

# Talking Points for ODs to Begin Discussions with FQHCs



Optometrists provide many services, including medical eye care. Not only do they prescribe and fit glasses and contact lenses, but they can also diagnose and treat many eye diseases, including glaucoma. Optometrists diagnose and manage diabetic retinopathy, a leading cause of blindness. They also can perform minor surgical procedures, like foreign body removal and provide pre/post-operative care.

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Optometrists who perform retinal/eye exams are finding an alarming increase in diabetes and want to do something about it. For this reason, the California Optometric Association (COA) is partnering with a broad coalition of advocates to address the diabetes epidemic. The rate of diabetes deaths has grown exponentially in Californians under the age of 55. It is the leading cause of blindness and other health complications such as heart disease, stroke, and amputation.

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The incidence of diabetes disproportionately affects low income Californians and people of color who are enrolled in Medi-Cal managed care plans. The State Department of Health Care Services tracks quality of care performance through HEDIS measures. Both the state and stakeholders are increasingly focusing on how to improve performance on the six HEDIS measures of diabetes; eye exams are one of these measures. As the primary source of care for Medi-Cal beneficiaries, FQHCs can play a key role in improving the quality of care.

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Integrating optometry and comprehensive eye care into the array of offered on-site FQHC services is an example of a model that can provide seamless, “whole person care” for its patients who get the convenience of “one-stop shop” care. Referrals, appointment scheduling, recordkeeping, and care coordination can also be improved. Adding optometry into an FQHC’s scope of project may also help it to be better positioned to negotiate and accept a value-based payment, as the Department of Health Care Services continues to explore this payment model.

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Integration of eye care is also important for children. Serious eye diseases in young children, such as hyperopia and amblyopia, are often undetected in school vision screenings and result in learning deficits and behavioral issues. By making it easier and more convenient for parents to access comprehensive care for their children, serious eye and vision problems are detected and treated earlier. Children who need glasses are also more likely to get them.

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The restoration of the Medi-Cal benefit for adult eyeglasses and low vision aids creates a new opportunity for optometric care in health centers. For many hard-to-reach Medi-Cal beneficiaries, the restored benefit creates an added incentive to come to a clinic. In addition to getting a comprehensive exam, they can receive needed glasses.

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Please contact Kara Corches at [kcorches@coavision.org](mailto:kcorches@coavision.org) if you are interested in integrating optometry in an FQHC near you.