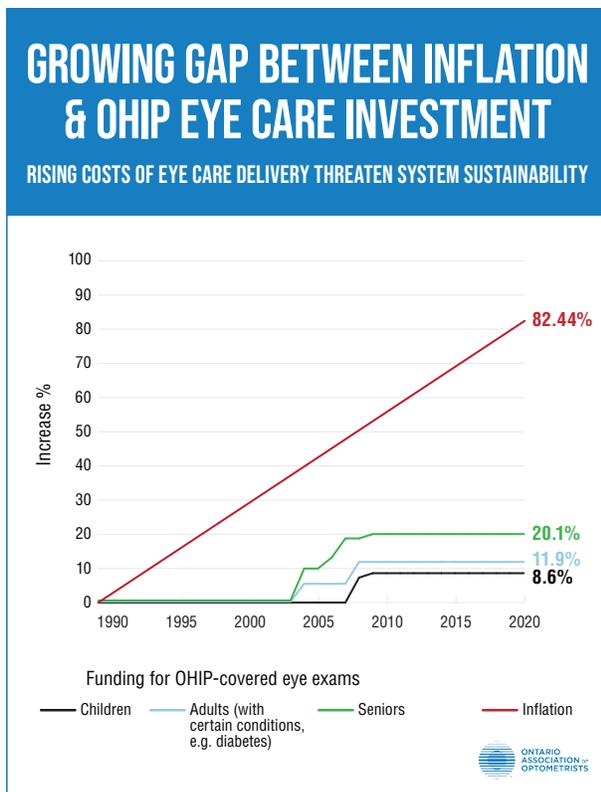


The Eye Care Crisis in Ontario

An open letter from Dr. Moore, an Optometrist in Orillia, Ontario, to his patients, to The Hon. Doug Ford, The Hon. Christine Elliott, to all members of the Ontario Government, to the medical community (including all of the great doctors and surgeons that share our mutual patients), and **to every person in Ontario** that may be affected, or know someone that may be affected, by the eye care crisis in Ontario.

Recently you may have seen media coverage about Ontario optometrists and the potential of a withdrawal of OHIP covered eye exams. I feel that it is important for everyone involved to understand why **96% of optometrists in Ontario voted to move forward with this withdrawal of service on Sept 1, 2021 if there is no significant action by the Ontario Government.** It is also important to note that the Ontario Government had almost 4 months notice and, despite attempts by the Ontario Association of Optometrists, the Government, solely, decided to wait until the last month to begin a dialogue.

In 1989 OHIP paid \$39.15 for an eye exam. Thirty two years later OHIP pays an average of \$44.65 for an eye exam. A \$5 increase in 32 years! This simple graph is also a great place to start this conversation, as it highlights the basics of our concerns and the crisis in funding that threatens your access to eye health care.



As you can see, inflation from 1990 to 2020 was over 80%, and the rate of coverage for OHIP covered eye exams has failed to keep pace.

Staff salaries, rent, utilities, and equipment expenses have all increased with, or above, the rate of inflation.

The scope of what optometrists are expected to do during an eye health exam has dramatically changed in that time as well.

The end result is that OHIP now covers only about 55% of the overhead cost of providing the exam, before any income is paid to the doctor. This means that the practice has to pay for every OHIP patient that is seen. The amount paid by OHIP is less than the cost to provide the service, so the balance of that cost is paid for by the practice.

This has been unfair and disrespectful for many years, and is no longer sustainable.

How has this happened? The Ontario Government does not have the force of legislation that requires them to negotiate with Optometry, unlike teachers, nurses, and physicians. **The Government has willingly ignored our profession for over 30 years.** That is now long enough, **and your access to eye health care is now at risk.**

It is also important to note that the responsibility for this crisis in eye health care is not solely that of the current Ontario Government as this issue extends back 30 years. However, the current Government has the opportunity to correct years of neglect and ignorance. Or they can be the Government that continues the trend of underfunding which will ultimately result in limiting your access to eye health care in Ontario.

Optometrists in Ontario are being very clear and transparent in our concerns. Yet the Government continues to believe that the current funding model is adequate to meet the needs of patients that require eye health and vision care. The Government is aware that the current funding is below the cost of providing the service, that Optometry is expected to cover, out of pocket, the remaining cost of providing Government funded eye health and vision care. **We pride ourselves on providing the highest care possible, however, if the current funding model continues that provision of care will be limited at best, and impossible at worst.**

Do not be fooled when the Government states that there has been a 15% increase in the fees paid to optometrists. Although true, the increase is due to the provision of 15% more OHIP insured eye exams, each and every one performed and paid for by a fee that only covers 55% of the cost of the service. Essentially, the Government is admitting that Optometry is servicing 15% more patients at a loss. This increasing demand makes our situation even more dire.

