

BRIEFING NOTE

TO: Board of Directors

FROM: Patient Relations Committee

DATE: September 28, 2026

SUBJECT: Demographic Data Collection Project

☒ For Decision

☐ For Information

☐ Monitoring Report

Purpose:

To review and consider approval of the proposed survey questions for the demographic data collection project.

Background:

The College is developing a voluntary demographic survey to better understand the backgrounds and experiences of its registrants. Advancing diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) and addressing discrimination are key components of the College's public protection mandate. Understanding the demographic composition of the registrant population will provide important insight into current representation and potential barriers within the profession.

The project aligns with the COO's Strategic Plan for 2026-2028. In March, the Board approved the Strategic Plan Monitoring Template. Under Outcome 3.5, which focuses on strengthening the representation of Indigenous and other equity deserving groups at the Board and committee level, the Board approved strategy 3.5.1 to collect demographic data on registered opticians. A key performance indicator (KPI) for this strategy is the launch of a registrant demographic survey.

The project also supports other related strategic outcomes, including Outcome 1.3, "*Patient care is more inclusive and culturally safe,*" and Outcome 1.5, "*There is a sufficient number of qualified opticians to meet the needs of Ontario patients*". The Office of the Fairness Commissioner (OFC) also encourages regulatory bodies to collect demographic data to support inclusion and anti-racism efforts and identifies this as an emerging best practice. Other Ontario regulatory colleges undertaking similar initiatives include the [Ontario College of Social Workers and Social Service Workers \(OCSWSSW\)](#), [College of Nurses \(CNO\)](#) and [College of Dental Hygienists of Ontario \(CDHO\)](#).

Objects of the survey include:

1. Providing a clearer understanding of the demographic composition of the College's registrant base.

2. Monitoring demographic trends over time, including changes in representation across the profession.
3. Supporting targeted, opt-in engagement with registrants.
4. Identifying potential barriers to entering and remaining in the profession.
5. Informing DEI initiatives that support the College's public interest mandate.

For Consideration:

The proposed survey questions are attached at **Appendix A**.

The questions are based on those developed by the OCSWSSW as part of its Equity and Inclusion Data Initiative and are informed by the Canadian Census and the Anti-Racism Data Standards established under the *Anti-Racism Act*.

It is recognized that no standardized set of questions can fully capture all aspects of diversity. Efforts have therefore been made to develop questions that are as inclusive as possible, while maintaining a structure that will support meaningful analysis and comparability between the College's data and broader Ontario population data. To further support inclusivity, registrants will also have the opportunity to provide a written response where the available response options do not fully reflect their identity or experience.

Survey Implementation

The survey is intended to be integrated into the annual registration renewal process, beginning with the 2027 renewal cycle. However, participation will be voluntary and will not affect a registrant's ability to complete their renewal. Registrants may answer all, some, or none of the questions, select "I prefer not to answer" for any question, and review or update their responses during each renewal period. Registrants may also withdraw their consent at any time and request that their information be removed or no longer used.

Survey responses will be kept confidential and managed in accordance with applicable privacy standards. Data will be securely stored separately from registrant profiles, with restricted access, so that individual responses cannot be linked to specific registrants. All data will be analyzed and reported in aggregate form only, ensuring that no individual can be identified from the results.

How will the data not be used?

It is important to highlight that the data collected **will not be used** for any of the following purposes:

- **It will not be used or reported** in a manner that could identify an individual registrant.
- **It will not be linked** to individual registration records or used to assess registration or practice requirements.
- **It will not be used** in complaints, investigations, or discipline processes.
- **It will not be used** for any purpose that could negatively affect, harm or discriminate against a registrant.

- **It will not be used or reported** in a manner that perpetuates bias, stereotypes or discrimination.

The initial set of survey questions were reviewed by the Patient Relations Committee at its meeting on May 12. Following its review, the committee approved proceeding with stakeholder consultation and engagement with key communities and organisations, including the College's registrant base. Feedback received through this consultation was then reviewed by the COO team and used to inform revisions to the questions. The revised question set was then brought back to the committee for further review at its meeting on July 28.

Consultation Feedback

The registrant consultation was conducted from June 22 to July 22 through an online survey seeking feedback on the proposed questions. The consultation was promoted through e-blasts, the College website, and social media, with the explanatory document (**Appendix B**) and survey link provided to registrants.

A total of 94 responses were received, representing 2.7% of the College's registrant base. A summary of the consultation results is provided in **Appendix C**.

When asked whether the College should proceed with implementing the demographic data project, responses indicated:

- **Yes:** 32%
- **No:** 41%
- **Unsure:** 26%

The committee reviewed this feedback and noted that the majority of respondents did not support proceeding with the project, while a significant proportion remained unsure. Committee members agreed that clearer information about the project's purpose and use of the data was needed and recommended that a clear, plain-language introduction to the survey should be used. Continuing education roadshows, a dedicated webinar, and online educational content were also identified as opportunities to provide further information, address questions, and support informed participation.

