

**Ministry of Health**

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Dear Doctor,

I am writing to you today to provide an update on the government's negotiations with the Ontario Association of Optometrists (OAO).

I want you to hear from me directly that the government recognizes that you and all optometrists in Ontario provide patients with vital and quality eye health and vision care. I am personally grateful for your ongoing commitment to the highest standard of vision care for all Ontarians and your support throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

I also know that optometrists have been long neglected by previous governments, who have failed to negotiate a fair and sustainable agreement. After too many years of delay, I want to be clear that our goal is to reach an agreement as soon as possible and, most importantly, build a long-term and sustainable funding relationship with Ontario's optometrists that ensures patients can continue to receive the care they need. We have a plan to do exactly that, but it takes a significant amount of work and two partners willing to take it on together.

To that end, with the third wave of the COVID-19 pandemic behind us the government recently entered into rigorous bilateral negotiations, later with the support of a third-party mediator, with the OAO.

At that time, we shared a proposal that was designed to take immediate action to right years of neglect and establish a process that would put both parties on a path to a long-term and sustainable solution. It includes immediate funding increases, a commitment to future funding increases and a plan to work together to better understand the issues that will allow us to productively address funding in the future. This is important work and we believe it should be done in the spirit of collaboration.

I want to be fully transparent with you. Here is the offer we put on the table:

- An immediate compensation increase of 8.48% at the fee code level, retroactive to April 1, 2021. This represents a "catch up" of fee increases calculated to reflect similar increases applied to physicians over the past decade.

- A one-time payment of \$39 million. Like the fee increases described above, this payment would cover a retroactive period over the past decade and was calculated to reflect similar increases applied to physicians during this time.
- Future fee increases to align with increases provided to physicians under the upcoming Physician Services Agreement, including any increases physicians receive beginning April 1, 2021.
- A commitment to immediately establish a Working Group with the OAO that would continue to be supported by a mediator and would allow us to come to a common understanding on the overhead costs associated with delivering publicly funded optometry services, and inform ongoing negotiations associated with the fees for the delivery of optometry services.
- A commitment to ensure ongoing monthly discussions with the OAO through establishing an Insured Optometry Services Review Committee to:
  - Develop recommendations on the implementation of the fee increases; and
  - Provide a mechanism to continue to discuss health care policy and system issues affecting optometrists.

I truly believe this is a fair and reasonable offer.

However, we are very concerned by the OAO's response to our offer and their approach to this process, particularly their continued suggestion that they intend to withdraw services that many vulnerable Ontarians, including seniors, rely on.

Regardless of the OAO's response to our offer, I want you to know that we intend to go ahead and distribute the \$39 million retroactive lump sum payment to you before an agreement is even reached. We plan to flow you this payment directly as part of your monthly OHIP payment in October.

In addition, we remain seized with the firm commitment to continue to a collaborative, mediated process to determine future fee increases.

As we move into the cooler fall months and we begin to see an expected increase in daily COVID-19 cases, our government's top priority remains protecting the health and safety of our most vulnerable. During these challenging times, it is particularly important that patients know they can continue to rely on the high-quality vision care optometrists provide.

We know this issue is critical to you and to Ontarians. The Ministry of Health is committed to continue to have meaningful and productive discussions with the OAO and to build a roadmap to an ongoing and successful working relationship with Ontario's optometrists.

We ask you to urge the OAO to work with us to reach an agreement as quickly as possible to ensure Ontarians can continue to access the high-quality eye health and vision care services they need and deserve.

Sincerely,



Christine Elliott  
Deputy Premier and Minister of Health

c: Helen Angus, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Health  
Patrick Dicerri, Assistant Deputy Minister and General Manager, OHIP,  
Ministry of Health