

## FORAC-FAROC Policy on Teleoptometry

### Preamble and Definition:

The profession of optometry in Canada is defined primarily by its scope of practice. The traditional model of providing optometric care with its direct provider-to-patient relationship is evolving. New technologies are emerging that allow for more indirect and remote ways of providing consultative, diagnostic and treatment services. The ability to create and transfer digital health information has become a major factor in the fields of health and medicine and has led to the use of terms such as **telehealth** and **telemedicine**.

Telehealth and telemedicine are often used interchangeably but are distinguished in terms of their scope.<sup>1</sup> Telemedicine describes the remote delivery of clinical medical services, such as diagnosis and disease management, but telehealth includes the delivery of health promotion and disease prevention information and therapeutic care. As such, **telemedicine is a part of telehealth**. And while teleophthalmology is considered a branch of telemedicine; **teleoptometry is a part of telehealth** since optometry is its own health care profession and not a branch of medicine.

With this context in mind:

***Teleoptometry is the provision of vision and eye health services that are delivered within the scope of practice of optometry using electronic health information, medical and communication technologies, and where the provider and patient are separated by remote distance.***

<sup>1</sup>US Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) <https://www.hrsa.gov/>

### What Optometrists in Canada need to know:

In order for Optometrists in Canada to engage in the practice of **teleoptometry**:

- Optometrists must be registered, practice within the scope of practice, and maintain appropriate professional liability insurance in the province or territory where patients are located;
- Optometrists must comply with all privacy regulations within their province or territory and the province or territory of the patient;
- Optometrists must establish an appropriate practitioner-patient relationship before any care or recommendation is provided to the patient;

- Optometrists must adhere to all ethical and legal requirements to obtain valid informed consent and to protect the privacy and confidentiality of patient information;
- Optometrists must ensure that their identity and location is known to the patient and the identity and location of the patient is confirmed at each consultation;
- Optometrists must provide the same level of care and observe the same responsibilities as provided in direct patient care;
- Optometrists must fulfil the same obligations for patient follow up in **teleoptometry** as in a direct patient care;
- Optometrists must maintain proper clinical records for all patients to whom care is delivered through the practice of **teleoptometry**;
- Optometrists must ensure that all digital health information that is collected is appropriately stored and protected;
- Optometrists must comply with relevant legislation and regulatory policies concerning conflict of interest, advertising and communication with the public, as well as the sale of goods and services, and expectations of ongoing competence, including as it applies to current and evolving technologies used in **teleoptometry**.

### **The Role of the Regulators:**

- The role of the regulators is to regulate optometrists, and not the technology used in the practice of **teleoptometry**;
- The role of the regulators is to advise their members that their ethical, professional and legal obligations around the provision of appropriate care do not change with the use of technology in the practice of **teleoptometry**;
- The role of the regulators is to develop policies and procedures to ensure effective regulation;
- The role of the regulators is to establish and articulate principles that ensure that the practitioner always acts in the patient's best interest and to the highest standards of professionalism.

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<https://fmrac.ca/fmrac-framework-on-telemedicine/>

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