College of Opticians of Ontario

BRIEFING NOTE

TO: **Board of Directors**

FROM: **Derick Summers, Chair, Registration Committee**

DATE: **November 30, 2026**

SUBJECT: **Practicum Policy**
Appendix A: Proposed Practicum Policy (Current with tracked changes)
Appendix B: Proposed Practicum Policy (Clean version)
Appendix C: Practicum Hours Summary from Environment Scan
Appendix D: Summary Notes from 2025 Industry & Academic Roundtables
Appendix E: Summary Notes from 2026 Conversations with Vendors

☒ For Decision ☐ For Information ☐ Monitoring Report

Purpose:

To review proposed updates to the Practicum Policy and provide feedback to the Registration Committee ahead of a final consultation with key system partners.

Background:

The Practicum Policy was approved on June 5, 2023, to set out how applicants must satisfy the practical experience component of the Registration Regulation (Regulation) in order to meet entry-to-practice requirements.

The policy was developed in anticipation of changes to the Regulation that would remove the detailed practical experience requirements from the regulation itself, such that they could be set out in policy going forward. This approach was intended to provide greater flexibility to adapt requirements in response to changes in professional practice and the practice environment.

To maintain continuity, the Practicum Policy approved in 2023 retained the existing practicum requirements that had previously been set out in regulation, with the understanding that substantive changes would only be considered after appropriate consultation and a reasonable implementation period.

The current Practicum Policy has the following minimum components:

- 1000 verified dispensing hours.
- 250 eyeglass fittings, of which 100 be multifocal fittings and 25 myopic or hyperopic fittings.
- 20 contact lens fittings, of which 5 be rigid gas permeable (RGP) fittings.

All components must be supervised by a person authorized to dispense prescriptions eyeglasses, contact lens, and/or subnormal vision devices in the jurisdiction where the dispensing takes place (e.g. optician, optometrist, ophthalmologist). Contact lens fittings that take place in Ontario must be supervised by an optician who has been approved as a contact lens mentor under the Contact Lens Mentor Policy.

Given that the current practicum requirements are based on a legislative provision that has remained unchanged since the Regulation was first approved in 1991, the transition to a policy-based framework provided an opportunity to assess whether the practicum requirements continued to reflect contemporary practice and remained relevant to the core competencies of the profession.

In recent years, the College of Opticians of Ontario (COO) has received ongoing feedback that one practicum requirement in particular, the completion of five rigid gas permeable (RGP) lens fittings, has become increasingly difficult for applicants to satisfy. Stakeholders have reported that declining demand for RGP lenses, coupled with a limited number of qualified mentors to supervise fits, has reduced opportunities for applicants to meet this requirement.

Following the amended Regulation coming into force on July 1, 2024, the COO undertook extensive research and stakeholder consultations to determine whether updates to the practicum requirements were warranted to better reflect current practice environments and address the perceived barriers.

For Consideration:

A Brief Overview of the Research Results & the Proposed Changes to the Practicum Policy

In order to determine what changes should be proposed for the Practicum Policy, a number of research and consultation methods were utilized to gather information about practicum requirements:

- Environmental scan of Ontario health regulators, Canadian opticianry regulators, Canadian optometric regulators, and international opticianry regulators.
- Focus groups were held via Zoom. One focus group consisted of educators from the approved opticianry programs. The other focus group consisted of industry professionals representing retailers, vendors, and the Ontario Opticians Association.
- Research papers on practicum requirements in other health professions.
- Individual interviews with various opticianry vendors and retailers in the market.

The research conducted provided feedback on the Practicum Policy, including insight into practicum requirements of various health professions, what opticianry products are most commonly used or

needed by patients, and what skills a new Registered Optician should have on their first day of practice.

Key themes from the feedback and research:

- There were no strong opinions from stakeholders on raising or lowering the requirement for 1000 dispensing hours. The environmental scan of regulators indicated that the COO's 1000 hours requirement sat in the middle of the practicum hours range.
- Myopia management is a growing practice area but is not generally considered a necessary skill for the first day of practice as a Registered Optician.
- The use of rigid gas permeable (RGP) contact lenses is on the decline currently sitting at less than 1% of the market.

Based on the research and feedback, the Registration Committee is proposing that the primary elements of the Practicum Policy remain unchanged, including the requirement for 5 RGP fits. Despite the feedback that the use of rigid contact lenses has declined in the past 30 years, stakeholders noted that RGPs continue to be used in various aspects of practice, and identified a risk to the public if this competency is no longer assessed prior to registration.

Instead, the Committee proposed to make the following changes to the Practicum, all of which are focused on clarifying language and alignment with current practice environments:

- Clarifying language around the number of eyeglass and contact lens fits.
- For eyeglass fits: clarification on the type of multifocal fits and myopic or hyperopic fits.
- For contact lens fits: addition of soft multifocal and soft toric fits.

