

Alberta Optometry Patients

Frequently Asked Questions

What changes can I expect to see to my optometry coverage in Alberta?

Effective February 1, 2025, three main changes will occur:

1. Partial eye exams will be delisted
 - a. This means that if, during a full eye exam, there is a reason the exam can't be completed or there is a reason for a follow up, there is no covered option for bringing the patient back.
2. Retinal imaging and photography
 - a. There will be a reduction in the frequency that our optometrists can see their patients by 50%. Due to this, it will become more difficult to follow up with patients as frequently as needed, increasing the potential of eye disease needlessly advancing; and
3. Cannot bill basic eye services (B650) and medically necessary eye care (B900) on the same day
 - a. Optometrists are no longer able to complete all the needed vision care in one appointment. Albertans will need to re-book and come back on a different day to get the balance of needed care.

What impact will these changes have on Albertans?

The changes announced by Alberta Health will have major impacts on all Albertans seeking eye health care.

With partial eye exams being delisted, that means if during a full eye exam there is a reason the exam can't be completed or there is a reason for a follow up, there is no covered option for bringing the patient back. There are several examples of how this will impact Albertans:

Delisting B651s

- As children grow, so do their eyes and their vision can change. If there are indications this has happened, the optometrist can no longer confirm a vision change and implement appropriate care. So, a child's vision could be impaired, which then impacts their ability to do well in school and live a full, active life.
- Individuals who have complex needs and are unable to sit through an entire eye exam. They will no longer be able to be brought back when they are calm. This is also common with young children, as bringing them back was a reasonable option that avoided negative experiences or trauma for the patient.





Retinal Imaging and Photography Cut in Half

With the frequency of optometrists being able to see their patients being reduced by 50 per cent, it will become difficult to follow up with patients as often as needed. In turn, this increases the potential for eye disease to needlessly advance. For example:

- Patients may delay or eliminate appointments, increasing the risk of progression in eye diseases like Age-Related Macular Degeneration, Glaucoma and Diabetic Eye Disease, potentially leading to blindness if not managed according to evidence based standards of care. Because the number of follow up exams has been reduced, a patient will now pay out of pocket for needed follow up exams. This will impact vulnerable populations and those on fixed incomes the most.
- These changes could lead to more patients with needless vision loss. If someone has diabetic eye disease and should be followed over a period of time for signs of eye health changes, this option is no longer available.

Cannot Bill B650 and B900 Same Day

As a result of these changes, optometrists are no longer able to complete all of the needed care in one appointment. Albertans will need to re-book and come back on a different day to get the balance of needed care. For example:

- Delays of eye care can have serious consequences, such as irreversible vision loss. If, during an exam, an optometrist sees reason for additional testing, they can no longer complete the tests during the same appointment. They need to re-book the patient for a separate appointment. This will increase wait times for eye care, and if it's an issue that needs a referral to a specialist, there is now an increase in wait times here, too. This also unnecessarily increases expense and hardship for vulnerable populations and rural Albertans who travel to see an optometrist.
- This also affects patients who are in care facilities and unable to leave. The ability to dilate the patient and ensure the patient is properly cared for that day may be compromised.

When will the changes take effect?

Alberta Health has announced these changes take effect starting February 1, 2025.



Who will be impacted most by these changes on February 1?

All Albertans will be impacted by the changes announced by Alberta Health, but the following populations will be most notably impacted:

- Patients with special needs
- Low vision patients
- Patients with chronic eye conditions including glaucoma, macular degeneration, diabetes, retinal or neurological conditions
- Those with difficulties accessing transportation for multiple appointments
- People in rural Alberta who must travel distances for services

Have eye exams for children and seniors been affected by this announcement?

At this point in time, the government has not made any changes to eye exams for those under 19 years of age and over 65.

Will I have to pay more out of pocket for optometry services in Alberta?

For insights related to costs and payment, please contact your family optometrist as all rates are set by individual optometrists in their clinics.

Will I need to book more than one appointment to address all of my eye health needs?

You will need to speak to your optometrist about your specific eye health needs. However, as optometrists are no longer able to bill basic eye services and medically necessary eye care on the same day, Albertans will need to re-book and come back on a different day to receive all of the care needed. For example, if an optometrist sees reason for additional testing during an exam, they can no longer complete the tests during the same appointment.

If I have further questions, who should I contact?

Should you have further questions, please contact your family optometrist for more information. Patients are also encouraged to reach out to their local MLA to ensure that their voices are heard.

Was my optometrist aware that these changes were coming?

No. These changes were implemented without any prior consultation with Alberta optometrists.

