



**National Vision Health Desk:
Written Submission for the Pre-Budget Consultations in
Advance of the 2023 Federal Budget**

September 2022

RECOMMENDATION: That the Government of Canada allocate \$10M over five years (\$2M per year) to create a National Vision Health Desk (NVHD) that will develop and implement a National Vision Strategy to coordinate and address eye health issues across Canada.

Despite commitments to several international pledges over the last two decades, the Government of Canada has taken no action toward creating a vision health strategy. Today, over 1.2 million Canadians live with vision loss, and more than 8 million Canadians live with one of the four major eye diseases. Still, we know that 75% of visual impairment is avoidable if detected and treated early. The cost of vision loss in 2019 was \$32.9 billion. Studies have also shown that timely access to diagnosis and treatment of eye disease saves money in the long run. However, post-COVID, surgery backlogs and the results of individuals not seeking proper care have combined to exacerbate vision health issues in Canada, costing government even more to treat and deal with the impacts.

A recently tabled [Private Member's Bill](#) to create a vision health strategy does not have the required funding to fulfil the intended obligation. There is a desire within the vision health community for more coordinated efforts between government departments and agencies to create a truly cohesive plan to deal with eye health issues from coast to coast to coast. The federal government should include the intent of the proposed legislation in the 2023 Federal Budget and provide Health Canada and the Public Health Agency of Canada with implementation funding.

The total cost of vision loss in 2019 was \$32.9 billion, representing a significant cost to the public health purse. However, studies have shown that timely access to diagnosis and treatment of eye disease saves money in the long run*.

Blinding diseases affect older adults (55+) at much higher rates. As Canada's population ages, the number of individuals affected by vision impairment will rise. In 2019, the total cost of vision loss in Canada was \$32.9 Billion. This cost will grow to \$56 billion by 2050. Today, productivity losses cost the Government of Canada \$4.8 billion alone. If the \$10 Million initiative is even moderately successful, the return on investment to the Government will be enormous. Studies have shown that early access to diagnosis and treatment saves money in the long run. For example, cataract surgery is the most common surgery performed in Canada. Cataract surgeries have saved \$123.4 billion over 13 years and a significant return on investment to society.

Given the importance of vision health and its effect on public health spending, the Government of Canada plays a critical role in developing vision health policies. Therefore, members of the Vision Health community are calling on the Federal Government to create a **National Vision Health Desk** (NVHD) at the Public Health Agency of Canada with the appointment of a Chief Vision Health Officer. The NVHD would be the national policy voice for the vision health community. It would work with the provinces and territories on strategies for efficient, cost-effective access to eye health and vision care.

A Vision Health Desk will provide the pan-Canadian view necessary to help integrate care and increase access to vision health across Canada. Vision Health is a public and private delivery area, like dental and long-term care, complicating the delivery of services within and amongst provinces. A national-level view will help understand issues and address the lack of coordination at the government and patient levels.

The **National Vision Health Desk** will develop a National Vision Health Strategy that:

- Supports health promotion and disease prevention by promoting public awareness and providing the government with information on the most critical eye diseases and best practices to protect vision health
- Provides advice and expertise to the Federal Government on the use and availability of eye drugs and technologies; insight and analysis of data in eye care; and the development and implementation of eye health programs
- Informs the development of standard professional and technical guidance through a standardized national vision screening policy that focuses on high-priority populations.

Given the importance of vision health and its outsized impact on overall health spending, the Canadian Ophthalmological Society and all members of the Vision Health community are calling on the Federal Government to create and fund an NVHD at the Public Health Agency of Canada.

About the Canadian Ophthalmological Society

The Canadian Ophthalmological Society (COS) is the national, recognized authority on eye and vision care in Canada. As eye physicians and surgeons, we are committed to assuring the provision of optimal medical and surgical eye care for all Canadians by promoting excellence in ophthalmology and by providing services to support our members in practice. Our membership includes over 900 ophthalmologists and 200 ophthalmology residents. We work collaboratively with government, other national and international specialty societies, our academic communities (ACUPO), our provincial partners and affiliates, and other eye care professionals and patient groups to advocate for health policy in Canada in eye and vision health. COS is an accredited, award-winning provider of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) through the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada (RCPSC) and is an affiliate of the Canadian Medical Association (CMA).

References:

1. Private Members Bill <https://www.parl.ca/LegisInfo/en/bill/44-1/C-284>
2. Press release, October 4, 2022 – Joint survey underscores critical need for Canadian National Vision Health Strategy to address eye health issues <https://www.cos-sco.ca/joint-survey-underscores-critical-need-for-a-canadian-national-vision-health-strategy-to-address-eye-health-issues/>
3. Canadian Ophthalmological Society Council on Advocacy <https://www.cos-sco.ca/council-on-advocacy/>