



2025 Federal Election Members Advocacy Toolkit

Engaging with Your Local Candidates

As Canada approaches the 2025 federal election, engaging with your local candidates is more important than ever. Meeting with local candidates presents a valuable opportunity to advocate for eye and vision health, emphasizing the critical role that ophthalmologists play in ensuring Canadians have access to high-quality medical and surgical eye care. It is also essential to distinguish ophthalmology from optometry and other vision health professions to ensure policymakers understand the unique expertise and contributions ophthalmologists provide in diagnosing and treating complex eye diseases. By discussing the challenges in access, research funding, and coordination of services, you can help ensure that vision health remains a national priority.

Preparing for the 2025 Federal Election: Why It Matters

The 2025 federal election is expected to be highly competitive, with key issues such as healthcare, workforce shortages, and public health priorities expected to be discussed. Vision care is often overlooked in national healthcare discussions, despite its significant impact on quality of life, workforce productivity, and the broader health system. It is crucial that ophthalmologists engage with candidates to emphasize the importance of policies that improve access to eye care and support the ophthalmological workforce.

Why Engage Now?

- **Policy Formation Period:** Election periods offer a chance to influence party platforms, government agendas, and candidate priorities.
- **Increased Receptivity:** MPs and candidates are often more responsive to constituent concerns during an election period and are more open to consider new policies.
- **Building Long-Term Relationships:** Early engagement strengthens relationships with future decision-makers, building champions, and ensuring ongoing advocacy success.

Below are key messages and policy proposals to communicate to your MP candidate at a community event, constituency meeting, or at the doors. After any engagement, please send a brief update to Elisabeth Fowler, Chief Executive Officer (efowler@cos-sco.ca) or complete the post-engagement survey at the bottom of this toolkit, for us to highlight key outcomes and track candidate engagement.

Ophthalmology in Canada

Vision health is fundamental to the well-being and productivity of all Canadians, yet our current system faces significant challenges in access, coordination, and research investment. With over 1.2 million Canadians living with vision loss and more than 8 million affected by major eye diseases, decisive action is needed to ensure that all Canadians – regardless of geography, socioeconomic status, or age – can access high-quality vision care.

Key Advocacy Objectives

COS's objectives with conducting federal election advocacy are to highlight issues critical to the healthcare and ophthalmological sector. The goal is:

1. That the federal government allocate the necessary funding and resources to accelerate the implementation of Bill C-284, *An Act to Establish a National Strategy for Eye Care*, ensuring that Canadians benefit from a fully integrated, evidence-based, and accessible national eye care strategy.
2. That the federal government invest \$10 million over five years in the 2025 Federal Budget to establish and fund the National Vision Health Desk (NVHD) and appoint a Chief Vision Health Officer to lead Canada's national eye care strategy.

The following are the key issues that the association and its members across Canada will be advocating for during the election. You may pick and choose which you would like to advocate for based on your operations and priorities. The following issues are not in any order of importance. Please speak to the ones that matter the most to you.

1. Swift Implementation of Bill C-284: A National Strategy for Eye Care

In June 2022, Bill C-284 received unanimous support in the House of Commons, later passing the Senate, and receiving Royal Assent in November 2024. This landmark legislation mandates a coordinated approach to preventing and treating eye diseases, improving access to rehabilitation services, and ultimately enhancing health outcomes for all Canadians.

Key Messages:

- The Canadian Ophthalmological Society urges the federal government to prioritize the swift implementation of Bill C-284 and commit the necessary resources to ensure its success
- A nationally coordinated eye care strategy will provide equitable access to eye care, support early detection and prevention efforts, enhance treatment and rehabilitation services, and advance critical research aimed at preventing vision loss

- COS and the Vision Health Partners Coalition, including the Canadian Association of Optometrists (CAO), Fighting Blindness Canada (FBC), the Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB), Vision Loss Rehabilitation Canada, Diabetes Canada, and the Canadian Council of the Blind (CCB), is dedicated to building an integrated system that improves patient access to timely and appropriate care.
- Through defined referral pathways, workforce planning, shared education, and public awareness initiatives, we can ensure a more efficient use of health care resources and a clearer understanding among Canadians about where to seek eye care for their specific needs
- By centralizing research efforts, fostering professional collaboration, and leveraging technology-driven solutions, this legislation will lay the foundation for sustainable, equitable, and high-impact outcomes in eye health.
- As Canada moves forward with its national eye care strategy, COS stands ready to work alongside the federal government and our partners to drive meaningful progress.

