks to ensure other healthcare providers understand the importance of an annual dilated exam for patients with diabetes. My role also took me to British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Ontario to collaborate with other Optometrists and associations to encourage growth in a variety of areas – scope expansion, artificial intelligence, and telehealth, to name a few.

The AAO couldn't do what we do without your support. As we navigate each new wave of change, the strength of our membership allows us to continue working to advance our profession. I am so proud of the hard work of our board of directors, CEO, and AAO staff over the last year. I have thoroughly enjoyed my time representing this beautiful province, full of amazing innovators and clinicians. Thank you for this opportunity, I can't wait to see what is in store for our profession over the coming years.

Dr. Andrea Lasby, AAO President

*I can't change the
direction of the wind,
but I can adjust my
sails to always reach
my destination.*
- Jimmy Dean



2023/2024 AAO Council

As we continue to advance the mission of the AAO and support the outstanding work of Alberta's optometrists, strategic planning is at the top of the list of considerations for Council. The path forward is created by our Council and reviewed on a regular basis to ensure there continues to be an alignment with current opportunities and trends.

The hard work contributed over the past year has again served the members well and these visionary efforts will ensure this work continues in a positive direction. Our Council is elected by the membership with the expectation that its governance will see the AAO through both the professional and business cycles of operation, and the forward-thinking required to guide the association.

Thank you to everyone on Council for their service and expertise in representing the membership and the AAO, and ensuring the association continues to be a strong, vibrant organization.



Dr. Andrea Lasby

President



Dr. Richard Cowles

Past President



Dr. Sophia Leung

President Elect



Dr. Monica Bell

Director



Dr. Cristy Franco

Director



Dr. Pamela Giles

Director



Dr. Colin Hobson

Director



Dr. Darren Wagner

Director



Dr. Troy Brady

CAO Representative

2023 AAO

Committees

The AAO is fortunate to have so many members active on its committees. Each year countless hours are provided by these members to ensure the various areas supporting the AAO's forward trajectory are guided by informed voices. With more than 130 members on committees, a broad and varied range of skill sets are at the foundation of the successful work being accomplished. There were many more members who spoke at medical, community, and trade events to advance the awareness of what optometrists can do to support the eye health of Albertans.

This very important work could not be accomplished without the support of these individuals. Thank you to everyone who contributed their time and knowledge in 2023.



Policy Committees

Artificial Intelligence and Teleoptometry Subcommittee

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

Board Development and Nominations Committee

Dr. Richard Cowles, Chair
Dr. Troy Brady
Dr. Colin Hobson
Dr. Andrea Lasby

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. Sophia Leung, Chair
Dr. Cristy Franco
Dr. Colin Hobson
Dr. Andrea Lasby

Finance, Audit, & Risk Management Committee

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

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Policy Committees

continued

Local Optometric Societies Committee

Dr. Pamela Giles, Chair

Dr. Monica Bell - Calgary Society of Optometrists

Dr. Tatiana Cook - Lethbridge Society of
Optometrists

Dr. Jade McLachlin - Edmonton Society of
Optometrists

Dr. Jodi Sehn - Medicine Hat Optometric Society

Dr. Heather Van Haren - Central Alberta Optometric
Society

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. Clark Hyde

Dr. Dylan Johnston

Dr. Sheila Morrison

Dr. Rima Sabbah

Editorial Board Committee

Ms. Jan Archbold, Chair

Dr. Susan Joe

Dr. T.H. Poon

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. Riaz Ahmed
Dr. Jonathan Akle
Dr. Mohammad Al-Bekai
Dr. Monzer Al-Bekai
Dr. Trent Allred
Dr. Ziad Al-Qishawi
Dr. Guy Ambrosio
Dr. Dave Anderson
Dr. Jennifer Ash
Dr. Jim Asuchak
Dr. Jaswinder Bains
Dr. Sallie Barclay
Dr. Ben Barrus
Dr. Monica Bell
Dr. Troy Brady
Dr. Kim Bugera
Dr. Aysha Chaudhry
Dr. Theresa Checkley
Dr. Laura Chisholm
Dr. Nadia Clark
Dr. Mark Cloarec
Dr. Heather Cowie
Dr. Richard Cowles
Dr. Matthew Craig

Dr. Yen Dang
Dr. George Day
Dr. Madhu Deka
Dr. Hazel Delong
Dr. Nicole Deschamps
Dr. Kirandeep Dhaliwal
Dr. Blake Dornstauder
Dr. Benjamin Doz
Dr. Laura Dwernichuk
Dr. Amy Forrest
Dr. Cristy Franco
Dr. Pamela Giles
Dr. Ravneet Grewal
Dr. Jackie Hagen
Dr. Jamie-Lee Halabi
Dr. Chrissy Hines
Dr. Colin Hobson
Dr. Michael Hopper
Dr. Clark Hyde
Dr. Sumeet Jeerh
Dr. Aleem Jiwa
Dr. Menka Johl
Dr. Shane Keddie
Dr. Tracy Kitiz
Dr. Michael Kreuzer
Dr. Hudson Kroeker