The Practicum Policy with visible proposed tracked changes is attached as **Appendix A** and the proposed clean version of the policy is attached as **Appendix B** so that the Board can view what edits are being proposed by the Registration Committee

Research Methods Utilized

A number of methods were utilized to gain research and stakeholder feedback for the review of the Practicum Policy: environmental scan, focus groups, and consultations. An environmental scan was conducted of Ontario health regulators, Canadian opticianry regulators, Canadian optometry regulators, and some English-speaking international opticianry regulators.

Two roundtables were held: one with educators from the accredited opticianry programs and one with industry professionals along with the Ontario Opticians Association. As well, a series of individual Zoom interviews were held with various vendors in the opticianry profession. All were asked for their feedback on the Practicum Policy, trends in the industry, and what skills new opticians should know on day one of their practice.

1000 Dispensing Hours

The current Practicum Policy requires applicants to demonstrate that they've engaged in at least 1000 dispensing hours under the supervision of an authorized dispenser. Stakeholders were invited to provide feedback on whether the requirement remains appropriate, including whether the

threshold is too high or too low, to strike an appropriate balance between practice-readiness and avoiding unnecessary barriers to entry. Research was also carried out on standards across other opticianry regulators and health professions.

The key themes that emerged from research and stakeholder feedback:

- The requirement of 1000 hours lands in the middle of the range of supervised practicum hours as compared to other health regulatory bodies, including other opticianry regulators in Canada and internationally.
- In general, stakeholders felt that 1000 dispensing hours continued to be appropriate, with no respondent identifying any significant concerns to this aspect of the practicum.

In sum, neither the research nor the stakeholder feedback appeared to identify a compelling basis to modify this aspect of the practicum. As a result, the Registration Committee proposes that **no change** be made to this element as the current number of dispensing hours appears to strike an appropriate balance between practice-readiness and avoiding unnecessary barriers to entry.

Eyeglass Fittings: 250 Fittings in Total

The current Practicum Policy requires 250 eyeglass fittings under the supervision of an authorized dispenser. Stakeholders were asked whether the total number or type of eyeglass fittings should be changed to ensure that new opticians are ready for their first day of practice.

The key theme from stakeholder feedback around the required 250 eyeglass fittings:

- No strong opinions on raising or lowering the total number of eyeglass fittings.
- No barriers were identified in completing the number of eyeglass fittings.

Based on the feedback received, no indicators and barriers were identified to modify the required 250 eyeglass fittings. Therefore the Registration Committee proposes that **no change** be made to this requirement as this element allows practice-readiness and is not a hinderance for the completion of practicum.

Eyeglass Fittings: That of the 250 Fittings, 100 of the Fittings be Multifocal

The Practicum Policy currently requires that 100 of the required 250 eyeglass fittings be multifocal lens and be under the supervision of an authorized dispenser. Stakeholders were asked if new opticians required more or less experience with multifocal fits, and whether experience with any other types of lenses (e.g. task specific lenses, single vision, AI lenses, etc.) were necessary for a Registered Optician to know on their first day of practice in this current market.

Key themes from stakeholders on multifocal lens fittings:

- Orders on multifocal/progressive lenses are slightly higher than single vision lenses.
- Task specific lenses were not a rapidly growing market and while all feedback agreed that opticians should be able to dispense them, this was not generally considered a required “day one” skill. Currently, feedback indicates that approximately 10% of the market is in task specific lenses.

- Smart eyewear or AI eyewear has seen a slow increase in market demand but is not quickly rising.

Stakeholders identified that experience with single vision and multifocal/progressive lenses are necessary skills but no strong opinions were given about raising or lowering the required 100 multifocal lens fittings. It was also identified that task specific lenses are an emerging trend as patient lifestyles become more digital. Based on these findings, the Registration Committee is proposing that **no change** be made to this aspect of the practicum, as the number of fittings and lens types appear to remain appropriate to ensure optician readiness.

While the number of multifocal fits is not being proposed to change, feedback suggested that there was uncertainty whether certain task specific lenses could be counted toward the multifocal fit requirement. To address this, the Registration **proposes** to add clarifying language to the Practicum Policy that multifocal fits can include task specific lenses.

Eyeglass Fittings: That of the 250 Fittings, 25 of the Fittings be Myopic or Hyperopic

The Practicum Policy currently requires that 25 of the required 250 eyeglass fittings be myopic or hyperopic and under the supervision of an authorized dispenser. Stakeholders were invited to provide their thoughts as to whether the number of fits should be raised or lowered or if changes need to be made to ensure optician practice-readiness.

Key themes from the feedback on the required myopic or hyperopic fittings:

- Myopia management is a growing market as the population ages.
- Myopia management is a necessary skill but proficiency is not required on the first day of an optician's practice.

