

October 7, 2021

Re: Optometrists Withdrawal of OHIP insured Services as of Sept 1, 2021

Dear Mayor McNamara and council,

I am writing on behalf of local optometrists to request the Town of Tecumseh and council to call on the Ontario Government to address the chronic underfunding of eye care. As frontline health professionals optometrists play a vital role in keeping our community healthy and safe.

For more than 30 years, previous Ontario governments have ignored our requests for a sustainable funding system.

In 1989 the Ontario government paid \$39.15 for an OHIP insured eye exam and now 32 years later the average remuneration has increased by \$5.50 – this is less than the increase in hourly minimum wage. The discrepancy in the cost to provide an exam with the remuneration from OHIP has left optometrists to subsidize the delivery of OHIP-covered eye care by \$173M per year. Furthermore, Ontario optometrists are the lowest compensated in Canada. The next lowest funded province is Manitoba where their fees are at \$77.18 for equivalent exams – 60% more than Ontario and certainly more than the Ontario government's most recent offer of an 8.48% increase. Every time we perform an OHIP insured eye exam we do so at a loss since compensation has not kept with inflation nor changed much over the last 30 years. This is not normal for any industry nor is it sustainable.

With the withdrawal of OHIP insured services, which makes up ~70% of the eye care we provide, there will be a further backlog compounded by the backlog still caused by COVID delays due to our closure last year and our limited capacity to see patients while physically distancing. Across Ontario there will be two million comprehensive eye exams wiped out over the next 12 months if something is not done soon. Communities across Ontario are at risk of losing their local eye care – the Town of Tecumseh is not an exception. This is not acceptable.

We optometrists stand united, and our best intentions are for a sustainable future for our patients and community. Unfortunately, as we speak, thousands of patients are left without care due to lack of funding as of September 1st, 2021. This includes eye exams for children 19 years of age and under, patients 20-64 years of age with OHIP insured medical conditions, patients 65 years of age and over, and patients funded through Ontario Works and ODSP.

Patients cannot pay for their eye exam due to a provincial law (The Commitment to the Future of Medicare Act 2014), which states that doctors cannot charge a patient any amount for medically necessary insured services covered by OHIP; this means all OHIP insured services are now halted. While the intentions of this regulation are good, this often leaves doctors working for free or worse, footing the bill since fees never catch up to cost of delivery.

I want to be clear that our withdrawal of services from all OHIP insured exams will continue until a reasonable long-term commitment has been agreed upon between the Ontario Association of Optometrists and the Ministry of Health, which allows Ontario Optometrists to deliver high-quality care for years to come. This is a simple ask. Every province in Canada, except for Ontario, has been able to fund eye care to ensure it is sustainable. Why can we not fix it here and now?

Although it is the province that needs to fix the issue, the underfunding of eye care affects municipalities too. Optometrists are located in over 200 communities, making us the most accessible primary eye care professionals in the healthcare system. In many of these locations, we are the only providers of comprehensive general eye care. We provide emergency services for our community as well – and we did this even through the COVID shutdown. **This is why municipalities must stand up for their residents and help protect access to OHIP optometry services.**

To date, at least 37 municipalities have passed motions to urge the government to establish a timeline to solve the chronic underfunding of OHIP eye care services. We are hoping you will do the same – to pass a motion as soon as possible so that the residents of the Town of Tecumseh can continue to have access eye care.

Below you will find the names of local optometrists in support of this letter and request for you to pass this motion to reach a sustainable solution to eye care. I, and all Ontario optometrists, await your decision to stand up for eye care once and for all. We hope that we can count on your support.

Sincerely,

Keri Baker, OD

Co-Signatories

Cathy Adams, OD

Janice Bellemore, OD

Sarah Fong, OD

Britney Hewitt, OD

Hansel Huang, OD

Richard Kniaziew, OD

Dino Mastronardi, OD

Rick Mastronardi, OD

Laurie Montcalm, OD

Jean O'Connor, OD

Natalie Raies, OD

Lauren Renaud, OD

Ali Siblani, OD

Dan Vespa, OD

Abee Azar, OD

Sandra Cozzetto, OD

Andrew Hager, OD

Kyla Hillier, OD

Abby Jakob, OD

Jamie Larocque, OD

John Mastronardi, OD

Paul McLure, OD

Robert Nichols, OD

Tim Peters, OD

Kreeshna Rana, OD

Alice Saad-Laba, OD

Jim Tolmie, OD

Katelyn Wharram Maytham, OD