Dr. Jennifer Langfield
Dr. Cory Larson
Dr. Andrea Lasby
Dr. Paul Lathrop
Dr. Sophia Leung
Dr. Allan MacKenzie
Dr. Noufal Mais
Dr. Jeff Mann
Dr. Jade McLachlin
Dr. Craig McQueen
Dr. Craig Meckelborg
Dr. Harpreet Minhas
Dr. Diana Monea
Dr. Brenda Mummery
Dr. Eve Niedergesaess
Dr. Nimrit Nijjar
Dr. Nobe Nijjar
Dr. Justin Norris
Dr. Sherri Norris
Dr. Jon Pack
Dr. Holly Parker
Dr. Jason Pearce
Dr. Shannon Pennifold
Dr. Darren Phillips
Dr. Mark Pitcher
Dr. Jimmy Prince

Dr. Christine Russo
Dr. Stan Russo
Dr. Brent Saik
Dr. Jean Shen
Dr. Brittany Shewchuk
Dr. Tanya Sitter
Dr. Timothy Skwarok
Dr. Sara Starko
Dr. Jared Steblin
Dr. Farrah Sunderji
Dr. Pam Syrota
Dr. Chelsea Syverson
Dr. Shelly Taneja
Dr. Julie Theng
Dr. Raman Thind-Gill
Dr. James Thompson
Dr. Jay Torbeih
Dr. Kevin Tsen
Dr. Mona Ubhi
Dr. Jade Ulmer
Dr. Christopher Vu
Dr. Darren Wagner
Dr. Tom Wilk
Dr. Mark Wood
Dr. Michael Yu
Dr. Ward ZoBell

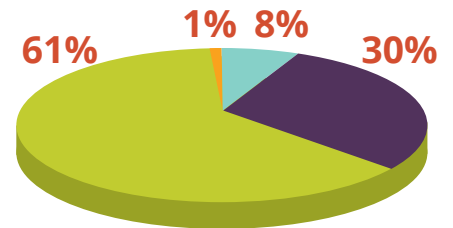
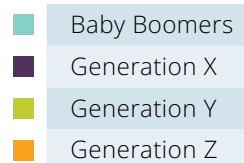
A photograph of a diverse group of professionals sitting at a long table in a bright, modern office setting. In the foreground, an older man with a white beard and a woman with dark curly hair are looking towards the right. The woman is smiling. Behind them, a blonde woman and a man with glasses are also looking in the same direction. They are all dressed in business attire. Papers and a pen are visible on the table.

The Membership



With 879 members, the AAO represents 94% of all optometrists in the province. There is strength in numbers, and the AAO is 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.

Membership by Generation



★ Optometrist



Student to New Graduate



Dr. Andrew Krein

Nine-year-old Andrew Krein was playing catch with his dad, Dr. Steven Krein, in the backyard when a call came to the house from a Devon resident saying he had a piece of metal in his eye and could Dr. Krein meet him at the clinic to remove it. He said he was on his way but had his son with him so he would also be coming to the clinic.

That first experience of seeing his dad help someone in distress sealed Andrew's career choice. From that day his decision to become an optometrist has never wavered. While Andrew chose to follow both of his parents, Dr. Shelley Lindberg-Krein is also an optometrist, his brother chose an entirely different career. "My parents never pushed me to become an optometrist. In fact, they pushed back. They wanted me to be sure that becoming an optometrist was what I wanted to do and I wasn't being influenced by their career choice,"

Fast Fact

In 2023, there were 83 New Grads in their first, second, or third year of membership.

said Andrew. So, Andrew joined his third-generation family practice and began supporting the residents of Devon and the surrounding rural areas.

"I am very honoured and humbled to be in this position," says Andrew. "I have had my parents to use as resources, but also other optometrists within the AAO. This profession is very community minded. They want you to succeed." When attending meetings and conferences, Andrew has always felt welcomed by the other members, "It's a community atmosphere. Like-minded people who are excited to hear from other like-minded people and learn more about what's happening in the eyecare profession in Alberta. I've also found that same communal attitude when dealing with anyone from the AAO."

Andrew's advice for optometrists just starting out is to never be afraid to not know. "There are always people and resources to guide you through questions. We're in a learning profession, so be prepared to keep learning." He also suggests new grads go to meetings and conferences, "If you can, get involved. It will help you to understand behind the scenes and what makes our profession great." Some sage advice that is certain to take Andrew to the next level in optometric practice.



Student Members

The student membership offers future optometrists an opportunity to utilize the resources available to all members through the AAO. It also opens an avenue for students to connect with practicing optometrists and learn more about practicing in the province. Thirty-six students are members of the AAO.