Stakeholders all agreed that myopia management is a growing market but no strong opinions were given about raising or lowering the required 25 fittings. In consideration of this feedback, the Registration Committee proposes that **no change** be made to the requirement that 25 of the 250 eyeglass fittings by myopic or hyperopic. The current number of required fittings in myopic or hyperopic assists in ensuring that a new optician has a semblance of knowledge to build upon as they begin their practice. The myopia or hyperopic fittings requirement also supports the public interest through a balanced and accessible fitting requirement.

Apart from the feedback received, it has been identified that there may be a misalignment between how the myopic or hyperopic fittings requirement is worded and the actual skill set it was intended to assess. Specifically, it has generally been understood that the purpose of requiring fits in both the myopic and hyperopic categories was to ensure that applicants gained experience with high power fittings, as they're considered more complex. To ensure the proper experience is gained, the Registration Committee **proposes** to update the requirement to read as follows: "25 myopic or hyperopic fits for high powers (+/- 5 diopters or higher)". This proposed clarifying language will better reflect the intent of this requirement to ensure exposure to complex fittings as part of the practicum. The proposed change that the fits have to be +/- 5 diopters or higher will allow students to have the experience with calculating higher power fits but acknowledges that not as many

patients wear +/- 6 diopters or higher and that fitting a 6 is very different than fitting a 4. The proposed inclusion of the number of diopters will allow for accessibility and education in these types of fits.

Contact Lens Fittings: 20 Fittings

The Practicum Policy currently requires 20 contact lens fittings under the supervision of a contact lens mentor (in Ontario) or an authorized contact lens dispenser (outside Ontario). The total number of contact lens fits can be in soft contact lens or in rigid gas permeable (RGP) lens. Feedback specific to the types of fits will be reviewed in a separate section below. Stakeholders were invited to provide feedback as to whether the number of 20 required contact lens fittings should be raised or lowered to ensure practice-readiness.

Key themes from stakeholder feedback on the number of contact lens fittings:

- Stakeholders in the roundtable and consultations did not have strong commentary about the overall number of required contact lens fits.
- Stakeholders agree that multifocal, toric, and myopia management are important skills for new opticians to be familiar with as there is a growing market.

Stakeholders did not have a strong opinion on modifying the number of required contact lens fittings. In light of this feedback, the Registration Committee proposes that **no change** be made to this element of the policy. The current requirement demonstrates to balance proper job training while avoiding restrictive entry requirements. The feedback around contact lenses identified that myopia management is an increasing market and will be addressed in the proposed changes below.

Contact Lens Fittings: That of the 20 Fittings, 5 of the Fittings be Rigid Gas Permeable Lens

The Practicum Policy currently requires that of the 20 contact lens fitting, 5 fittings be rigid gas permeable (RGP) lenses and be under the supervision of a contact lens mentor (in Ontario) or an authorized contact lens dispenser (outside Ontario). Stakeholders were asked for feedback as to whether the number of required fits should be lowered or if the RGP requirement should be removed.

Key themes from stakeholders on the RGP requirement:

- RGPs are still being worn by the public but the market for these lenses now accounts for less than 1%. This is in contrast to its popularity 20 years ago.
- Feedback was split between those who advocated for completely removing the RGP requirement or lowering the number RGP fits, and those who advocated for maintaining this requirement as a core/foundational skill for contact lens fitters. Some stakeholders were in favour of keeping the requirement but unsure of what the required number of RGP fits should be.
- Stakeholders identified that the main barrier to meeting the RGP requirement is limited access to both patient fitting opportunities and qualified contact lens mentors.

While some stakeholders supported reducing or removing the RGP requirement, it was generally agreed that the ability to fit rigid lenses continues to be a core foundational skill for opticians. The Registration Committee pose that eliminating the RGP requirement entirely could potentially put patients at risk, as applicants could be licensed without having demonstrated safe performance of this skill. Similarly, lowering the number of fits from the current number may not meaningfully preserve the competency and could have similar practical effects to removing it.

Rather than eliminating RGP fits from the practicum, the proposed approach is to address the barriers to completion. One way of reducing the accessibility barrier is to make permanent the temporary COVID-era provision in the Contact Lens Mentor Policy which allows instructors to qualify as contact lens mentors. This change would allow RGPs to be completed in the classroom while maintaining the competency standard. This proposed change would also allow peer-to-peer fits to occur and count towards the practicum requirement. Peer-to-peer fits would allow students to practise contact lens fittings on each other, while under the supervision of a contact lens mentor (in Ontario) or an authorized contact lens dispenser (outside Ontario), and does not have to specifically occur in a classroom.

The Registration Committee proposes that **no change** be made to the number of required RGP fits, but **proposes** that a corresponding amendment be made to the Contact Lens Mentor Policy to permanently allow academic instructors to qualify as contact lens mentors.

