

TALKING POINTS

Doctors of optometry take a leading role in an individual's overall eye and vision care, health and well-being.

- Doctors of optometry provide a lifetime of vision care and play a key role in their patients' total quality of life. Proper vision affects how well a person functions and succeeds in life.
- Doctors of optometry, America's primary eye health care providers, are the frontline of eye and vision care. In addition to examining, diagnosing, treating and managing diseases and disorders of the eye, they also:
 - Prescribe medications, low vision rehabilitation, vision therapy, spectacle lenses, contact lenses, and perform certain laser procedures and minor surgical procedures such as removing foreign objects from the eye and cornea.
 - Counsel patients regarding surgical and non-surgical options that meet their visual needs related to their occupations, avocations, and lifestyle.
- An in-person, comprehensive examination with a doctor of optometry is the medically-recognized standard to assure precise and healthy vision, identify and treat diseases such as dry eye and glaucoma, as well as ensure early diagnosis of immediate threats to overall health, including hypertension, stroke and diabetes, which may have no obvious signs.
 - Through an in-person comprehensive eye examination, doctors of optometry can detect more than 270 systemic and chronic diseases.
 - For example, in 2018, doctors of optometry identified signs of diabetes in more than 301,000 patients who did not know they had it, leading to earlier management of the disease.
- Children are at risk for a wide range of eye and vision disorders, but regular comprehensive eye examinations conducted by a doctor of optometry at key developmental milestones in a child's life and allow early detection, diagnosis, and prevention or treatment of eye conditions. Traditional vision screenings, such as those offered at schools and pediatrician offices, are a limited process and can't be used to diagnose an eye or vision problem, but rather may indicate a potential need for further evaluation. Unfortunately, many parents aren't aware and undue reliance on vision screenings alone can lead to major issues throughout their child's school years.

Doctors of optometry play a vital role in health care

- In more than 10,000 communities nationwide, optometrists are the only primary eye providers.
 - Patients enjoy greater access to the latest procedures and more immediate care since there are more doctors of optometry, especially in underserved areas, and an increasing amount of eye problems can be diagnosed and treated with one visit or without a referral.
 - Greater access for patients is a great advantage for senior citizens as well, as they typically need more frequent exams and diagnostic tests or procedures and many of them find it more difficult to travel longer distances to see a doctor.
- The average cost of an emergency room visit for an eye emergency is over \$900. Research shows treating eye emergencies at eye doctors' offices can potentially divert 1.4 million patients away from emergency rooms each year. Patients with urgent or emergency eye care needs are urged to consult their doctor of optometry for guidance and possible treatment before heading to a hospital emergency department.



TALKING POINTS

Education & Training

- After undergraduate college training, the post-graduate, doctoral-level degree program in optometry is comprised of an additional four years of extensive classroom, laboratory, and clinical training at an accredited optometry school. This education combines all phases of functional eye health care and optics with the health sciences in a unified, specialized program. Courses in pharmacology, optics, vision science, biochemistry, and systemic diseases are included.
- Optometry is one of the only doctoral-level health care professions to require continuing education in every state for license renewal.

Eye Health and Vision Statistics

- Up to 16 million Americans struggle with undiagnosed or untreated vision impairments. Combined with the fact that eye diseases, vision loss, and eye disorders create an estimated \$139 billion economic burden, the U.S. is facing a significant public health crisis.
- The American Optometric Association's (AOA) 2020 Eye-Q survey revealed Americans understand that eye health is important, but they aren't doing all they can to take care of their eyes.



92% of Americans value the health of their eyes as much as the health of their heart or lungs.



Yet, 4 in 10 don't know how to take good care of their eyes.



A quarter of Americans don't think they need an eye exam if their vision is clear – and nearly half of millennials agree.



Many Americans (52%) don't know that an eye disease diagnosis is part of a standard comprehensive eye exam.



AMERICAN OPTOMETRIC ASSOCIATION

AOA.ORG