

FORAC-FAROC Policy on Indigenous Cultural Safety, Humility, and Anti-racism in Optometric Practice

In 2015, the **Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada** published 94 Calls to Action. Among them was a call for all levels of government to “provide cultural competency training for all healthcare professionals.”¹ In addition, the First Nations and Inuit Health Branch (FNIHB), Assembly of First Nations (AFN), First Nations regional partners and vision professional associations have committed to work together to develop and implement actions aimed at increasing cultural competence among vision care providers serving First Nations clients as well as advocating for changes to requirements for professional registration and promoting cultural competency education in professional training.

To address and recognize these important calls to action, the **Federation of Optometric Regulatory Authorities of Canada (FORAC)** signed a Declaration of Commitment on July 13, 2019 in Victoria, BC, signalling its collective resolve to advance Cultural Safety and Humility in the regulation of optometrists who are involved in the delivery of vision care services to First Nations and Indigenous peoples of Canada.

Signing the Declaration recognized FORAC-FAROC members’ commitment to integrating Cultural Safety and Humility into optometric education and practice standards that are required to ensure public safety and the delivery of high-quality services to Indigenous patients.

In keeping with the principles of the Declaration, this policy document sets clear expectations for how optometrists are to provide culturally safe and anti-racist care for Indigenous patients and identifies the foundational principles for each provincial regulator to guide its registrants.^{2,3}

Core concepts and principles

1. SELF-REFLECTIVE PRACTICE (IT STARTS WITH ME)

Cultural humility begins with a self-examination of the optometrist’s values, assumptions, beliefs, and privileges embedded in their own knowledge and practice, and consideration of how this may impact the therapeutic relationship with Indigenous patients. Cultural humility promotes relationships based on respect, open and effective dialogue, and mutual decision-making.

Principles

Optometrists should:

- 1.1 Reflect on, identify, and take care not to act on any stereotypes or assumptions they may hold about Indigenous Peoples.
- 1.2 Reflect on how their privileges, biases, values, belief structures, behaviours, and positions of power may impact the therapeutic relationship with Indigenous patients.

1.3 Evaluate and seek feedback on their own behaviour towards Indigenous Peoples.

2. BUILDING KNOWLEDGE THROUGH EDUCATION

Optometrists continually seek to improve their ability to provide culturally safe care for Indigenous patients.

Principles

Optometrists should:

2.1 Undertake ongoing education on Indigenous health care, determinants of health, cultural safety, cultural humility, and anti-racism.

2.2 Learn about the negative impact of Indigenous-specific racism on Indigenous patients accessing the health care system, and its disproportionate impact on Indigenous women and girls and two-spirit, queer, and trans Indigenous Peoples.

2.3 Learn about the historical and current impacts of colonialism on Indigenous Peoples and how this may impact their health care experiences.

2.4 Learn about the Indigenous communities located in the areas where they work, recognizing that languages, histories, heritage, cultural practices, and systems of knowledge may differ between Indigenous communities.

3. ANTI-RACIST PRACTICE (TAKING ACTION)

Optometrists take active steps to identify, address, prevent, and eliminate Indigenous-specific racism.

Principles

Optometrists should:

3.1 Take appropriate action when they observe others acting in a racist or discriminatory manner towards Indigenous Peoples by:

3.1.1 Helping colleagues to identify and eliminate racist attitudes, language, or behaviour.

3.1.2 Supporting patients, colleagues and others who experience and/or report acts of racism.

3.1.3 Reporting acts of racism to leadership and/or the relevant health regulatory college.

4. CREATING SAFE HEALTH CARE EXPERIENCES

Optometrists facilitate safe vision care experiences where Indigenous patients' physical, mental/emotional, spiritual, and cultural needs can be met.

Principles

Optometrists should:

4.1 Treat patients with respect and empathy by:

4.1.1 Acknowledging the patient's cultural identity.

4.1.2 Listening to and seeking to understand the patient's lived experiences.

4.1.3 Treating patients and their families with compassion.

4.1.4 Being open to learning from the patient and others.

4.2 Care for a patient holistically, considering their physical, mental/emotional, spiritual, and cultural needs.

4.3 Acknowledge and incorporate into the plan of care Indigenous cultural rights, values, and practices, including ceremonies and protocols related to illness, where able.

