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## NEWS RELEASE

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Ministry of Health Services

### **MORE CHOICES FOR EYE HEALTH CARE ANNOUNCED**

VICTORIA – Government is expanding the range of eye care service options available to consumers while ensuring patient safety, Health Services Minister Colin Hansen says. The changes clarify the roles of optometrists and opticians by updating the types of procedures they can perform.

Amendments to regulations governing optometrists will allow them to offer treatment previously offered only by physicians for some eye health problems, including:

- Diagnosing and treating some eye diseases and disorders, and
- Prescribing some therapeutic drugs.

“We are making a strategic decision on eye health care that will improve the public’s access to professional care,” Minister Hansen said. “We want to make it as convenient as possible for people to obtain treatment for common eye conditions.”

Other Canadian jurisdictions, including Alberta, Saskatchewan, Quebec, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and the Yukon, already allow optometrists to prescribe therapeutic drugs.

Regulations relating to opticians will also be amended to allow them to sight-test healthy adults using computerized testing equipment, provided the client signs a consent form that they understand the difference between a sight test and an eye health exam.

Opticians in British Columbia and Alberta have been performing computerized sight tests for several years. The amendment ensures consumers’ eye health history is considered before a sight test is performed and that consumers are aware of the purpose and limitations of sight testing. Quality assurance guidelines will be developed in conjunction with the College of Opticians of British Columbia, which will monitor use of sight testing equipment by opticians.

Eye health exams assess the medical health of a patient’s eyes, as well as their vision, and can only be performed by an optometrist or ophthalmologist. Sight tests only measure the refractive error of the person’s eyes to indicate the power of the lens needed to correct their vision.

“Optometrists expressed concerns that the public might confuse computerized sight tests for a full eye health exam,” Hansen said. “This change offers consumers the flexibility to obtain sight tests from opticians, while ensuring they understand the function of a full eye health exam in maintaining good eye health.”

To protect people for whom an eye health exam is necessary before glasses can be safely prescribed, opticians will not be permitted to perform sight tests on the following:

- Individuals under 19 or over 65;
- Individuals with specific medical conditions which may cause disease of the eye. Examples include diabetes, high blood pressure and many other illnesses involving the eye.
- Individuals with certain categories of eye prescriptions.

“I am confident that a trained optician using the autorefractor test does not pose any harm to individuals,” said Dr. Donald North, an ophthalmologist with 25 years experience with automatic refractors. “This test has never made a claim of diagnosis. These new processes will give added assurance that an individual being fitted for eyeglasses to correct common optical errors is also made aware of the need for regular eye health exams.”

“Sight testing technology has evolved to the point that healthy consumers from the age of 19 to 64 now have more choice in purchasing corrective lenses,” Hansen added. “We have looked at the safety of computerized autorefractors and found no evidence to suggest these devices are unsafe when used by opticians.”

The changes are expected to take effect following a three-month consultation period provided for under the Health Professions Act.

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