



Statement on Behalf of Dr. Sheldon Salaba, President of the Ontario Association of Optometrists

October 18, 2021

In late August, the OAO accepted an invitation to mediation with the Ontario government to fight for high-quality eye care for our patients. After only two days, it became abundantly clear that the Ministry of Health was not there to negotiate in good faith. Instead of focusing on a real, long-term solution, the government used the process as a publicity stunt. The government breached confidentiality when disclosing confidential information to the public, and offered a one-time payment that was never negotiated. These actions demonstrate the government's lack of commitment to a responsible bargaining process.

While it is accurate the OAO did not accept the terms of the mediation, we stand confident in that decision as those terms would have prevented us from achieving our goal of a long-term solution. At no point did we anticipate the government to walk away after only one attempt at cooperation. The fact is, mediation is a costly process. The OAO is a small organization that does not have the infinite resources required to engage in a process where one of the parties is not taking it as seriously as the other. Eyecare in Ontario has been left behind for over three decades because we have blindly trusted these same disingenuous outreaches by the Ministry of Health over the years. While they talk about building a new and better relationship, to date there have been no commitments or indication of a thoughtful plan that will ensure quality access to eye care for everyone in Ontario today, and into the future. We need reassurances that this time it is truly different. Our phone lines remain open and we patiently wait for the Ministry to reach out and discuss a genuine path forward - one built on trust and constructive dialogues. The people of Ontario deserve no less.