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European  
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Optometry  
and Optics

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## DEAR COLLEAGUES, DEAR FRIENDS,



*Dr Matjaž Mihelčič,  
ECOO President*

Winter will soon be over; nature is waking up and, at this time, we usually happily make plans for the future. At ECOO, many activities are in progress: The Driving Licence Directive, the PFAS issue, the Horizon project and many more. Our new Executive met in Madrid in January, kindly hosted by our Spanish member, the Consejo General de Colegios de Ópticos-Optometristas, to discuss these issues and to begin preparing a variety of interesting topics for the General Assembly in Poznan in May this year.

A word about the Horizon project: Last year, ECOO had the unique opportunity to be a partner in a large proposal, led by Vienna Medical University. The project was about the screening of patients in optometric practices that own OCT devices. The aim was to detect early signs of geographic atrophy, a dry form of AMD, and to prove a model for collaboration between optometrists and ophthalmology clinics to better serve the patients. The news behind the scene: some forms of dry AMD may soon become treatable and the early diagnosis is really the key factor here. The project proposes a very interesting model of including

small, local practices into a screening framework in all EU countries. It has great value for the public and for ECOO. Unfortunately it missed the pass rate in the evaluation, however only by very little and so we hope to have another opportunity soon leading to some interesting interdisciplinary work.

Why small practices are so important: In the busy and globalised world, big companies have big plans; they want and need to dictate trends, and have great control over all of it. This however is not always compatible with individualised care, which we promote. Sometimes it seems that the global market would like to globalise end consumers too, so they can be served with standardised solutions. I am not sure who really benefits from that. In our business, the interface between producers and customers/patients are practices, which are easily accessible, widely spread and which offer an individual approach. Practices are the places which offer a human aspect to the process of delivering eye care and also where we supply products. Luckily, we see that people in big business in our field mostly do understand this. They value



*The ECOO Executive Committee with Juan Carlos Martínez Moral, President of the Consejo General de Colegios de Ópticos-Optometristas (CGCOO) in Madrid.*

and support national associations and ECOO. We all know that the benefit is on all sides.

We are all going digital, but how much of it is good? Artificial intelligence (AI) can assist in diagnosis, but cannot replace professionals' perspective; it can just add to its value. Health data management, together with AI, already enables scientists to find connections between certain factors and diseases, but not necessarily to determine the causalities. More data and more analyses mean more work for us. Do we have the time? Or will we delegate decisions to the machines? As we have already seen in early attempts to regulate this field, machines cannot be made accountable for their "decisions". It will always be a practitioner who decides, together with the patient. AI, of course, is fascinating and it is coming. We often hear: "the future is digital".

I agree to a certain point. All aspects of communication might certainly become fully digital in the near future. But human life is not digital and we should not attempt to "adapt humans to the bright digital future", but rather the new tools should be adapted and subjugated to human nature, down to the last detail. Our individual development, our insights and personal growth are not digital. This should always be kept in mind.

Soon we will meet in Poznan, at the combined ECOO/EAOO meeting. The Academy is working hard to unite the academic world throughout Europe and ECOO is helping with that. We wish them every success. In the meantime, I wish you all a nice spring time, pleasant encounters with people you like and fresh insights into our beautiful profession.

**Matjaž**

## ECOO AT OPTI 2023 IN MUNICH

ECOO President Matjaž Mihelčič and Treasurer Peter Gumpelmayer attended opti 2023 in Munich. At the international trade fair for optics and design, ECOO was kindly hosted at the stand of its German member, the Zentralverband der Augenoptiker und Optometristen (ZVA). This provided a great opportunity to meet with friends, colleagues and make new acquaintances.



