

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

**Project Title:** *Canada-Switzerland Inter-Institutional Exchange for Swiss Therapeutic Scope Expansion*

**Submitted by:** Dr. Benoit Tousignant

**Supported by:** World Council of Optometry (WCO) Education Mentor Grant 2024-25

This project, supported by the WCO Education Mentor Grant, facilitated a collaboration between Switzerland's Fachhochschule Nordwestschweiz (FHNW) and the École d'optométrie de l'Université de Montréal (ÉOUM), aiming to support the evolution of Swiss optometry from WHO "advanced" level of proficiency (using diagnostic agents) to "expert" level of proficiency (including therapeutic services). Dr. Benoit Tousignant, a professor from ÉOUM, conducted a series of strategic visits to Switzerland while during a year of research and study in Europe, providing guidance rooted in Quebec's own successful transition in the early 2000s.

A central component of this collaboration was collaboration in the development of a master's degree in optometry at FHNW, scheduled for launch in 2027–2028. This program will be delivered in English, allowing it to serve not only Swiss students but also optometrists across Europe seeking therapeutic qualifications. The curriculum is designed to align with elements from the WCO Competency Framework for Optometry and will include specializations in:

- Anterior eye and contact lenses
- Medical retina and low vision
- Binocular vision and pediatrics
- Diagnostics and therapeutics

A practical and clinical component is planned, including supervised patient care rotations. The program follows an "educate then legislate" model, aiming to build professional capacity ahead of regulatory change.

In parallel, discussions are ongoing around a mutual professional recognition agreement between Quebec and Switzerland. This agreement could serve as a key advocacy tool to support legislative reform by demonstrating external recognition of Swiss optometric competencies.

While Swiss optometry shows strong motivation and institutional readiness, some challenges persist. These include administrative delays, a current lack of reimbursement structures for optometric services, and competing lobbying efforts favoring refracting opticians. Nonetheless, with continued collaboration, Switzerland has the potential to emerge as a leader in advancing therapeutic optometry in continental Europe.

This initiative exemplifies the value of international mentorship in expanding scope of practice and strengthening optometric education globally, in line with WCO's mission to improve access to high-quality eye care.