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ADVOCACY UPDATE

February 04, 2026

Last week, we shared a comprehensive overview of the advocacy work underway and the launch of *Your Vision Matters*, a campaign designed to ensure optometry's message is heard clearly by government and the public, and to support optometrists in reinforcing that same message.

Now we are at the point where advocacy moves beyond representation to participation.

The short video below highlights the core points of this work and sets the context for the more detailed information that follows in this email.

Dr. Nensi Advocacy Update

What has happened so far

Phase One of negotiations with the government has concluded and both sides have tabled formal positions and exchanged counter-proposals. We have tested areas of alignment and identified areas of disagreement. Negotiations are ongoing. There is no pause. There is no disengagement.

Where things stand now

There is a clear gap between the OAO's position and the government's current stance. Specifically:

- The Ministry's most recent proposal does not cover the cost of delivering insured care.
- It does not support a sustainable model for community optometry practices.
- It does not reflect the complexity, urgency, or volume of care optometrists are now expected to provide.

This gap is real, and it is the central issue in negotiations. This is why we are entering Phase Two of advocacy.

What Phase Two means

Phase Two means:

- Increasing political engagement outside the table.
- Expanding public and grassroots pressure at a time when decisions are actively being shaped.

This escalation is necessary because creative, reasonable, and defensible leverage matters in this phase.

Why the next six weeks matter

The next six weeks contain time-sensitive key events including the Legislature returning on March 23, and OAO hosted Queen's Park event on March 30. In the weeks following, Ontario is expected to announce the 2026 budget.

This is the period when:

- Political direction is finalized
- Mandates are set
- Budget signals are locked in

After this window, flexibility drops significantly.

It's important to be clear about the environment we are navigating. Any movement on remuneration requires a government mandate that extends beyond the Ministry of Health, with fiscal constraints and Treasury Board oversight limiting flexibility. The provincial budget cycle creates real timing pressure — once mandates and budgets are finalized, options narrow.

These dynamics are not unique to optometry, but they do shape how and when progress can occur.

How your action fits into this

Member engagement in this phase is not symbolic. Consistent, disciplined messaging from members will reinforce the credibility of optometry's position, strengthen OAO's negotiating leverage, and make the consequences of inaction more visible to decision-makers.

Move this work forward in three steps:

Step 1. Use the Advocacy Toolkit

We've developed a toolkit to make it easy to amplify optometry's message in your community. The toolkit includes:

- Printable posters for your office to encourage patients to sign up for the campaign.
- Ready-to-use social media posts to amplify the message in your community.

These materials are designed to support consistent, visible advocacy at the local level and are available anytime on the OAO Advocacy web page.

Step 2. Share patient stories

We're looking for real patient stories that bring *Your Vision Matters* to life. These stories matter because they show decision-makers what optometry delivers—every day, in real communities. These are the types of stories we're looking for:

- Vision-saving care through early detection
- Urgent eye care that kept patients out of emergency rooms
- Complex care delivered in rural or underserved communities
- Situations where a trusted OD-patient relationship enabled timely intervention

To share your patient story,
Email: oaocommunications@optom.on.ca
Subject line: Your Vision Matters – Patient Story

Step 3. Join the OAO Advocacy Network

Over the past few months, optometrists across Ontario have been actively engaging their local MPPs. With 124 ridings to cover, we are now organizing this work through an MPP ambassador program called **OAO Advocacy Network** to strengthen the impact of these efforts.

By joining the network, you will receive meeting preparation support and ready-to-use materials to enable ongoing, effective engagement with MPPs.

The OAO will support you throughout the process to ensure every interaction is aligned, consistent, and impactful.

Join the OAO Advocacy Network

Deadline: February 12, 2026

For any further information email oaoinfo@optom.on.ca

This is not business as usual.

Negotiations are active. The gap is real. And the window for influence is limited.

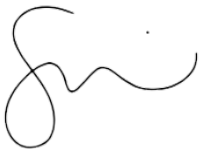
Consistent, coordinated member engagement strengthens optometry's position and reinforces the case at the negotiating table.

Your Vision Matters is the framework guiding this work. What we do together over the next six weeks through patient engagement, public visibility, and direct conversations with MPPs will influence how and when decisions are made.

This is the moment for informed, coordinated action.

We will continue to keep you informed with clarity and candour as this work moves forward.

Sincerely,



Dr. Shaina Nensi

President, Ontario Association of Optometrists

Questions?

For inquiries about OAO programs, events, or membership, please contact OAO at **oaoinfo@optom.on.ca**

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