The proposed approach aims to safeguard patients by preserving this core competency while seeking to address the access issues that have been identified.

Contact Lens Fittings: Soft Multifocal and Soft Toric

The Practicum Policy currently requires 20 contact lens fittings under the supervision of a contact lens mentor (in Ontario) or an authorized contact lens dispenser (outside Ontario). The total number of contact lens fits can be in soft contact lens or in rigid gas permeable (RGP) lens, with a minimum of the 5 fittings be RGPs.

Stakeholder feedback indicated that familiarity with soft multifocal, soft toric, and myopia management are skills that opticians should have familiarity with on day one of their practice, as the number of patients requiring these fits are rising.

To address this market change, the Registration Committee **proposes** to include two other types of contact lens fittings to the Practicum Policy:

- 5 soft multifocal fittings; and
- 5 soft toric fittings.

This proposed change would mean that of the 20 contact lens fittings:

- 5 fittings will have to be RGP;
- 5 fittings will have to be soft multifocal; and
- 5 fittings will have to be in soft toric.

This proposed change aims to address one of the key themes from stakeholder feedback around contact lens fittings: that multifocal, toric, and myopia management are important skills for new opticians to be familiar with as patient needs evolve.

It should be noted that at this time, there is no concrete data as to whether this proposed change to require soft toric and soft multifocal fits might create any barriers or complications for students in meeting this practicum requirement. However, based on stakeholder feedback, it appears these types of fits have been on the rise for patients and are currently more common than (RGP) lenses in the practice environment. If a student is having trouble securing the proposed soft multifocal and/or soft toric fittings, contact lens fits can be done on a peer-to-peer basis, and can also be carried out in an academic environment via the proposed change of making the temporary addendum to the Contact Lens Mentor Policy a permanent part of the policy. Peer-to-peer fittings will also assist in reducing this accessibility barrier.

Clarifying Language Around Total Fits Needed for Eyeglass and Contact Lens

The Practicum Policy currently stipulates that 250 eyeglass fittings and 20 contact lens fittings are required. There was confusion if the types of fittings are on top of the total number of fits or included as part of the total. Proposed clarifying language has been added to provide transparency to the policy.

The number of eyeglass fittings and contact lens fittings have not changed. The proposed changes clarify the language around the fittings: that the total 250 required eyeglass fittings must include 100 multifocal and 25 myopic or hyperopic and that the total 20 contact lens fittings must include 5 RGPs, 5 soft multifocal, and 5 soft toric.

Status and next steps

Before moving forward, the Registration Committee is proposing to carry out a final consultation to gather feedback from key system partners, including educators, industry members and registrants, on the proposed updates to the Practicum Policy. The feedback will be reviewed and considered by the Registration Committee, after which the Committee will bring its recommendations forward to the Board for approval.

Public Interest Considerations:

The Registration Committee reviewed and considered the research and stakeholder feedback while drafting the proposed changes to the Practicum Policy. The proposed updates in the policy aim to support the COO's public interest mandate by:

- Maintaining practicum components that, based on extensive research and consultation, were found to continue to support competent practice.
- Adding/editing language to provide additional clarity around the inclusion of task-specific lenses within the requirement for 100 multifocals.
- Addressing a misalignment relating to the requirement for 25 myopic and hyperopic lenses to ensure candidates are exposed to more complex fittings.

- Addressing the accessibility concerns with respect to RGP fits by proposing to permanently codify the temporary addendum to the Contact Lens Mentor Policy that permits instructors to serve as mentors.
- Addressing stakeholder feedback that new opticians need more experience in multifocal, toric, and myopia management by proposing these types of contact lens fittings be included in the policy.
- Adding language to clarify how many total number of eyeglass fittings and contact lens fittings are required for a student to complete the practicum requirement.

All the proposed changes above aim to support public protection, provide transparency, uphold professional practicum standards, and ensure that practicum requirements remain grounded in research, accountability, and patient needs.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Considerations:

The Registration Committee recognizes that with the decrease in patients who wear rigid gas permeable (RGP) contact lens over the years, it may be difficult for students to achieve the required number of fits. To remove this accessibility barrier for students and to still ensure public safety, the Committee's proposed change to make the temporary addendum to the Contact Lens Mentor Policy a permanent part of the policy will assist in reducing this identified entry to practice barrier. In addition, the proposed policy change can assist in ensuring that fitting and dispensing RGPs is still accessible to patients who wear RGP.

The proposed change of requiring a number of soft toric and soft multifocal contact lens fittings will assist in a student's practice-readiness, but the Registration Committee acknowledges that it may create barriers or complications for students to meet the practicum requirement. There is currently no data as to whether this proposed change will be a barrier. However, to support accessibility of this proposed change and reduce barriers:

- During consultation, stakeholders indicated an increase usage among patients for soft toric and soft multifocal fits. Patients with these types of fits are much more common in the practice environment than patients who wear RGPs.
- Contact lens fits can be completed peer-to-peer. This will allow students to still meet the practicum requirement if they are unable to complete fits via patients.

