

August 27, 2021

Dear Minister Christine Elliott
Deputy Premier and Minister of Health,

I am terribly disappointed in the offer presented to the optometrists of Ontario via Twitter and later via regular mail. There is a very clear disconnection between your understanding and the true facts of the situation. I have taken your letter and added my notes in red.

Please also visit www.ottawaeyedoc.ca to read the letter to my patients about the upcoming OHIP service withdrawal that is scheduled to occur on September 1st unless there is a marked change in course by your government.

Respectfully,



Dr. R.J. Tripp, Optometrist
Proud member of the Ontario Association of Optometrists

I am writing to you today to provide an update on the government's negotiations with the Ontario Association of Optometrists (OAO).

FACT: there has been very little in terms of negotiations and nothing that has been respectful or meaningful as the government and the ministry have no plan to propose a deal with any meaningful change.

I want you to hear from me directly that the government recognizes that you and all optometrists in Ontario provide patients with vital and quality eye health and vision care. I am personally grateful for your ongoing commitment to the highest standard of vision care for all Ontarians and your support throughout the COVID-19 pandemic.

FACT: your government denied optometrists timely access to PPE, denied patients access to optometrists for emergency eye care by publicly stating that those patients are equally served at their GP or NP, and denied optometrists proper early access to vaccination despite the profession meeting all of the requirements for high risk/close contact professions.

I also know that optometrists have been long neglected by previous governments, who have failed to negotiate a fair and sustainable agreement. After too many years of delay, I want to be clear that our goal is to reach an agreement as soon as possible and, most importantly, build a long-term and sustainable funding relationship with Ontario's optometrists that ensures patients can continue to receive the care they need. We have a plan to do exactly that, but it takes a significant amount of work and two partners willing to take it on together.

FACT: the offer outlined below is also a failure to negotiate a fair and sustainable agreement. And, optometry is willing to partner with the government to find a solution. The government has been the only party not at the table. Despite our attempts to reach out, there was absolutely no communication from the government or the Ministry from December 2020 to August of 2021. That is simply government neglect and proof that the government has no intention of reasonably negotiating a solution. And, in December 2020 our Association offered to jointly support an analysis of the cost to provide eye care in Ontario. Your government refused to be a part of that process, again proof that the government is not interested in finding a reasonable solution.

To that end, with the third wave of the COVID-19 pandemic behind us the government recently entered into rigorous bilateral negotiations, later with the support of a third-party mediator, with the OAO.

FACT: There have been no rigorous bilateral negotiations, despite the attempts from the Ontario Association of Optometrists. After almost 8 months of silence there was a meeting in early August, where the Ministry and government immediately declared an impasse, and requested mediation. Mediated meetings have been limited, and despite the promise of confidentiality during mediation this government, and indeed the Minister of Health, broke the rules of these discussions by leaking this offer through Twitter to the media rather than keeping the process within the confines of acceptable mediation and negotiation. Proof again that this government is not interested in engaging to find a solution.

At that time, we shared a proposal that was designed to take immediate action to right years of neglect and establish a process that would put both parties on a path to a long-term and sustainable solution. It includes immediate funding increases, a commitment to future funding increases and a plan to work together to better understand the issues that will allow us to productively address funding in the future. This is important work and we believe it should be done in the spirit of collaboration.

FACT: as noted above, the government has clearly not lived up to the spirit of collaboration.

I want to be fully transparent with you. Here is the offer we put on the table:

- An immediate compensation increase of 8.48% at the fee code level, retroactive to April 1, 2021. This represents a “catch up” of fee increases calculated to reflect similar increases applied to physicians over the past decade.

FACT: There is a gap of 77.8% between the current average fee of about \$45 and our costs to provide the service of \$80. This 8.48% increase is an absolute insult and proof that the government is not listening to our concerns and not interested in finding a funding model that protects optometric care in the future.

- A one-time payment of \$39 million. Like the fee increases described above, this payment would cover a retroactive period over the past decade and was calculated to reflect similar increases applied to physicians during this time.

