



## Media Release

### For Immediate Release

## The 4<sup>th</sup> World Congress of Optometry Now Postponed Until 2023

**September 9, 2020 – St. Louis, Missouri, USA** – After much consideration, the World Council of Optometry (WCO) has announced that the 4<sup>th</sup> World Congress of Optometry (WCO4) planned for Melbourne, Australia in 2021, will now be postponed to September 8-10, 2023. The partnership with Optometry Victoria South Australia (OV/SA) and the Optical Distributors and Manufacturers Association of Australia (ODMA) will continue.

This decision was made after much consultation and in the best interests of all involved. WCO4 was originally scheduled to be held alongside O=MEGA21, the largest eyecare and eyewear trade show and conference in the Southern Hemisphere, in September 2021. However, the impact of COVID-19 and travel restrictions have necessitated the postponement to 2023.

“After considering the impact of the pandemic on optometrists, travel restrictions and the possible challenges of our members to attend WCO4 in 2021, we decided that it was in the best interest of our members to postpone WCO4 until 2023. The ability for members to attend was at the heart of our decision,” stated WCO President Mr. Paul Folkesson.

“Because of the strength of our relationship with ODMA and OV/SA we remain certain that Melbourne is still the best place to hold WCO4, and as such there will be no need to retender for the Congress. The original Melbourne bid was excellent and all parties have been working together very well in planning for 2021. That momentum will carry us forward to 2023, and we are all very excited to be bringing the WCO4 Down Under,” said Mr. Folkesson.

OV/SA President Elise Pocknee-Clem said “There were a number of factors that made the decision to delay the WCO4 component of the 2021 program a simple one for all three Boards,” she said. “Many private optometrists from overseas have experienced shutdowns, as we have in Australia, and the economic impact of closures may limit practitioners’ ability to travel abroad for continuing education next year. Also, significant periods of lockdown and inconsistent ‘opening up’ protocols could impact the capacity of attendees to commit to international travel in the short-term. This, and the impact on the university and not-for-profit sectors, and the difficulty in predicting the timing for the ‘end’ of the pandemic meant that we needed to act decisively.”

The Chairman of ODMA, Robert Sparkes, said “Optometrists and the ophthalmic optics community have communicated that they are extremely eager to resume face-to-face buying and learning opportunities,” he said. “As the market leader, and given that O=MEGA21 is a year away, we wanted to provide certainty that we want to go ahead, and we will certainly do so with the welfare of our attendees in mind. It has always been our intention to develop the O=MEGA product into a truly regional event for Australia and our near neighbours. O=MEGA21 will still proceed as scheduled for Australian and regional audiences before we open up for the whole world to come and enjoy Australia in 2023.”

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