

# Telehealth Policy for Optometrists

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## Introduction

Telehealth refers to the practice of optometry at a spatial and/or temporal distance by exchanging health information via electronic communications. Telehealth activities include the provision of optometric services as well as the administration and sharing of health information and digital records.

## Principles

Optometrists engaged in telehealth:

- Must meet the standards of practice;<sup>1</sup>
- Have the same ethical duties and obligations as when providing care to patients in person;
- Will use their judgment when deciding whether telehealth is appropriate for patients; and
- Will communicate and collaborate effectively with patients, optometrists, and other health-care providers while protecting patient privacy.

## Standards of Practice for Telehealth

Optometrists must obtain informed consent for the use of telehealth and the same standards of practice<sup>1,2</sup> that protect patients during in-person interactions apply equally when care is delivered electronically.

Optometrists must comply with privacy regulations<sup>3</sup> and ensure that:

- Where patient information is stored on mobile devices or offsite in an identifiable form, the information is encrypted;

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<sup>1</sup> The Optometric Practice Reference (OPR) articulates the standards of practice for optometrists in Ontario: [http://www.collegeoptom.on.ca/images/pdfs/030\\_ID\\_COO\\_OPR\\_book\\_WEB.pdf](http://www.collegeoptom.on.ca/images/pdfs/030_ID_COO_OPR_book_WEB.pdf)

<sup>2</sup> Spectacle Therapy Using the Internet describes how optometrists may utilize their website and/or the internet in spectacle dispensing practices: <http://www.collegeoptom.on.ca/members/professional-practice/policy/366-spectacle-therapy-using-the-internet-2015/>

<sup>3</sup> Privacy regulations are constantly evolving and optometrists may want to contact the Office of the Information and Privacy Commissioner of Ontario for updated advice and information: <https://www.ipc.on.ca/?redirect=https://www.ipc.on.ca/>

- Optometrist-initiated electronic communications are appropriately protected (e.g., encrypted); and
- All information is maintained collectively in patient health records.

Optometrists must ensure that any measuring apparatuses or remote applications used during telehealth are reliable. Results obtained and their interpretation must be equivalent to those obtained when practising in person.

#### Establishing a Patient–Practitioner Relationship

Optometrists should not provide advice and/or care to patients using telehealth until a patient–practitioner relationship has been established.

A patient–practitioner relationship is not required when optometrists provide consultation services for other optometrists or regulated health professionals using telecommunication.

#### Interjurisdictional Considerations

Optometrists must be registered, practise within the scope of practice, and maintain appropriate professional liability insurance in the jurisdiction where patients are located.