The proposed changes to the Practicum Policy will be shared with opticianry educators, registrants, and the public for additional consultation, so there will be a further opportunity to identify and address any other concerns or barriers prior to finalizing the policy.

Risk Management Considerations:

The Registration Committee considered that the proposed changes to the Practicum Policy will provide a framework for new opticians to have the skills needed to treat patients on day one of their practice. The review of this policy and its proposed changes aim to mitigate new opticians lacking the relevant opticianry knowledge and to ensure that that the policy is reflecting the current landscape of opticianry practice realities.

For patients who wear RGPs, it is imperative to keep the RGPs fits requirement in the policy, while still addressing the accessibility challenges by students. Keeping the RGP requirement will mitigate the risk that patients might not have access to an optician with this knowledge.

Next Steps and Action Required:

That the Board approve the proposed Practicum Policy to proceed to stakeholder consultations or request that the Registration Committee make further revisions.

Appendix A

College of Opticians of Ontario

REGISTRATION POLICY

Practicum Policy

Introduction

To qualify as a Registered Optician, applicants must demonstrate to the Registration Committee that they have acquired practical fitting and dispensing experience.[1]

The following policy outlines the College's ~~Practicum~~practicum for applicants seeking registration as a Registered Optician. This ~~Practicum~~practicum may be completed as part of the applicant's educational program, or separately if the educational program does not include co-op placements or other practical experience components.

Applicants who are unable to complete the ~~Practicum~~practicum will be asked to demonstrate to the Registration Committee that they have gained the equivalent practical experience in another way.

Practicum

The ~~Practicum~~practicum consists of the following elements:

Activity	Minimum Requirement	Supervision Requirement
Verified dispensing experience	1000 hours	All dispensing must be supervised by a person authorized to dispense prescription eyeglasses, contact lenses and/or subnormal vision devices in the jurisdiction where the dispensing takes place (e.g. optician, optometrist, ophthalmologist).
Eyeglass fittings	250 fittings~~, including at least:~~ The 250 fittings must include: • 100 multifocal~~;~~ (can include task specific lens); and • 25 myopic or hyperopic fits for high powers (+/– 5 diopters or higher).	All eyeglass fittings must be supervised by a person authorized to dispense prescription eyeglasses in the jurisdiction where the dispensing takes place (e.g. optician, optometrist, ophthalmologist).

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[1] See section 7(1)2 of the Registration Regulation

Appendix A

College of Opticians of Ontario

Activity	Minimum Requirement	Supervision Requirement
Contact lens fittings	20 fittings~~, including at least~~ The 20 fittings must include: • 5 rigid gas permeable (RGP) • 5 soft multifocal • 5 soft toric	All contact lens fittings must be supervised by a person authorized to dispense contact lenses in the jurisdiction where the dispensing takes place (e.g. optician, optometrist, ophthalmologist). Contact lens fittings that take place in Ontario must be supervised by an individual who has been approved as a Contact Lens Mentor under the College's Contact Lens Mentor Policy.

[1] ~~See section 7(1)2 of the Registration Regulation~~

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Appendix A

College of Opticians of Ontario

Evidence

Applicants must provide evidence that they completed the Practicum. The following documents will be accepted as evidence of completion:

- Certain accredited education programs include all of the elements of the Practicum as part of their curriculum. Graduates of these programs may submit a letter from their education program verifying completion of the Practicum.

- Graduates from:

    - Accredited education programs that do not include the Practicum in their curriculum;
    - Non-accredited education programs; or
    - Internationally trained applicants

  must submit Form A – Dispensing Experience Verification signed by themselves and by the person(s) who supervised their Practicum.

Appendix B

College of Opticians of Ontario

REGISTRATION POLICY

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Eyeglass fittings	250 fittings The 250 fittings must include: • 100 multifocal (can include task specific lens); and • 25 myopic or hyperopic fits for high powers (+/– 5 diopters or higher).	All eyeglass fittings must be supervised by a person authorized to dispense prescription eyeglasses in the jurisdiction where the dispensing takes place (e.g. optician, optometrist, ophthalmologist).

[1] See section 7(1)2 of the Registration Regulation

College of Opticians of Ontario

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Contact lens fittings	20 fittings The 20 fittings must include: • 5 rigid gas permeable (RGP) • 5 soft multifocal • 5 soft toric	All contact lens fittings must be supervised by a person authorized to dispense contact lenses in the jurisdiction where the dispensing takes place (e.g. optician, optometrist, ophthalmologist). Contact lens fittings that take place in Ontario must be supervised by an individual who has been approved as a Contact Lens Mentor under the College's Contact Lens Mentor Policy.