25
years

2023 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. Kimberley Crowe



Dr. Annie Drouin



Dr. David Thomas



Dr. Murray Oshanyk



Dr. Riaz Ahmed



Dr. Leanne Kile



Dr. Scott Karaim



Dr. Sandra Oshanyk

**Members that received awards but were unable to attend the awards presentation:
Dr. Christina Bayer, Dr. George Fung, Dr. Jason Alexander, Dr. Marae Blume,
Dr. Nguyen Quan, Dr. Samuel Boucher, Dr. Sophie Jobin, and Dr. Tony Mann.**

50
years

2023 Practice Award
Recipients

Dr. Larry Gies



On Being an Award Winner

Each year members are encouraged to nominate individuals who have excelled in the realm of optometry or who have supported the profession.

The Optician of the Year and Optometric Assistant of the Year awards distinguish individuals who deserve recognition for their outstanding endeavors. These awards honour individuals who go above and beyond in fulfilling their areas of responsibility, show outstanding leadership, and provide outstanding patient care. The individuals who receive these awards are highly valued by the team working in their clinics.

At the 2023 Awards Luncheon, the AAO was pleased to present these awards to Sherry Kells, Optometric Assistant of the Year and to Maggie Paquette, Optician of the Year award.

Congratulations to these two dedicated professionals!



Optician of the Year Award

For Maggie Paquette, the day was going to be about celebrating her birthday, but what unfolded was so much more. "I didn't know I was nominated for the award, but it was a great birthday gift." The team where Maggie works waited until her birthday to make the announcement and celebrate her special day, the award, and her more than 19 years of commitment to the profession.

How Maggie ventured into the profession was a result of her younger sister asking her to help at the clinic where she was working. The hours would be part-time and came with a flexible work schedule, plus training was offered. What Maggie thought was a brief stop turned into a career. "It completely changed the trajectory of my career. I thoroughly enjoyed the work and still do," said Maggie. In those first years, Maggie had the support of one of the optometrists who was approaching retirement. He helped Maggie to appreciate that the best working environment was one that encouraged team members to learn and grow, and that this would translate into positive patient experiences.

According to the nomination submission, Maggie still takes this learned philosophy to heart, "It is not just these qualities that make her stand out, it is her unwavering dedication to excellence for the patients and from the staff that truly sets her apart."

While Maggie acknowledges that the technical component is critical and values formal profession related education, human caring and compassion are just as important.

"You may have someone come in who is having a bad day and by being empathetic and helping, you can turn it into a great experience for the patient."

Teamwork, approaching each patient as an individual, and advancing your education are all components that she values.

Maggie is looking forward to continuing her formal education, to the contribution she can make to her team, and in caring for patients now and in the future.



Maggie Paquette

Optometric Assistant of the Year Award

Sherry Kells was thrilled to be invited to the Awards Luncheon at the 2023 AAO conference. She was told it was a celebration for the entire clinic team, so you can well imagine her surprise when her name was announced as the winner of the Optometric Assistant Award.

The nomination made it clear that Sherry is a valued member of the team, who comes to work ready to support clinic staff and provide outstanding patient service. And, for the past 20 years, she has come to work every day with a smile and is thought of as smart, organized, reliable, and caring. Sherry feels it's a result of the great support she has received and that she was set up for success from the start of her employment.

"I had the support of doctors like Dr. Ken Gellatly*, Dr. Paul Dame, and Dr. Sherri Norris in those first years, which helped open the door to a management position," says Sherry. She started as a pre-tester and found that her passion for the profession continued to grow. When a position in management became available, she applied and began a whole new career. "The retail concept wasn't foreign to me, but properly managing a clinic was new. Dr. Gellatly brought in a consultant to ensure we were set up to succeed." From that initial training, Sherry developed her skills in all areas of the business.

While Sherry has flourished on the business side, it's the interactions with patients that have made for a fulfilling career. "There are people who have been coming to the clinic for many years and ask for me," says Sherry. "My job allows me to maintain the people side."

Sherry has chosen a helping profession and recommends that anyone looking to build a career as an Optometric Assistant should "go for it." She adds, "There are so many connections made between management, staff, and patients. It's a very rewarding profession."



Sherry Kells

**Dr. Ken Gellatly was a valued member of the AAO, who died in tragic plane crash in 2016. He was posthumously awarded an AAO Service Award in 2017 for his outstanding service to the profession. Dr. Dame and Dr. Norris continue to be active members of the AAO.*

Continuing Education

The Continuing Education committee was hard at work in 2023 organizing learning opportunities based on what members said was important to them in the annual survey. The year kicked off with the Spring Symposium, which was held in Calgary and in Edmonton. The day was packed with lectures and hands-on activities directed at learning gonioscopy techniques, the implementation of gonioscopy in current practice in the diagnosis and management of glaucoma, and the utilization of gonioscopy in advanced scope procedures. This highly rated session also provided insight for the committee on the value members place on small group hands-on activities. More of these types of sessions are planned for the future.