2. Establishing a National Vision Health Desk (NVHD) and Appointing a Chief Vision Health Officer

Key messages:

- To address the growing challenges of vision loss, ensuring equitable access to care, and meeting the increasing demand for critical eye treatments, the COS strongly recommends that the federal government allocate \$10 million over five years in Federal Budget 2025 to establish and fund the National Vision Health Desk (NVHD) at the Public Health Agency of Canada.
- Additionally, the COS urges the government to appoint a Chief Vision Health Officer to oversee its operations and drive strategic action in eye health.
- The NVHD would:
 - Implement a National Strategy for action on eye health and vision care, stemming from the passage of C-284 and building on the work of Health Canada to ensure a coordinate, evidence-based approach to improving vision health across Canada.
 - Support the work of the Federal government in the creation of an essential ophthalmic drug list within the National Pharmacare framework to improve accessibility and affordability of critical treatments.
 - Create a standardized national policy for vision screening across the country, with a particular focus on children, seniors, and Indigenous peoples.
 - Develop patient care pathways for the main eye diseases, delineating inter-professional collaboration amongst physicians, opticians, optometrists, and

ophthalmologists, leveraging the expertise of ophthalmologists to ensure optimal patient safety and outcomes remain at the forefront.

- Be focused on coordinated action by governments, health professionals, non-government organizations, industry, and individuals working in partnership.
- Oversee research with the goal to improve the evidence base for vision care. There is no longer dedicated funding for eye health within the Canadian Institutes for Health Research (CIHR). There is no overarching body like the US National Eye Institute to set priorities or coordinate vision research and translate science into health services.
- Educate the public by implementing a public awareness campaign about the importance of eye health as a core component of overall health care, including, but not limited to:
 - Become the compendium/library for eye health research across Canada.
- A dedicated National Vision Health Desk, led by a Chief Vision Health Officer, will provide the leadership and coordination needed to drive evidence-based policies, enhance access to care, and reduce preventable blindness.

Meeting Pointers

1. Tell your story. Local candidates will want to hear the impact your business has in the community and what issues your business, and the community may be dealing with.
2. Be natural, these conversations/business tours are about educating the candidates about the ophthalmological sector and the support needed.
3. Address candidates respectfully, do not assume anything about their positions on topics based on their party; approach the discussion as an interested member of the community who wants to discuss solutions to some very important issues.
4. Keep in mind that most politicians will afford you only around 30 minutes, so you should be brief and to the point. Ensure you maximize their time at your business.
5. Open your meetings by thanking the candidate for having taken the time from his or her busy schedule to meet with you and discuss issues facing the ophthalmological field.
6. Introduce yourselves by giving your name, title and the name of the organization you work for and its contributions to the local community. Introduce the candidate to your staff as they will want to maximize the number of people they meet.
7. Say a few words about the purpose and aim of your meeting (refer to key messages).
8. Remember to leave time for the candidate to ask you questions.

9. Have a concrete request – Ask the candidate to take action, either within their party, or in government if they are elected: *“Will your party commit to support the ophthalmological workforce of tomorrow?”*
10. Wrap up the tour by thanking the candidate. Make sure to add that if they have any further questions, to not hesitate to personally contact you or the association.
11. Complete one feedback form for each meeting
12. Expect the unexpected. Some of your meetings will be cancelled at the last minute or will move to a different time/location. Campaigns are extremely busy, and you will need to accommodate the schedules of the candidates you meet with.
13. Ask for a picture. Most candidates use social media and will be more than happy to take a picture with you. They can use it for themselves, and we can use it for our own channels.

About the Canadian Ophthalmological Society (COS)

The Canadian Ophthalmological Society (COS) is the national, recognized authority on eye and vision care in Canada. As eye physicians and surgeons, we are committed to ensuring all Canadians have access to the highest standard of medical and surgical eye care.

Our membership includes over 900 ophthalmologists and 200 ophthalmology residents. We work collaboratively with government, other national and international specialty societies, our academic communities (ACUPO), our provincial partners and affiliates, and other eye care professionals and patient groups to advocate for health policy in Canada around eye and vision health.

The mission of the Canadian Ophthalmological Society is to strive toward the provision of optimal medical and surgical eye care for all Canadians by promoting excellence in ophthalmology and providing services to support its members in practice.

The COS and its members of eye physicians and surgeons are the foremost subject matter experts in eye care across the country and a leading advocate for vision health for all Canadians.



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Ophthalmological canadienne
Society d'ophtalmologie
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AND SURGEONS | OPHTHALMOLOGISTES
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COS Toolkit Post-Engagement Feedback Form