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    - Non-accredited education programs; or
    - Internationally trained applicants

  must submit Form A – Dispensing Experience Verification signed by themselves and by the person(s) who supervised their Practicum.

	Number of Required Praticum Hours	Notes
Ontario Regulatory Colleges		
College of Kinesiologists of Ontario	1500	
College of Psychologists and Behaviour Analysts of Ontario	1500	
College of Respiratory Therapists of Ontario	1125	Must have completed their education program (or assessment) within 3 years before the date of their application for registration, **OR** have practised Respiratory Therapy for at least 1125 hours within those three years.
College of Audiologists & Speech-Language Pathologists of Ontario	350	Minimum 350 hours of supervised clinical education (maximum 50 hours simulated) •Professional Competencies, Profession Specific – Minimum 300 hours direct contact or simulation. Must include: o 50 hours with children o 50 hours with adults o 100 hours assessment o 50 hours intervention • Professional competencies, all disorders – Minimum 20 hours direct contact or simulation
College of Optometrists of Ontario	750	
College of Registered Psychotherapists of Ontario	155	125 direct client contact hours & 30 clinical supervision hours
Heath and Supportive Care Providers Oversight Authority	600	600 hours of education: Can include class time and practical training time
College of Early Childhood Educators	500	
Canadian Opticianry Regulatory Bodies		
Opticians of Manitoba	2000	For those trained outside Manitoba, must have 1 year's practical training and 2000 hours of practical experience. (pages 11-12)

Canadian Optometry Regulatory Bodies		
All practicum requirements have to be done through accredited optometry school. Most optometric residences are one year full-time (approx 40 hours/week) = 2080 hours/year		
International Regulatory Bodies in Opticianry		
General Optical Council (UK)	1600	Minimum 1600 hours/48 weeks of patient-facing learning
CORU Health and Social Care Professionals Council (Ireland)	1000	
Optometrists and Dispensing Opticians Board (New Zealand)	800	
Health Professions Council (South Africa)	274	•Clinical Practice (170 hours) •Use of Technology (minimum 10 patients per technology) •Soft contact lenses: 6 hours (minimum 6 patients) •Hard contact lenses: 6 hours (minimum 4 patients) •Low Vision: 7 hours (minimum 5 patients) •Paediatrics: 5 hours (minimum 5 patients) •Optical Industry skills: 80 lab hours Total: 274 hours plus lab technology patient minimums

Research Papers		
Optometry Document: *The Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry's Everything You Need to Know About Optometric Residences* https://opted.org/files/Residencies_PowerPoint.pdf Document: *The Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry: The Path to an Optometric Residency*	Approx 2080*	Most optometric residences are one year full-time (approx 40 hours/week = 2080 hours/year)
Nursing Research Paper: *Nursing students' experience during their practicum in an intensive care unit: A qualitative meta-synthesis* https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/public-health/articles/10.3389/fpubh.2022.974244/full	190 - 900 hours	Reserarch paper focused on nursing licensing board in the United States of America. Hours varied depending on the Licensing Board.
Nursing Research Paper: *Variability of clinical hours in prelicensure nursing programs: Time for a reevaluation?* https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S1557308720300639?via%3Dihub	South Africa: 2800 UK: 2300 Hong Kong: 1400 NZ: 1100 - 1500 Australia: 800	Research paper focused on the amount of required clinical hours in prelicensure in South Africa, the United Kingdom, Hong Kong, New Zealand, and Australia.

Practicum Consultation Feedback

Educator Focus Group

A total of seven participants took part in the Educators roundtable via Zoom in early 2025 with the College of Opticians of Ontario, with representatives from four of the accredited opticianry programs: Seneca College, Georgian College, La Cité College, and Stenberg College.

