



**Legislation, Registration, and Standards (LRS) Toolkit  
Case Study Template**

We are looking to develop case studies that reflect real-life examples of the stages of the LRS toolkit that will help advocates using the toolkit with their work. Please consider writing a case study on one of the following themes:

- Developing a professional association in your country
- Lobbying for formal recognition of optometry
- Introducing legislation or legislation changes within your country
- Developing a regulatory body
- Expanding scope of practice

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**Case Study Country:** Saudi Arabia

The health sector has been supported with the highest budget for decades in Saudi Arabia. The goal was to improve the health services that are accessible by the people living in the country, these health services included the primary health care. One of the primary health care specialties is the primary eye health care in which Optometrist should provide most of this service. Accordingly, an Optometry department was established in King Saud University, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia (in 1985). The department provided a Optometry program with bachelor's degree; this program hugely supported the establishment of Optometry clinics in the health clinics with Optometry graduate professionals across the country.

However, there were two challenges that delay the development of the Optometry profession in Saudi Arabia. First, Optometry clinics were mostly within secondary and tertiary hospitals, which means that people would go to the Optometry clinics after they were seen in the primary health clinics where the role of Optometrist should have been in. The consequence of this challenge was that people seeking primary eye health care services need to make appointments with the specialists in which a long list is existed, therefore, long waitlists were found. This could cause a significant delay in the diagnosis, as a result, there would be complications that potentially impact the treatment and management plan. The second challenge was the limited scope of practice of the optometrist in their clinics, which did not include procedures and protocols for the comprehensive eye exams.

In 2007, the Saudi Society of Optometry (SSO) was established. The establishment helped the optometric community to be advanced in the profession through the development programs (conferences and workshops) as well as the support of the optometry advocate through the governmental agencies, along with coordination and efforts with the Optometry academic programs in the universities. The advocate included the expansion of the scope of practice for the optometrists, which is supposed to broaden the role of optometrists in the primary health care system as well as.



In 2010, a new Optometry department was established in another region of the country (Qassim) in which Optometry Doctor program (OD) was provided. This means there are currently two Optometry departments providing OD degree across the country (King Saud program developed an OD program replacing the bachelor's). This led to significant developments in the role of Optometrist and in the skills that optometrists would have in their practice. Nowadays, there are optometrists who are skilled in the primary eye health care with strong knowledge in the ocular disease and therapeutics.

Meanwhile, there are obstacles for these developments to move forward with the Optometry profession. First, the primary health care centers do not have Optometry clinics. There were efforts at high levels for this implementation, but still not successful. This would affect the role of the optometrists in the early detection of ocular diseases and visual disorders. Second, the medical insurance doesn't cover Optometric exams as well as glasses and contact lenses for the adults. This would potentially impact the accessibility of the Optometry services.

In addition to the above obstacles, there is a huge need for developing residency programs so optometry doctor graduates can pursue their optometric training in different subspecialties such as contact lenses, low vision rehabilitation, vision therapy, and pediatric optometry. Up to date, there is a huge lack in specialized optometrists who can provide professional health services in different optometric disciplines such as low vision and other services. There is high demand among population of Saudi Arabia to have full and easy access to such health services.

The SSO started building up connections that help increase the visibility of the optometry role in the health system in Saudi Arabia, especially in the primary eye health care. A recent Optometry conference in Saudi Arabia was held in the partnership with the Eastern Mediterranean Council of Optometry (EMCO). The Ministry of Health in Saudi Arabia approved a request made by the SSO to have the conference under their sponsorship and support. This should increase the visibility of the profession in the high levels at the Ministry of Health. Therefore, support and considerations can be achieved for future legislations or regulations established to develop the profession. The presence and contribution made by the president of the World Council of Optometry and other members from EMCO in the conference was magnificent, and raised the attention of the profession to the decision-making agencies in the country.