A series of human resources webinars were held which

were clearly valued by members. Whether a clinic owner or an optometrist looking for best practices, the session content was ranked high amongst participants. The sessions included: Diversity & Inclusion, Managing Mental Health, Motivation at Work, Respect in the Workplace, and Effective Communications Techniques.

As the profession begins to look at the impacts of artificial intelligence, the AAO provided a member webinar by international speaker, Dr. Roya Attar, *Artificial Intelligence: Friend or Foe?* was well attended and also highly rated. Members clearly valued Dr. Attar's level of expertise.

The annual conference lived up to its theme of "Leading the Way in Eye Care." The Continuing Education Committee packed



the schedule with speakers offering a cross section of offerings to ensure Alberta's optometrists are able to live the mission of the AAO. The highest rated attribute of the sessions was learning new approaches and strategies on the topics discussed, and the ability to transfer that knowledge into practice.

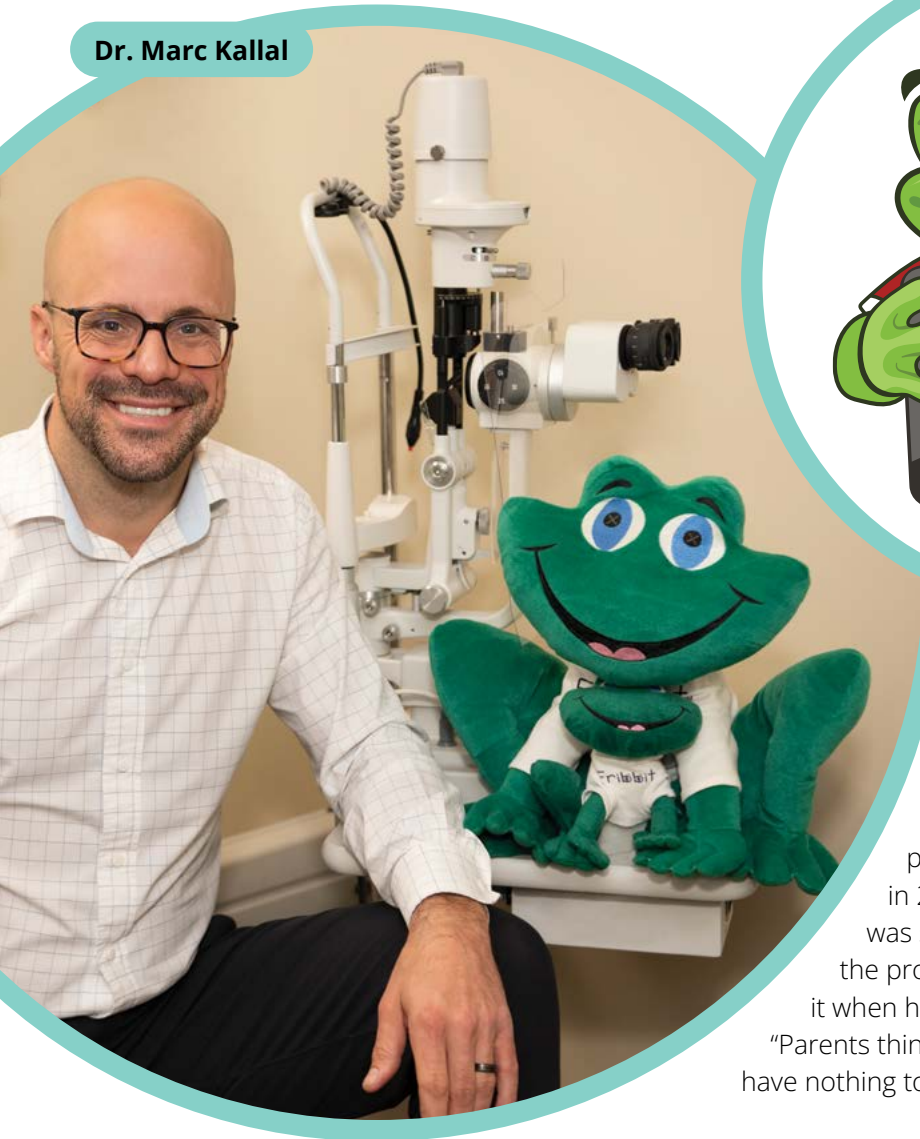
Optifair, the trade show held during conference, was again sold out and offered a cross-section of service providers for delegates to meet with and learn about the latest industry developments. This showcase is well attended by members and many connections are made that reach beyond the conference dates.