- More contact lens toric and multifocal fittings requirements
- New skills needed: anti fatigue, myopia control, occupational lenses
- How many hours required from students for to be ready to practise on day 1?
    - Question as to whether required number of hours can be removed? One suggestion to lower it to 500 hours.
    - Focus should be number of fits not number of hours.
    - Other provinces have a lower hours requirement and there seems to be no problem when entering workforce. Some students going to other province and then transferring to Ontario. Close this loophole by requiring same number of hours as other provinces?
    - Some students are having problems getting the number of high fits.
- Contact Lens: Rigid Gas Permeable (RGP) Fits
    - Half in favour of getting rid of RGP (hard contacts)
    - Half in favour of keeping it but lowering the 5 RGP fittings.
    - Finding a RGP mentor is difficult. Doing peer to peer fitting helps.
- Criteria to being a mentor
    - Engaged and willing to teach
    - Critical feedback skills
    - Seneca Polytechnic has a course for mentors that they can take before they become a mentor.
    - List expectations of a mentor so they know what to teach/expect.
    - Maybe instead of number of fits to qualify to be a mentor, consider years of full-time work and experience in a specialty.
        - E.g. 3 years of full-time experience: 2 years full-time glasses, 3 years full-time for contact lens.
- Anything COO can do to incentivize mentors?
    - Visibility – do they know they can do it and that the process is now online.
    - Finding mentors is not a problem but the admin of signing up to be a Contact Lens Mentors intimidate them to be a Contact Lens Mentor.
        - There are specific requirements to be a Contact Lens Mentor and opticians don't always keep track of how many fittings they have done and they don't have proof. They worry about being audited by COO so they don't do it.
        - One wanted the admin of signing up to be a Contact Lens Mentor removed.
    - Why do we register contact lens mentor and not eyeglasses mentor? Can COO streamline or remove the admin to register being a Contact Lens Mentor?
- Changes in immigration policy
    - Recruit more high school students. Focus on domestic recruitment
    - Fed govt doesn't recognize La Cite's opticianry program for international students so they aren't allowed to stay and work in Canada after graduating. People are choosing to go to the optometry asst program as that is recognized and they are allowed to work in Canada after graduation.
    - More visibility of the profession country-wide. COO can help with this.

- Delivery model of academic program
    - In-person portion necessary – consensus that lab portion has to be in-person.
    - Hybrid still an option: either because of geography or time in life (working f/t)
    - p/t students really prefer a hybrid approach as they are most likely working f/t.
        - Lab portion is in-person and necessary.
- Marketing, advocacy and visibility of the profession is more Association work than COO's purview.
- How can the COO improve/help within our mandate?
    - Opticians need to fear COO less. Should be using COO as a resource.
    - Appreciates the COO's participation in introducing themselves to graduates. To lessen the fear around regulatory body.
    - More French staff at COO would be appreciated.
    - Good for COO on doing focus groups with stakeholders.
        - Would also like to hear feedback on this topic from other stakeholders.
    - Most schools seemed really appreciative of the good reach out that COO does.

From Industry Focus Group

A total of five participants took part in the Industry roundtable via Zoom in early 2025 with the College of Opticians of Ontario and came from a number of areas of the opticianry industry profession: retailers, vendors, and the optician association. Specifically, participants came from Lenscrafters, Loblaws, Specsavers, Ontario Opticians Association, Hoya, and Essilor.

- Rigid gas permeable (RGP) experience is hard to find. 30 years ago, RGP was common place.
    - Instead of 5 RGPs fits, maybe requirement for toric, multifocal, and spherical contact lens.
- What are your must-haves for opticians to practice on day one?
    - RGP not a necessity for day 1 but important specialty as it is still required.
    - Stronger sense of multifocal and toric are needed – grads are really nervous about it as they don't have enough experience.
    - Lack of confidence in proficiencies.
    - Need better troubleshooting skills.
    - Rise in anti-fatigue lens is common now and opticians should know.
    - Increase in myopia – need more practice as it's gaining momentum.
    - Gap for graduates – they don't know how to use digital tools to measure (not just manual pencil).
- 1000 hours is reasonable. Practicum of four months of full-time at 40hours/week is not always possible as permanent full-time opticians usually do 35 hours/week. If part-time during the year can count towards the 1000 hours, it is easier on the employer.
    - Not less than 1000 hours. More – something in the 1200 range.
    - Note for schools: their constraints around 4 month practicum is making it harder for employers.
- Thoughts on the *Student & Intern Supervision Policy* (3 years exp & 750 fits to be supervisor) & *Contact Lens Mentor Policy.*
    - No less than 3 years of experience
    - No less than 750 fits.
    - Reconsider 15 fittings for RGB as that is a hinderance

    - Some confusion by registrants who think they can automatically be a mentor. Re-education of registrants needed as to what the requirements are to be a mentor.
    - Any other incentives for opticians to become mentors?
- More opticians needed. Retirement of baby boomers is going to propel a need for licensed opticians.
    - More stores
    - How do you draw opticians to specific areas that are having a hard time filling that position? (Non-GTA)
    - Need independent opticians (not just retail side)
- Are you seeing patient demands evolving?
    - Rise in mobile practice: going to retirement homes, rural communities, etc.
    - Patients don't want to come back to pick up their glasses. They want it shipped to them. They need to be fitted and patients don't want to come back.
- Leveling up those who work in optician stores but aren't opticians.
    - Cost is a factor (school, need to work full-time)
    - Can experience be leveraged as a pathway?
- How can COO work better with employers?
    - Continuance of forums with employers and COO
    - Increased levels of communication (not just email) to registrants and employers.

