

COVID-19's Impact on Vision Loss Across Canada

Canadian Council of the Blind and Fighting Blindness Canada Release Addendum Report: The Impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Eye Health Canada

OTTAWA, Ontario – October 13, 2021 - The Addendum to the Cost of Vision Loss and Blindness in Canada Report ("the Report) estimates 1,437 Canadians lost vision due to delayed eye examinations and delayed treatment in 2020. The COVID-19 pandemic continues to challenge Canadian patients and the health care system. Almost all optometrists' offices were closed during the first lockdown from March to June 2020, with most offices restricting capacity for the rest of 2020. There were close to three million fewer optometry visits in 2020 compared to 2019, which put millions of Canadians at serious risk of losing vision.

Vision loss in Canada is increasing.

- There were 335,000 fewer (47 per cent decrease) eye surgeries performed across Canada between March and June of 2020.
- An estimated 1,437 people lost vision due to delayed eye examinations and treatments in 2020.

The short and long-term cost brought on by the pandemic goes well into 2023.

- It is expected to take two years to clear the additional backlog of cataract surgeries caused by the pandemic.
- Between 2021 and 2023, it is estimated that an additional \$129 million per year will be required to clear the backlog.

The cost of vision loss in Canada goes well-beyond the health care system.

- An increase in wait times for surgery will result in a \$1.3 billion increase in the cost of vision health over the next two and a half years.
- Though \$253.3 million of these costs are direct health care system costs, \$1.1 billion result from the loss of well-being.

All Canadians living with eye diseases were impacted by COVID-19. Some had their diagnosis delayed, potentially missing or delaying an opportunity to receive treatment to stabilize their disease. Others were delayed in receiving counselling and support to assist in dealing with the mental, physical and social effects of vision loss.

It is imperative to make eye health and rehabilitation services a population health priority. Visit [StopVisionLoss.ca](https://www.stopvisionloss.ca) and sign the petition asking the Canadian government to recommit to a national vision health plan today.

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Statements:

- “We need to make eye health and rehabilitation services a population health priority. It is critical for Canadians to have access to treatment and receive an early diagnosis,” says **Louise Gillis, immediate past president, Canadian Council of the Blind**. “Research shows that three-quarters of causes of vision loss in Canada are preventable, treatable, or reversible. The delays in treatment, and the backlog of appointments, has and will, continue to create long-term impacts on vision health in Canada.”
- “COVID-19 has, and continues to, affect every Canadian. This report shows the unnecessary impact of COVID-19 on the over 8 million Canadians who are living with a blinding eye disease that puts them at significant risk of going blind. We are calling for a National Vision Health Plan because it would have reduced people losing vision today and in the future.” says **Doug Earle, President & CEO, Fighting Blindness Canada**.
- “The COS was pleased to support this critical initiative that helps us understand the impact of COVID-19 on fighting blindness in Canada” says **Dr. Colin Mann, president, Canadian Ophthalmological Society**.
- “Regular and comprehensive eye examinations are essential to combatting vision loss in Canada,” says **Dr. Harry Bohnsack, president, Canadian Association of Optometrists**. “Vision and ocular health conditions are not always accompanied by recognizable symptoms, so there can be an increased risk to the patient if treatment is not initiated in a timely manner.”

About the Report

The Canadian Council of the Blind, partnering with Fighting Blindness Canada, and key stakeholders, the Canadian Association of Optometrists and the Canadian Ophthalmological Society, conducted a supplementary study to reveal the astounding impact COVID-19 has had on eye health in Canada. The Canadian Council of the Blind (CCB) engaged Deloitte Access Economics in December 2020 to provide a contemporary estimate of the annual social and economic cost of vision loss (VL) and blindness in Canada. In support of this report, the CCB partnered with Fighting Blindness Canada and key partners the Canadian Association of Optometrists and the Canadian Ophthalmological Society. The full report on the Cost of Vision Loss and Blindness in Canada using 2019 data was completed in May 2021. During the completion of that earlier document, it became apparent that the COVID-19 pandemic was having a major impact on the findings of the study. It was therefore decided to conduct a supplementary study on the impact of the pandemic in 2020 on the prevalence and cost of VL. The findings of that study are presented as an addendum to the original report. The estimated costs in the report reflect the impact of COVID-19 from March to December of 2020, highlighting aggregated, pan-Canadian effects

About the Canadian Council of the Blind (CCB)



The Canadian Council of the Blind Is the Voice of the Blind™ in Canada, a membership-based charity that brings together Canadians who are living with vision loss, the blind, deaf-blind and the partially sighted. Advocating for its members, the CCB works to promote a sense of purpose and self-esteem along with an enhanced quality of life. Based on belief in ABILITY, not disability Canadian Council of the Blind (CCB) is a vibrant network of active members across Canada. Each chapter is unique to its geographic area and engages in a variety of social and recreational activities based on the interests of their local members. Visit www.ccbnational.net or call 1-877-304-0968 for more information.

About Fighting Blindness Canada (FBC)

Fighting Blindness Canada (FBC) is the largest charitable funder of vision research in Canada. FBC has contributed invested over \$40 million to the search for sight-saving cures and treatments research for blinding eye diseases. With the support of its generous donors, FBC has funded over 200 research grants that have led to over 600 discoveries such as stem cell research, neuroprotective therapies, technological developments, pharmaceuticals, and gene therapies. Visit www.fightingblindness.ca or call 1-800-461-3331 to learn more.

About the Canadian Ophthalmological Society (COS)

The Canadian Ophthalmological Society is the national, recognized authority on eye and vision care in Canada. As eye physicians and surgeons, we are committed to assuring the provision of optimal medical and surgical eye care for all Canadians by promoting excellence in ophthalmology and by providing services to support our members in practice. Our membership includes over 900 ophthalmologists and 200 ophthalmology residents. We work collaboratively with government, other national and international specialty societies, our academic communities (ACUPO), our provincial partners and affiliates and other eye care professionals and patient groups to advocate for health policy in Canada in the area of eye and vision health. COS is an accredited, award-winning provider of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) through the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada (RCPS) and is an affiliate of the Canadian Medical Association (CMA). Visit www.cos-sco.ca to learn more.

About the Canadian Association of Optometrists (CAO)

The Canadian Association of Optometrists (CAO) is the national voice of optometry, providing leadership and support to its members to enhance the delivery of healthy eyes and clear vision for all Canadians. Founded in 1941 and formally incorporated in 1948, CAO is dedicated to collaboratively advancing the highest standard of primary eye care through the promotion of optimal vision and eye health, in partnership with all Canadians. Visit <https://opto.ca/> for more information. Visit www.opto.ca for more information.

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