Conference also brings the opportunity for members to catch up with colleagues and an opportunity to relax and recharge for the next day's schedule of learning sessions. Overall, it was a very busy three days and the highly valued survey responses by members are forming the platform for the 2024 offerings.



Member Programs

Dr. Marc Kallal



Out of university, into practice, and right on to signing up and endorsing the Eye See . . . Eye Learn™ program. Dr. Marc Kallal was an advocate of the program from the start of his practice in 2013 at a Ponoka clinic. In fact, he was so convinced of the importance of the program that he continued providing it when he opened his Tofield clinic in 2017. "Parents think their child's vision is fine, but kids have nothing to compare it to. They don't know what

Many AAO members head into classrooms to talk about the importance of eye health and their vision. Pictured: Dr. Lauren Zaifdeen and Fribbit at Lois Hole Elementary in St. Albert.

they should be able to see,” says Dr. Kallal. It’s just one of the reasons he promotes the program at every opportunity. Dr. Kallal also makes sure parents in the community understand the Eye See . . . Eye Learn™ program is barrier free as any kindergarten student can access an eye exam and, if needed, receive eyeglasses free of charge.

“If a child comes in to access the program, I use the opportunity to educate the whole family about eye health and vision care. I also talk about urgent care and how we can help,” says Dr. Kallal. Years of practice has repeatedly shown him that parents often think an eye exam is about vision rather than eye health and determining what may be causing the vision problem. He also helps parents understand how quickly young eyes can change and the impact poor vision can have on a child’s quality of life and their educational experience. “If we don’t find a problem, I explain to parents that eye exams are a type of preventative medicine and a reassurance that everything is as it should be.” Dr. Kallal has had many occasions when he does find something that needs attention and the parents are shocked they didn’t realize there was an issue. “I had a young patient and his parents stop by recently to tell me how much better he was doing in school and his headaches were gone. They had never

thought about the importance of eye exams before.” These situations lead to the whole family making eye health a priority.

Each fall, the AAO distributes more than 57,000 kindergarten student packages to every school in Alberta for children to take home. Teachers are also provided an information package to help them identify vision issues in the classroom and what they can do to help parents and children. This is complemented by an Alberta wide targeted advertising campaign to reinforce the program and the key reasons for eye exams. Every library in the province also receives a poster and information on the program.

“This is a great program,” says Dr. Kallal. “It’s a great way to build a relationship with children at an early age to help them understand there is no reason to be afraid of an eye exam. If they start caring for their eyes as children, it can become a life-long habit.” Children, adults, seniors, in fact every population group benefits from taking care of their eye health and vision. The Eye See . . . Eye Learn™ program is an excellent way to begin.



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



Eyewear Partners:



ONESIGHT
EssilorLuxottica Foundation



Modern Optical
C A N A D A



Member Programs



**Maureen Wade – Eyesafe™
Program Representative**

In 2023, the Eyesafe™ team once again took to the road to encourage major employers in the province to look to the program

for their prescription safety eyewear needs. It was a beneficial approach as the number of companies signing on to the program grew more than 27 percent.

The eight key trade shows attended last year presented an opportunity to personally tell more than 1,000 human resource and occupational health/safety officer delegates about the benefits of prescription safety eyewear and the important role our member clinics play in ensuring Alberta's workers have the best possible eye protection. Member optometrists often spoke at the associated information sessions, reinforcing eye health and eye exams as part of the importance of eye care. After the trade shows, the meetings continued and the efforts of the Eyesafe™ team moved to specific discussions about the benefits the program offers in areas such as managing compliance, access to a professional vision care network, quality products, and the more than 50 years of eye safety excellence in Alberta our members have offered.

A client survey showed every area of the Eyesafe™ program receiving high marks. From ease of ordering to client services to meeting their company's

prescription safety eyewear needs, the program continues to be a highly valued asset to employers concerned about the well-being of their employees and protecting their vision.

According to the Canadian National Institute of the Blind, 90 percent of eye injuries in Canada are preventable, and our members, along with the Eyesafe™ program can provide the best in preventive care.

Eyesafe™ also offers the Advantage program. As many of AAO's members offer prescription safety eyewear to individuals, this program offers members access to the ordering process and compliance management of the employer program. Ending eye injuries is the goal and this area of Eyesafe™ can help continue to move the needle in ending needless eye injury and vision loss.

To complement the direct program sales efforts, the AAO ran an advertising strategy that targeted those specifically looking for Eyesafe™ and those searching generally for prescription safety eyewear support. These campaigns direct Albertans to the Eyesafe™ website and search tool for the more than 350 clinics that offer the program. Regardless of where an individual is located, professional care through Eyesafe™ and Advantage will be in the vicinity.

Between Eyesafe™, Advantage, and the 2024 addition of a sports safety eyewear program, the members of AAO are taking significant steps to protect Albertans and help ensure they can maintain life-long quality vision and eye health.

