



# WORLD COUNCIL OF OPTOMETRY

*Advocacy | Education | Policy Development | Humanitarian Outreach*

Dear Colleagues,

Welcome to World Optometry Week – this week is a time when we can all share the importance of taking care of your eyes with the public and our patients and show how optometry is doing that.

I'm Dr. Sandra Block, currently the President of the World Council of Optometry (WCO). During last year's World Optometry Week, I focused on the fact that it is a wonderful time to be an optometrist. This year I want to reiterate that thought and remind you that we as a profession contribute to the importance of addressing the growing prevalence of vision and eye health problems by providing high quality eye care. We need to continue to share that optometry is a primary healthcare profession that works toward achieving better access, affordability, equity, and equality for eye health and vision care as human rights.

The focus for the World Council of Optometry during World Optometry Week 2024 is to highlight the work of the profession and the contributions that optometrists play in increasing access to eye healthcare as a human right globally. There are so many accomplishments on the global level that have led us here.

Since the launch of the World Health Organization's (WHO) World Report on Vision (WRV), the awareness of the importance of addressing access to eye care has grown. We have seen several resolutions within the World Health Assembly and the United Nations bringing forward the call to action for challenges that are faced by people trying to access eye care services and to do it in a manner that is integrated patient-centred eye care. As a follow-up to the call on the global level, several initiatives have been created and launched that help optometry to be a part of the solution. WCO has been included in all of the conversations along with the development of the tools and programs to address the most significant problems identified by the WRV.

WCO's vision and mission are focused on the global development of the profession through advocacy, education, and public health initiatives. The efforts from the World Health Organization and the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness (IAPB) continue to include optometry in the development of models to address preventable vision impairment.

I want to highlight the WHO Eye Care Competency Framework (ECCF) as one of the steps forward. ECCF was designed to describe the competencies needed at all levels of eye care. Optometry was intimately involved in the development of that document along with representatives from many other providers of eye care. While the document does not refer to professions by name, optometry was included in the ECCF at the level of primary eye care based on their definition of optometry that outlines the skills and knowledge of an optometrist. WCO has furthered the focus on competencies by developing an updated curriculum framework which serves to describe in detail the domains that every optometrist would have covered in their professional education with the expectation of lifelong learning. The WCO Competency Framework for Optometry will be officially launched this week on 20 March 2024.

The goal of these documents includes helping to reduce the large discrepancy of human resources in remote areas along with other underserved regions. The reality is that the lack of access occurs in low-, middle-, and high-income settings. In a low- and middle-income setting, the focus needs to be on how to not only increase the numbers of optometrists, but also in the development of a continuum of care that reaches out to the individuals who do not have access due to disability, transportation, or awareness, along with other barriers to care. While in high-income settings, the same barriers may exist, but the solutions are often different. It is hoped that whatever setting a clinician is working, there are opportunities to effect change with respect to scope of practice, recognition of the contributions of optometry that can help solve access, or offering care to those who are often forgotten.

WHO has launched their new SPECS program in an effort to improve effective coverage of uncorrected refractive error. We are looking forward to optometry being actively engaged in the models to improve coverage.



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In the bigger picture we need to remember that the care given must be appropriate for our patients and their quality of life. We can all agree, and it is shown by the evidence, that many vision and eye health problems do not occur in isolation. Whether it is a vision problem that leads to loss of independence, the reality that vision issues are often found as a co-morbidity for our patients or may even be the first sign of an impending systemic disease process, receiving care even before there are signs or symptoms can improve overall health outcomes. Even problems that are solely visual, if addressed early can yield better functional outcomes including refractive problems. Starting the process with health promotion, ensuring our patients are knowledgeable and think about prevention and not simply addressing problems after the emerge can improve quality of life.

So, with that, I wish you all a happy World Optometry Week, and I look forward to interacting as we move forward in this next decade. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Sandra S. Block, OD, M ED, MPH, FAAO, Dipl AAO, FCOVD, FNAP, FARVO  
World Council of Optometry President