At Orillia Optometry our patient base is 70% OHIP insured (Children, Seniors, and those with certain medical conditions). My practice specifically is 75% OHIP. On each and every one of those exams the payment through OHIP only covers 55% of the overhead cost to provide that exam, with the practice expected (forced) to cover the remainder of the cost to provide the eye exam. If the visit is in between regular yearly exams, typically an appointment that involves an urgency or emergency, OHIP only covers about 30% of the overhead cost. Again, to be clear, the overhead cost to provide the service does not include any remuneration for the doctor.

To put this into perspective, consider yourself working a job and getting paid \$45 to do that job. Now factor in your expenses to perform that job, including your vehicle, gas, parking, and tools of the trade, that cost you \$80. **Would you spend \$80 to earn \$45?** That is what your optometrist is doing every time that they see an OHIP covered

patient. And, if it is an urgent or emergent exam between yearly exams, it is like making only \$25 for the same \$80 in cost!

This funding model is simply no longer sustainable. And access to eye health care is what is at stake. Due to this lack of funding, optometrists are limited in their ability to invest in their practices and access to eye care in rural areas is especially threatened. Investments in care that are directly OHIP insured are currently all but impossible, which limits any advancements in the quality of care that you deserve to have.

Without a considerable change we will be unable to continue to see 70-75% OHIP patients. Access to these exams will be limited. And that is the best case scenario. Worst case is that Optometry continues on its current funding path (with no future increases), having time and inflation continually erode the business model that allows you to access eye health care to a point where there simply is no business model that remains. **Faster exams, less time spent, less technology employed, only lead to poor patient outcomes.** Fewer appointments mean reduced eye care for those who need it most like seniors, children, and those with existing eye diseases. The lack of funding makes it difficult to prioritize modern technology, especially in rural communities where access to ophthalmologists is limited or non-existent. **This future is not a path that I am willing to take.**

That is why I am standing up for my patients. Standing up to ensure access to high quality eye health care in the future. And, simply standing up demanding respect from Government towards Optometry that has been blatantly absent over many years.

Very recently the Government has announced a one time retroactive payment to Optometry in the hope that we accept their offer and make this issue disappear. \$39 million dollars sounds like a lot. Remember though, that we have worked without an active contract for over 10 years. This is a one time payment and there is no mention of correcting the funding model for the future. This \$39 million dollars translates to just over \$15,000 per Ontario Optometrist. **My practice subsidizes the provision of OHIP exams by over 10x that amount every single year! To put it another way, my practice subsidizes the provision of OHIP exams by about that amount every single month!** We need a realistic funding model moving forward to ensure the viability of your access to eye health care and for the viability of Optometry within our health care system. This announcement is like taking a water dropper to fill a swimming pool.

I will not sacrifice the care of my patients. Without Government commitment, they are forcing that as the only solution. I respect my profession and my patients too much to even consider that. **That is why I voted to support my profession and why Orillia Optometry will be involved in the withdrawal of OHIP services on September 1st without the commitment of the Government to agree to our two simple requests:**

- **agree to a formal, binding, negotiation process.**
- **agree to cover the overhead cost of providing care so Optometry no longer subsidizes the provision of OHIP covered health care.**

Unfortunately, those who will be impacted by any withdrawal of service the most are the groups OHIP is supposed to protect: our children, seniors and those with existing medical conditions or eye diseases. **If the Government continues to ignore this issue, they will force Ontario optometrists to have no choice but to stop providing OHIP services starting September 1st, 2021.**

This means that any person who is OHIP insured for their eye exam will not be able to see an optometrist, including those 19 years of age and under, 65 years of age and over, and adults with eye diseases related to diabetes, glaucoma and cataracts.

Ontario law makes it illegal for optometrists to accept direct payment or alternate health insurance from OHIP-insured patients. As a result, these patients will simply not be able to book an appointment with their optometrist starting September 1st.

Without action the Ontario Government will force eye health care to be redirected through alternate care providers including family doctors, ophthalmology, and the hospital.

At Orillia Optometry we are fighting for your continued access to quality eye health care. For those of you who may have existing OHIP eligible appointments after September 1st, or for those with eye diseases who require frequent monitoring we understand this is a difficult situation. If the Ontario Government allows service to be disrupted we will contact you to discuss an individual plan to ensure your specific health needs will be taken care of appropriately. We plan to keep you updated on our efforts and we are available to answer any questions you may have.

To protect your access to eye health care I ask for your patience, your understanding, and, ultimately, your help. The Government has proven that they do not respect our place in the provision of eye health care, but they do respect your voice as voters.

**Please visit SaveEyeCare.ca to learn more
and send a letter to your MPP and the Minister of Health.**

My desire is to be respected, and to continue to provide my patients with the best experience and care possible while visiting Orillia Optometry. Without a change, that is simply at risk. And, all that I can do is ask for your support.

Sincerely,


OPTOMETRIST