Government Relations

We Continue to Advocate and Educate

2023 was a year where the Association and its members continuously worked to educate elected and non-elected government officials about what our profession could do to assist Albertans.

Prior to the call of the election in April, the Association made every attempt to talk with MLAs from the UCP and NDP, other party officials, and political staff to ensure optometry did not get lost in the platforms or thoughts of the respective campaigns.

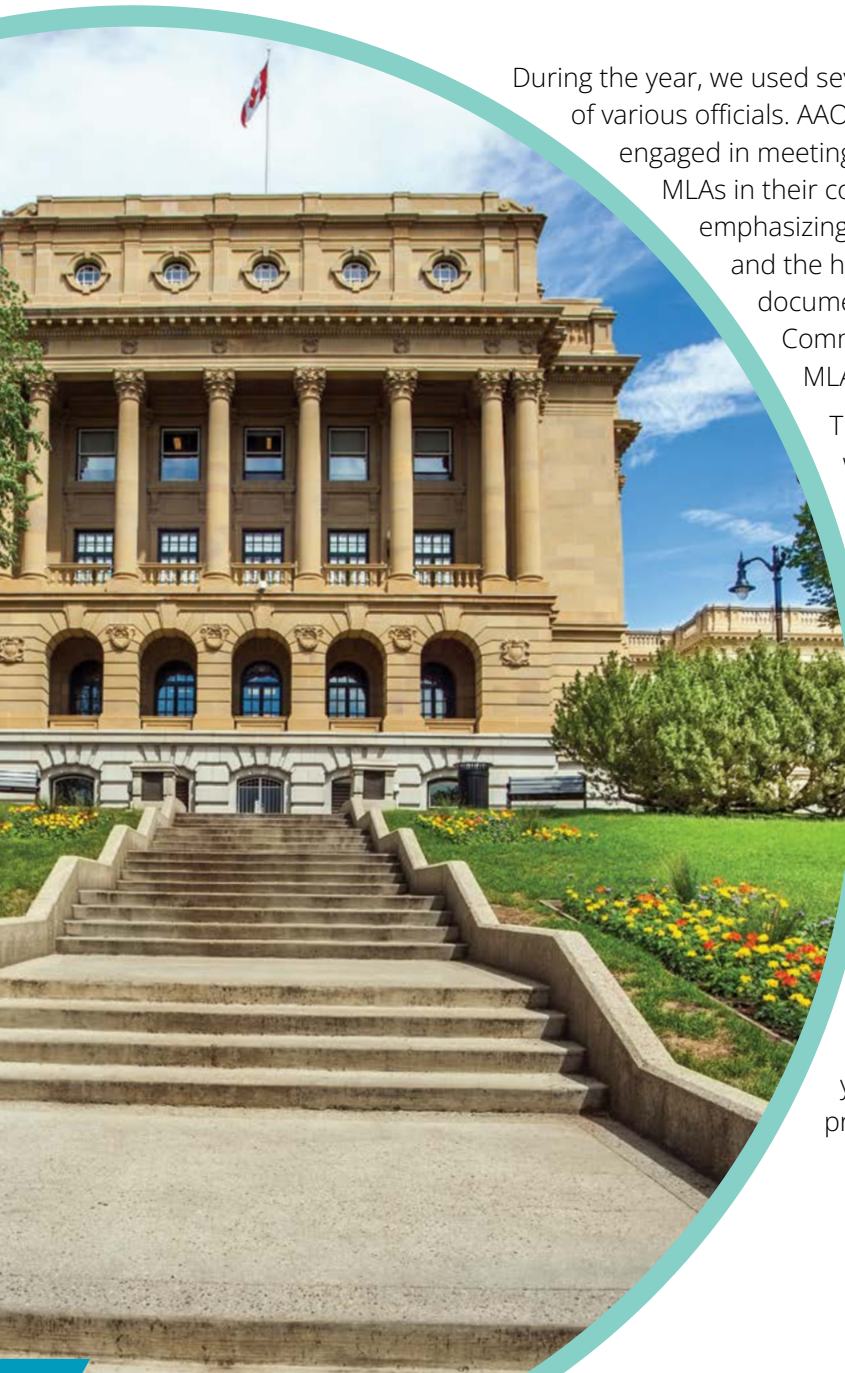
During the election, members of the Government Relations Committee visited various UCP and NDP candidates to talk with them about our profession and the Alberta College of Optometry's scope expansion request that had been lingering on the Minister of Health's desk.

On May 29, 2023, the UCP was returned to power with a reduced majority. Once the new minister was named (Adriana LaGrange in June) and their Mandate Letter was released (July) we knew who we were dealing with and what goals the minister was charged to advance.

In that interim period, we repopulated the Government Relations Committee - now 99 members strong - with coverage of 92% of the ridings. We created new documents that the Government Relations Committee members could leave with UCP MLAs when they visited them. These updated documents detailed the benefits of the College's Scope Expansion Proposal that had been filed years earlier.