Practicum Consultations

A series of individual video interviews were held in July 2026 by Fazal Khan, the College of Opticians of Ontario's Registrar, and Stephanie Jung, the Director of Registration, were held with various vendors in the opticianry profession. A total of 5 individuals agreed to provide feedback on the Practicum policy, trends in the industry, and what skills new opticians show know on day one of their practice:

- Two individuals worked in retail, one from a nation chain store and one from an independent owner.
- One individual who worked for an eyeglass vendor.
- Two individuals who work two different contact lens vendor.

A series of questions were asked, divided into eyeglass and contact lens. The questions with the answers are summarized below.

Question 1: What area is emerging or growing rapidly that may become a major item being dispensed in the future?
Myopia management and progressives are two major areas of growth. Other emerging trends include lenses related to digital lifestyle.

Question 2: What type of lenses should a "Day-One" optician be able to fit?
All agreed that new opticians should have the following knowledge in eyeglasses: single vision, multifocal, progressive, and lifestyle lens (e.g. anti-fatigue, office lens). For contact lens, new opticians need to know single vision, multifocal, and toric lenses. Under contact lens still, opticians need to understand how to fit lenses, and insertion and removal skills. The consultants indicate that opticians should also have a better breadth of knowledge of different vendors and their product offerings.

Question 3: What type of eyeglass lenses make up the majority of your patient orders?
The two retailers indicated that the majority of eyeglass lenses orders are multifocal/progressive, and single vision. The retailers are also seeing a rise in task specific lenses.

Question 4: Where does "smart eyewear", or AI, or tech driven eyewear fit in? Is it emerging? What type of skills should students be learning to prepare them for this area?
Individuals noted that this isn't quickly emerging area but there will be a slow increase over the next few years. While it is not currently a big component, new opticians should have awareness of it.

Question 5: What percentage of sales are made up of single vision lenses and multifocal?
Orders on multifocal/progressive lenses are slightly higher than single vision lenses.

Question 6: What market share do specialty lenses such as anti-fatigue or myopia control the make up?
About 10% of the market share is specialty lenses but this area is growing.

Question 7: Do you see these products (e.g. anti-fatigue or myopia) as 'mainstream' at this current point? If not, do you see them growing to a point where they would be "entry to practice" or mainstay products at the dispensary?
Individuals noted that specialty lenses is a growing market and that students should have knowledge of it in order to be ready to practise. Students need to understand what the lenses do and the benefits of them.

Question 8: What category or types of contact lenses do you see as lenses a basic contact lens fitter must be versed with?

All individuals agreed that opticians need to understand how to fit soft toric, soft multifocal, and spherical lenses. It was stressed that opticians should have the general foundation of how to fit contact lenses and to have a broader knowledge of all products in one category. For example, all the products available in a multifocal.

Question 9: Where do you see RGP lenses in the marketplace? Is this a main offering of most dispensaries? Do you consider RGPs mainstream or specialty lenses in today's marketplace?

All individuals in retail and contact lens agreed that RGP lenses are still being used but it is no longer the dominant type of contact lenses. The current market for RGP lenses are for patients who our previous RGP wearers. All individuals agree opticians must have RGP insertion and removal knowledge.

Question 10: What % of patients these days are asking for these lenses? Is the market growing or shrinking?

According to the individuals interviewed, less than 1% of their client base are asking for RGP lens, but acknowledged that fitting of RGPs is still a required skill as there are still patients. One individual indicated that RGP is growing in orthokeratology.

Question 11: What type and modality of contact lens is growing in patient demand?

Individuals noted that multifocal contact lenses is growing in market share. Soft toric holds steady with a quarter of the market share and the majority of patients have spherical lenses.

Question 12: Are you seeing a growth in myopia control contact lenses?

Yes – the individuals indicated that myopia management was a growing area and that opticians will need to educate themselves on it but it is not a day one skill. It was also noted that students need to better understand and utilize collaborative care with the optometrist and/or ophthalmologist.

Question 13: What would you consider "specialty" or "advanced" contact lenses?

Some individuals agreed that multifocal and toric would be considered a specialty or advanced contact lens and opticians would not be expected to have this knowledge of the first day of their practice. However, another individual disagreed saying that multifocal and toric are now considered basic and are no longer specialty lenses.

Additional comments

Individuals offered additional comments during the conversations. Some comments specifically focused on suggestions for the Practicum Policy, soft skills, and one focused on returns.

- One retailer suggested that the requirements for 1000 hours for practicum be removed. They indicated that the number of hours does not indicate the competency of whether or not an optician was capable. Instead of a required number of hours, they suggested listing core components and having the number of times that component had to be performed.
- One contact lens vendor said that the number of hours required for practicum should be higher than the 1000 hours minimum. They also stressed that more ways are needed to incentivize opticians to become mentors. Mentors for RGPs are needed.
- Multiple individuals indicated that new opticians should have a better idea of how to troubleshoot a problem presented by a patient.
- One eyeglass vendor wanted to highlight the unnecessary lens returns being done by opticians to vendors. A more competent optician means less returns to vendors.