FACT: Optometry did not ask for any retroactive payments, and this is a political move to try and score points with the public, rather than a solution to the problem of access to care in the future.

FACT: within the last 10 years Ontario Optometrists have performed around 40 million eye exams, so this is a retroactive payment of \$1 per exam, when the funding shortfall is 35x that amount.

FACT: this funding announcement is only 25% of the costs that are currently subsidized by optometrists in any single year in Ontario. And, in my practice, my share of this funding announcement will only cover less than 2 months of losses incurred by covering the shortfall of OHIP funding.

- Future fee increases to align with increases provided to physicians under the upcoming Physician Services Agreement, including any increases physicians receive beginning April 1, 2021.

FACT: with the above increase and then being tied to the physicians increase, Ontario Optometrist will forever be forced to pay out of our own pockets to provide OHIP care. This is not sustainable, fair, equitable, reasonable, or respectful.

- A commitment to immediately establish a Working Group with the OAO that would continue to be supported by a mediator and would allow us to come to a common understanding on the overhead costs associated with delivering publicly funded optometry services, and inform ongoing negotiations associated with the fees for the delivery of optometry services.
- A commitment to ensure ongoing monthly discussions with the OAO through establishing an Insured Optometry Services Review Committee to:
 - o Develop recommendations on the implementation of the fee increases; and
 - o Provide a mechanism to continue to discuss health care policy and system issues affecting optometrists.

FACT: working groups and committees have no power to impose changes, and once we have agreed to the above proposed funding changes the provision of a working group is simply a political ploy to present to the public who do not understand the true motivation of politics over substance.

I truly believe this is a fair and reasonable offer.

FACT: Then you have not been engaged in any of the processes, as the facts clearly point to this being a completely unfair offer that fails to address any of our concerns at all.

However, we are very concerned by the OAO's response to our offer and their approach to this process, particularly their continued suggestion that they intend to withdraw services that many vulnerable Ontarians, including seniors, rely on.

FACT: the government inaction currently, and over the last 30 years, has left us with no other option. The government knew about the September 1 deadline for 4 months, yet left any discussions to the last 4 weeks. The governments inaction has been disrespectful to those very Ontarians that you say you support, and it is your inaction that has forced our direction, and it is your inaction that will ultimately be the cause of the withdrawal of OHIP services.

Regardless of the OAO's response to our offer, I want you to know that we intend to go ahead and distribute the \$39 million retroactive lump sum payment to you before an agreement is even reached. We plan to flow you this payment directly as part of your monthly OHIP payment in October.

FACT: I, personally, do not want this payment. I wish to decline it. We have not asked for it, and trying to bribe us with the payment is insulting.

In addition, we remain seized with the firm commitment to continue to a collaborative, mediated process to determine future fee increases.

FACT: you have not begun to be collaborative and understanding. This offer is proof of that.

As we move into the cooler fall months and we begin to see an expected increase in daily COVID-19 cases, our government's top priority remains protecting the health and safety of our most vulnerable. During these challenging times, it is particularly important that patients know they can continue to rely on the high-quality vision care optometrists provide.

FACT: this is not a CoViD issue, and adding this into the letter is done only to score political points. If you wish for us to continue to provide care then you must address the abhorrent funding shortfalls.

We know this issue is critical to you and to Ontarians. The Ministry of Health is committed to continue to have meaningful and productive discussions with the OAO and to build a roadmap to an ongoing and successful working relationship with Ontario's optometrists.

We ask you to urge the OAO to work with us to reach an agreement as quickly as possible to ensure Ontarians can continue to access the high-quality eye health and vision care services they need and deserve.

FACT: the Ontario Association of Optometrists is eagerly awaiting meaningful and productive discussions, as that is something that has been sadly missing from the government for 30 years, and certainly over the last year, and significantly over the last month. Ontario does deserve better - from their government.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "R.J. Tripp". The signature is written in a cursive style with a vertical line to the left of the text.

Dr. R.J.Tripp, Optometrist
Proud member of the Ontario Association of Optometrists