

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. 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.

“Remote delivery” refers to any situation in which there is an absence of physical contact between the provider and patient and does not necessarily involve long distances.

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 in the absence of physical contact between the provider and patient.

The Role of the Regulators:

- is to regulate optometrists, and not the technology used in the practice of **teleoptometry**;
- 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**;
- is to develop policies and procedures to ensure effective regulation;
- 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.

What Optometrists need to know:

In order for optometrists to engage in the practice of **teleoptometry** in Canada, they must:

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

In order to establish an appropriate practitioner-patient relationship in the provision of **teleoptometry**, 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;
- explain in clear language the appropriateness and limitations of optometric services provided by **teleoptometry**;
- adhere to all ethical and legal requirements to obtain and document valid informed consent and to protect the privacy and confidentiality of patient information;
- provide the same level of care and observe the same responsibilities as provided in direct patient care;
- fulfil the same obligations for patient follow up in **teleoptometry** as in a direct patient care.

In order to maintain the regulatory standards of practice in the provision of **teleoptometry**, optometrists must:

- maintain proper clinical records for all patients to whom care is delivered through the practice of **teleoptometry**;
- ensure that all digital health information that is collected is appropriately and securely stored and protected;
- ensure that the patient is referred to an appropriate practitioner for direct care if the complaint cannot be resolved through the practice of **teleoptometry**;
- 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**.

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

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