



National Vision Health Desk

Maintaining good vision is a vital part of overall health and quality of life. The impact of vision loss on an individual is enormous from both physical and mental health perspectives. In fact, 80% of Canadians report that losing their vision is their most feared disability. Poor vision health impacts many Canadians, with 1.2 million living with vision loss, and more than 8 million Canadians living with one of the four main eye diseases: age-related macular degeneration, cataracts, diabetic retinopathy, and glaucoma. As these conditions disproportionately affect an older population, these numbers will grow with the aging of our population.

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.*

Given the importance of vision health and its impact on Canadians and public health spending, 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. The NVHD would be the national policy voice for the vision health community and would work with the provinces and territories on strategies for efficient, cost-effective access to eye health and vision care.

The **National Vision Health Desk** would:

- **Develop a National Strategy** for Action on Eye Health and Vision Care.
- **Support the work of the Federal government** on the creation of an essential ophthalmic drug list within the National Pharmacare framework.
- **Create a standardized national policy** for vision screening across the country, with a particular focus on children, seniors, and Indigenous peoples.
- **Develop patient care pathways** for the main eye diseases, delineating inter-professional collaboration amongst physicians, opticians, optometrists, and ophthalmologists.

- **Be focused** on coordinated action by governments, health professionals, non-government organizations, industry, and individuals working in partnership.
- **Oversee research** with the goal to improve the evidence base for vision care. There is no longer dedicated funding for eye health within the Canadian Institutes for Health Research (CIHR). There is no overarching body like the US National Eye Institute to set priorities or coordinate vision research and translate science into health services.
- **Educate the public** by implementing a public awareness campaign about the importance of eye health as a core component of overall health care, including, but not limited to:
 - Many Canadians are still not as aware of the signs and risk factors for vision loss.
 - 75 % of visual impairment is avoidable if detected and treated early.
 - Heredity is a risk factor for most eye diseases; however, most Canadians do not know their family eye health history.
 - Public awareness of the abilities of people with vision loss is essential to enhancing opportunities for Canadians with sight loss.
- **Become the compendium/library** for eye health research across Canada.

The [Canadian Ophthalmological Society](#) and other members of the Eye Health Team look forward to discussing the benefits of a National Vision Health Desk.

** In 2020, ophthalmic interventions saved a total of \$6.4 billion: \$1.6 billion in health care costs and \$4.8 billion in indirect costs to society. Total savings will more than double by 2040.*