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During the year, we used several different tactics to keep optometry in front of various officials. AAO Council members and staff were routinely engaged in meeting with officials at political party functions, meeting MLAs in their constituency offices, and sending them information emphasizing the benefits of scope expansion for Albertans and the health care system as a whole. These same documents were provided to Government Relations Committee members to talk with their respective MLAs, too.

The year ended with our Holiday Open House where 13 MLAs from both the UCP and NDP were in attendance and mingled with AAO and Alberta College of Optometrists council members, as well as those member ODs who were in attendance with our other guests.

Government Relations Committee members, AAO Council, and AAO staff continued to educate the government officials throughout the year. We had to. Those opposed to the College's scope expansion were busy lobbying the government against us spreading stories that we had to continually counter with fact-based information.

Never have such a committed group of ODs worked so hard to advance this profession for the benefit of Albertans. As always, a big thank you goes out to all who helped in 2023. The profession is stronger because of your efforts.

Communications

Building Awareness

For a second year, our communications campaign focused on increasing Albertans' awareness of optometric services with Alberta Health coverage, including infant, child, and senior exams, and urgent and medical care appointments. The strategy tapped into multiple targeted channels including paid search, referral, social media, billboards, print, radio, and television.

Alberta Health data shows that we are making great strides! However, our research tells us we still have lots of room to build awareness. For infants and children, we learned that once a parent is aware of the eye exam recommendations and the available coverage, their intent to book an exam moves from 34% to 89%. The awareness campaigns also encouraged seniors to move their eye health care to the top of the list and the number of Albertans who know their optometrist can provide urgent care continues to grow. This urgent care awareness is critical to alleviating some of the strain on hospital emergency care.

So many of these cases can be handled quickly and efficiently by optometrists.

Building awareness and reinforcing the important role optometrists play in helping Albertans care for their eye health is an ongoing process. It's building on efforts to help create new habits of annual and life-long eye care. To do this, the advertising campaign takes a multi-pronged approach.

In addition to the many broad public awareness efforts, the AAO also worked with Windspeaker News through its radio stations in order to reach the Indigenous communities throughout the province and help support eye health care and vision awareness.

University of Alberta Optometry Academic Day, member instructors and volunteers.

Front: Dr. Anjana Sharma, Dr. Salma Kiani, and Dr. Jada Hong.

Back: Dr. Tapasya Ranjan, Dr. Aaron Patel, Dr. Shannon Pennifold, and Dr. Riaz Ahmed.



As one of the populations with the highest rate of diabetes, a campaign was created to address these specific needs. Advertisements promoting overall eye health and exams were also included in Alberta Native News.

The AAO was invited to contribute to the Alberta Teachers Association magazine. An article that focused on the link between learning and children's vision drew attention to how teachers can help identify those children that should be seen by an optometrist and highlighted the things to look for in the classroom. A second article addressed an issue many teachers are experiencing with eye strain due to screen time and dry eye. This magazine is distributed to 40,000 teaching professionals. The AAO also advertised the importance of eye exams in the Association's magazine "Healthy Schools," which is distributed to 2,120 schools and 600 partner organizations.

Work with the Injury Prevention Centre at the University of Alberta continued and the AAO once again contributed to its publication: Keeping Well for Older Adults. This excellent information resource is

distributed in hard copy by request and at events. An electronic copy can be found on its website.

Through the support of members, the AAO presented at over 20 public events, to the University of Alberta Pharmacy Faculty, the University of Alberta Physical Therapists, eight Primary Care Networks (PCN), and at a specific session on Diabetes & Eye Health via webinar to a group of physicians working in six PCN locations. We followed up by providing eye health information to each location and to every Community Health Clinic in the province. The AAO was also asked to speak at the Rural Doctors Conference with a presentation on brain injuries and vision.

Our thanks to Drs. Salma Kiani, Shaminder Dhaliwal, Mande Cheema, Nobe Nijjar, Sheila Morrison, and Leah Thorpe who filled television spots on CTV and Global. This personal and professional representation was beneficial in supporting our messaging around infant, senior and urgent care. These live interviews showcase our members as the experts that they are and help Albertans to appreciate the excellent care available in their communities.

