



TO: Chair and Members of the Board of Health

FROM: Graham L. Pollett, MD, FRCPC  
Medical Officer of Health

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## **MAKE MY FIRST TEST AN EYE TEST RECOGNITION FROM THE ONTARIO ASSOCIATION OF OPTOMETRISTS**

### ***Recommendation***

*It is recommended that Report No. 106-12 re Make My First Test An Eye Test Recognition from the Ontario Association of Optometrists be received for information.*

### **Background**

There is a strong link between good vision and children's ability to learn. More than 80% of learning occurs through the eyes, while one in six children has a vision problem significant enough to impair learning ability. Children with poor vision often find it difficult to focus and may be misdiagnosed as having a learning or behavioural disability. Often, there are no signs that a child has a vision problem. If vision problems are undetected, they can, in some instances, lead to permanent sight loss.

The Ontario Association of Optometrists (OAO) recommends eye exams at 6 months and 3 years of age, then annually or as recommended. Although the Ontario Health Insurance Plan (OHIP) covers annual eye exams for children 19 years of age and under, in 2009, only seven percent of 0-4 year olds had their eyes examined by an Optometrist. This Report outlines the partnership between the OAO and the Health Unit.

### **The Eye See Eye Learn Program**

The Eye See Eye Learn Program is designed to detect, diagnose and treat children with vision problems when they begin Junior Kindergarten. This partnership was developed in keeping with a deliberate shift in approach to meeting the mandate to increase the proportion of children ready to achieve success as they begin school. As reported to the Board of Health in February 2011 (Report No. 013-11), the Child Health Team shifted from the provision of individual vision screening in school, to increasing the proportion of children having eye examinations prior to school entry and ensuring families in financial need have access to eyeglasses.

The Eye See Eye Learn Program addresses the problem that less than 20% of Ontario children have an eye exam before entering school, despite the fact that annual eye examinations are covered by OHIP for children 19 years of age and under. All children in JK identified with a vision problem and residing within designated areas are eligible to receive one free pair of eye glasses. In spring of 2011, a partnership between the OAO and the Province of Ontario announced plans to expand the Eye See Eye Learn program.

In the 2011-12 school year the Child Health Team began a comprehensive campaign to improve children's readiness for school success, using a variety of strategies, including a public awareness raising

campaign under the slogan Make My First Test An Eye Test. The establishment of a partnership with the OAO was an important element of this strategy. Health Unit staff linked the awareness raising campaign to the Eye See Eye Learn program, and advocated for the Eye See Eye Learn program to be made available in Middlesex-London. As a result, beginning this month, free eye glasses will be provided to all students in JK, who need them, regardless of income.

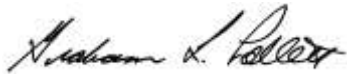
### Partnership Recognition

The Ontario Association of Optometrists awarded this Health Unit a President's Certificate of Appreciation in recognition of this agency's leadership in promoting children's eye examinations. On May 5, 2012, Ms. Nicole McDace, the lead Public Health Nurse for this initiative, received the Certificate of Appreciation on behalf of the Health Unit before more than 500 optometrists at the Association's annual general meeting. This case illustrates how key partnerships can help move the public health agenda forward.

### Conclusion

Boards of Health are mandated under the Ontario Public Health Standards to work toward increasing the proportion of children who are beginning school to be equipped to achieve success. Ensuring good vision through early eye examinations is considered a key aspect of working toward school readiness. Identifying vision problems early can improve learning outcomes. Through Eye See Eye Learn, parents with children entering JK are provided with program information, encouraging them to take their child for an eye exam at a participating optometrist's office.

This report was prepared by Ms. Nicole McDace, Public Health Nurse, and Mr. Jim Madden, Manager, Child Health Team, Family Health Services.



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**This report addresses** the following requirement(s) of the Ontario Public Health Standards: Child Health, Requirements 4, 5, 7 and 8.