Reasons for supporting the project

- *Advancing the College's public interest mandate*

Respondents noted that understanding the demographics of the profession could help the College better serve the public and communities across Ontario. As one respondent noted, *"having this information will allow the COO to explore how they can best serve the public through understanding registrants' unique demographics."*

- *Understanding barriers to entering and remaining in the profession*

Respondents identified the potential for demographic data to help identify barriers to entering and remaining in the profession and to support a more inclusive profession. One respondent noted that, *“used in a responsible way, collecting this information may help to identify barriers that affect people entering the profession.”*

- *Supporting future planning and decision-making*

Respondents noted that a better understanding of the profession’s composition could inform future planning and decision-making. One respondent described the survey as providing *“a broader picture of registrant composition”* that could *“help to chart a way forward.”*

- *Supporting evidence-informed regulation*

Respondents also identified demographic data as a potential resource for evidence-informed regulation and policy development in the public interest. As one respondent noted, *“it is important to have the data to help make regulatory decisions going forward.”*

Challenges identified with the project

- *Purpose and value of the initiative*

The most common concern raised by respondents was a lack of clarity about the project’s purpose, value and connection to the College’s public interest mandate. Comments included, *“Not exactly sure how this information benefits the College”* and *“What difference does it make to the profession?”*

The committee recognized that demographic information would establish a baseline understanding of the profession and help to identify potential gaps and systemic barriers. In response, the committee agreed that clear, plain-language information about the project should be developed, including through a survey introduction and supporting educational resources.

- *Privacy and collection of personal information*

Some respondents expressed concern about the collection and storage of sensitive demographic information and questioned whether the College should collect this type of data. Concerns included potential privacy risks and discomfort with disclosing personal information, with one respondent noting, *“I have some reservations about collecting this level of personal demographic information.”*

In considering these concerns, the committee noted that survey responses would be stored securely and separately from registration records, with restricted access and no ability for College staff to link responses to individual registrants. The committee agreed that clear information about these privacy and security safeguards should be provided to help address these concerns.

- *Use of the demographic data*

Some respondents expressed concern that demographic information could be used to influence hiring decisions or to assess individuals based on personal characteristics. Comments included, “*The person should get the job regardless of who they may be*” and “*people should be hired based on skill and experience.*” The feedback indicated some misunderstanding about the purpose of collecting demographic information and how the data would be used.

In considering these concerns, the committee agreed that the intended use of the data should be clearly communicated and that educational resources should be developed to explain the purpose of the data collection. Data collected through the survey would provide information about the demographic composition of the profession as a whole and would not be used for hiring, registration, practice requirements, complaints, investigations or discipline. Responses would not be linked to individual registrant records, and results would only be analyzed and reported in aggregate form.

- *Perspectives of demographic data collection*

Some respondents encouraged the College to consider broader aspects of diversity, including socioeconomic background, education, professional pathway, and other lived experiences. One respondent noted the importance of clarifying “*how it will avoid reducing representation to only a few visible demographic categories*”.

The committee recognised that a single survey could not capture all aspects of identity and lived experience. The proposed questions were therefore intended to balance inclusivity with the need for meaningful analysis and comparison with broader Ontario population data. Registrants would also have an opportunity to provide additional information through open-text responses.

- *Voluntary participation and data quality*

Some respondents expressed concern that the voluntary nature of the survey could result in low participation and limit the representativeness of the data collected. One respondent commented, “*I do believe in having accurate information and I believe you would have to have the majority participate...to have accuracy*” while another questioned whether there will be “*enough participation to gain true numbers.*”

The committee recognised that building participation would take time and could be supported through ongoing communication and engagement. A multifaceted communication campaign would support the project, with participation expected to grow over the next two to four years. While voluntary participation may affect the completeness of the data, demographic information of this nature must be collected on a voluntary basis. The *Data Standards for the Identification and Monitoring of Systemic Racism* recognize that consent is essential to respecting an individual’s privacy and dignity when collecting personal information.

Feedback on the proposed survey questions

Many respondents considered the proposed survey questions to be clear, inclusive and comprehensive, particularly given the ability to select multiple responses and provide open-text answers. Respondents also emphasized the importance of allowing individuals to decline to answer individual questions. However, some respondents questioned the use of self-identification as an approach to demographic data collection.

The proposed survey questions were also shared with key organizations for review. [Citizens with Disabilities Ontario \(CWDO\)](#) reviewed the disability-related questions to support alignment with current disability definitions and inclusive data collection practices. The [Ontario Anti-Racism Directorate \(ARD\)](#) also reviewed questions related to Indigeneity, ethnicity and race, and [The 519](#) reviewed questions related to gender identity and sexual orientation, with both organizations providing feedback on inclusive language and best practices. Feedback from these consultations informed revisions to the proposed survey questions.

Following the committee meeting, the question set has been further amended to include a concise, plain-language introduction outlining the survey's purpose, voluntary participation, confidentiality and use of responses. Registrants may also access a webpage with additional information about the initiative or choose to skip the survey altogether. A consent acknowledgement has also been added confirming respondents' understanding of the survey's purpose and terms, as well as their ability to withdraw consent at any time.

Public Interest Considerations:

Supporting DEI and addressing discrimination are key components of the College's public protection mandate. Understanding the current landscape of the profession, including representation and potential barriers, is central to this work. The data collection project will support this understanding and help inform decisions that reflect the diversity and lived experiences of the profession.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Considerations:

Collecting demographic data will establish a baseline of registrant composition and help assess how well it reflects the Ontario population. This information will help identify gaps and disparities, inform efforts to address systemic barriers, and support the development of equity-focused initiatives to better serve the public. The College is also taking steps to ensure that the survey questions and administration align with DEI best practices and established data sources, including the Canadian Census and the Anti-Racism Data Standards under the *Anti-Racism Act*.

Risk Management Considerations:

This project involves registrants self-identifying and sharing personal information, which carries inherent privacy implications. The College is committed to protecting the confidentiality and security of all data collected. Information will be securely stored separately from individual registrant profiles, with restricted access, and will only be analyzed and reported in aggregate form. These safeguards will be clearly communicated to registrants at the point of collection.

Recommendations/Action Required:

The Patient Relations Committee recommends that the Board of Directors approve the proposed survey questions as presented in **Appendix A**.