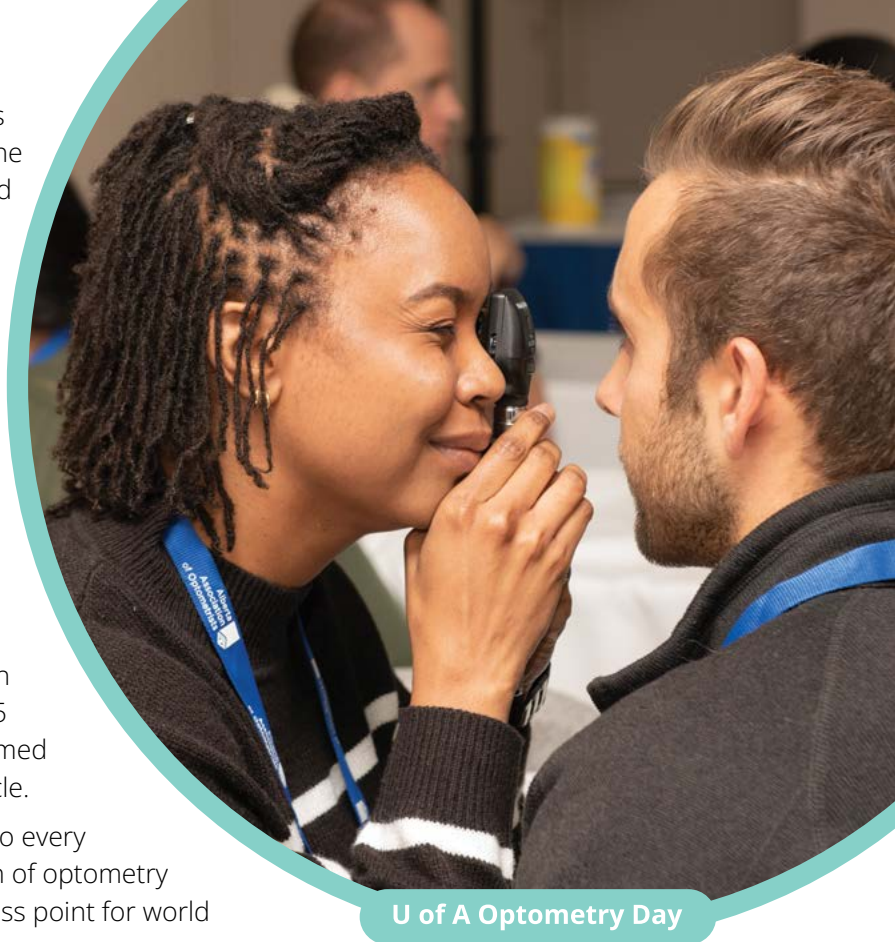


CTV Dr. Salma Kiani



From on-air and into the classroom, the AAO's programs with the University of Calgary and the University of Alberta brought optometrists and the next generation of physicians together to learn about the benefits of collaboration for quality patient care. The program at the University of Calgary has been in place for several years and continues to receive high ratings from students. This program is made possible because of the many member optometrists who welcome students into their clinics for one-on-one learning opportunities. The University of Alberta program was a first for the AAO. Every family medicine resident was required to attend the full day of learning and hands-on training. This session received a rating of 4.7/5 from attendees, and the University has confirmed optometry will be added to its educational cycle.

Overall, the communications area reached into every corner of the province to build on our mission of optometry being every Albertan's first and continual access point for world leading eye care.



U of A Optometry Day

Infant Eye Care

Doctor's Note:
"An eye exam ensures your baby's vision and eye health needs are addressed."

Dr. Jean Shan, Optometrist



Think your infant's too young for an eye exam? Their first exam is recommended between 6-9 months. Book baby's eye exam with an experienced, trained optometrist today.

[Book Now](#)

Alberta Association of Optometrists

Seniors Eye Care

Doctor's Note:
"Most eye diseases have no early signs or symptoms that you'll notice. But I will."

Dr. Nimrit Nijjar, Optometrist



Your vision and eye health are important. Yet only 37% of Alberta seniors get a yearly eye exam. Be safe, not sorry. Book your yearly seniors eye exam today.

[Learn More](#)

eyesight65+ Alberta Association of Optometrists

Medically Necessary/Urgent Eye Care

Doctor's Note:
"Careful when doing yard work, as debris can unexpectedly blow into your eye."

Dr. Nadia Clark, Optometrist



When an eye emergency happens, your optometrist is trained to help. They diagnose, treat and prescribe medications. Alberta Health coverage is available.

[Find An Optometrist](#)

Alberta Association of Optometrists

Find an Optometrist

The Find an Optometrist feature on the AAO website continues to be well used by Albertans who don't have a regular optometrist. This feature allows those in need of eye care to source members' locations by simply entering their postal code. There is also the option of searching for those optometrists that offer the Eye See . . . Eye Learn™ and Eyesafe™ programs. Agencies and medical practitioners can also access the feature to support patient care. In 2023, more than 34,600 Albertans accessed the tool.

Dr. T-H. Poon and patient



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Dr. Ahmed Aboudib
Dr. Ali Aboudib
Dr. Abdu Alazeez
Abougoush
Dr. Ibrahim Abraham
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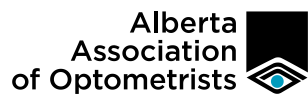
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