4.4 Facilitate the involvement of the patient's family and others (e.g., community and Elders, Indigenous cultural navigators, and interpreters) as needed and requested.

5. PERSON-LED CARE (RELATIONAL CARE)

Optometrists work collaboratively with Indigenous patients to meet the patient's vision health and wellness goals.

Principles

Optometrists should:

- 5.1 Respectfully learn about the patient and the reasons the patient has sought vision care services.
- 5.2 Engage with patients and their identified supports to identify, understand, and address the patient's vision health and wellness goals.
- 5.3 Actively support the patient's right to decide on their course of care.
- 5.4 Communicate effectively with patients by:
 - 5.4.1 Providing the patient with the necessary time and space to share their needs and goals.
 - 5.4.2 Providing clear information about the health care options available, including information about what the patient may experience during the health care encounter.
 - 5.4.3 Ensuring information is communicated in a way that the patient can understand.

6. STRENGTHS-BASED AND TRAUMA-INFORMED PRACTICE (LOOKING BELOW THE SURFACE)

Optometrists have knowledge about different types of traumas and their impact on Indigenous patients, including how intergenerational and historical trauma affects many Indigenous Peoples during health care experiences. Optometrists focus on the resilience and strength the patient brings to the health care encounter.

Principles

Optometrists should:

- 6.1 Work with the patient to incorporate their personal strengths that will support the achievement of their vision health and wellness goals.
- 6.2 Recognize the potential for trauma (personal or intergenerational) in a patient's life and adapt their approach to be thoughtful and respectful of this, including seeking permission before engaging in assessments or treatments.
- 6.3 Recognize that colonialism and trauma may affect how patients view, access, and interact with the health care system.
- 6.4 Recognize that Indigenous women, girls, two-spirit, queer, and trans Indigenous Peoples are disproportionately impacted by Indigenous-specific racism in the health care system and consider the impact gender-specific trauma may have on the patient.

Acknowledgements

This document is based on the Practice Standard⁴ adopted for registrants by the College of Optometrists of British Columbia (COBC), and was developed in collaboration with eleven other health regulatory colleges in BC. The standard's development was guided by Sulksun (Shane Pointe), proud member of the Coast Salish Nation, Musqueam Indian Band and Knowledge Keeper to all and Joe Gallagher (k'wunamen), Tla'amin Nation, Principal at Qoqoq Consulting Ltd.

The COBC Practice Standard was adapted with permission from the British Columbia College of Nurses and Midwives (BCCNM) and the College of Physicians and Surgeons of BC (CPSBC) who collaboratively developed the Indigenous Cultural Safety, Cultural Humility and Anti-racism Practice Standard (Jan 2022). We gratefully and humbly acknowledge the contributions from Indigenous people and guidance from Indigenous leaders during the consultation process which informed the development of the BCCNM and CPSBC Standard.

References:

¹ *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future - Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*, 2015, Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada
<https://publications.gc.ca/site/eng/9.800288/publication.html>

² *Indigenous Cultural Safety, Cultural Humility and Anti-Racism - Practice Standard Companion Guide*, 2023, British Columbia College of Nurses and Midwives
https://www.bccnm.ca/Documents/cultural_safety_humility/ps_companion_guide.pdf

³ *Social Determinants of Health - Indigenous Experiences with Racism and its Impacts*, 2020, National Collaborating Centre for Indigenous Health
<https://www.nccih.ca/docs/determinants/FS-Racism2-Racism-Impacts-EN.pdf>

⁴ *COBC Indigenous Cultural Safety, Humility, and Anti-Racism Standard of Practice*, 2022, College of Optometrists of British Columbia
<http://optometrybc.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/8.2-Cultural-safety-memo.pdf>

APPROVED and ADOPTED SEPTEMBER 9, 2023 © Federation of Optometric Regulatory Authorities of Canada