*Peter Gumpelmayer with Thomas Truckenbrod and Christian Muller of the ZVA and Per Michael Larsen of the Danish Optometric Association*



*Peter Gumpelmayer with Pavel Sebek and Václav Antonín from the Association of Czech Opticians and Optometrists*



*Matjaž Mihelčič with Liliana Stankova, President of the European Academy of Optometry and Optics, and Thomas Truckenbrod, President of the ZVA.*



## ON THE EU AGENDA

### EUROPEAN COMMISSION PUBLISHES PROPOSAL FOR REVISION OF DRIVING LICENCE DIRECTIVE

On 1 March 2023, the European Commission has published its proposal for the revision of the Directive on driving licences including its annexes. Amongst other changes, the Directive includes the provisions for renewal of driving licenses, which as a general principle consists of renewal every 15 years for the non-professional driving categories and those under the age of 70, and 5 years or less as of from the age of 70. Annex III covers the eyesight requirements, which ECOO is reviewing in light of responding to the public consultation, keeping in mind that one of the objectives of the review is to ensure adequate physical and mental fitness of drivers across the EU.

### PER- AND POLYFLUOROALKYL SUBSTANCES (PFAS) RESTRICTION PROPOSAL

PFASs are a large class of thousands of synthetic chemicals that are used throughout society, including in Rigid Gas Permeable (RGP) contact lenses. However, they are increasingly detected as environmental pollutants and some are linked to negative effects on human health.

The Netherlands, Germany, Norway, Denmark and Sweden submitted a restriction proposal to cover a wide range of PFAS uses on 13 January 2023, which the European Chemicals Agency (ECHA) published on 7 February. A restriction proposal is a first step towards a European ban on PFAS. ECHA's scientific committees for Risk Assessment and for Socio-Economic Analysis will check that the proposal meets the legal requirements of the REACH regulations in their meetings in March 2023. If it does, the committees will begin their scientific evaluation of the proposal.

A six-month consultation is planned to start on 22 March 2023 and an online information session will be organized on 5 April 2023 to explain the restriction process and to help those interested in participating in the consultation. ECOO is working with EuromContact to consider the potential impact such a ban would have on eye care and to prepare a response to the consultation.

# NEWS FROM THE ECOO ACCREDITATION AGENCY

The ECOO Accreditation Agency's work to accredit educational institutions with the European Diploma in Optometry (EDO) and the European Qualifications in Optics (EQO) is in full swing.

In 2022, re-accreditation visits took place at the Berliner Hochschule für Technik,(Germany), the University of Applied Sciences in Utrecht (the Netherlands) and the Karolsinka Insitutet (Sweden). In addition,

there were accreditation visits at two Schools of Optometry in Finland (Metropolia and Oulu).

In January 2023 the accreditation panel visited the School of Optometry in Hadassah College, Israel. The other optometry programme in Israel, Bar Ilan University in Tel Aviv, is due to have a visit in April 2023. Both these institutions were part of the OCULUS Erasmus+ project consortium led by our Norwegian and Dutch academic colleagues to develop optometry curricula and delivery of skills-based clinical education and training.

Other institutions are also progressing with the accreditation process, with further visits planned throughout this year and the next, and the Accreditation team are available if any institutions are interested in benchmarking their programme and working towards a harmonized and skilled workforce providing high level of primary eye care for our citizens.

ECOO is delighted that to date over 560 professionals hold the EDO and almost 80 hold the more recently established EQO.



*Accreditation visit to Hadassah College, Israel*

## **ABOUT THE ECOO ACCREDITATION AGENCY**

***ECOO has developed the EDO and EQO as syllabi and competency frameworks, and operates an accreditation scheme for institutions to benchmark against this framework. The Accreditation Agency has been set up to run this accreditation work.***

**TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THIS WORK VISIT:**

**<https://ecoo.info/ecoo-accreditation-agency/>**





Growth  
from  
Knowledge

## GFK OPTICS 2022: EUROPEAN OPTICAL MARKETS UPDATE

**PAUL YORK**

SENIOR CLIENT INSIGHTS MANAGER - OPTICS

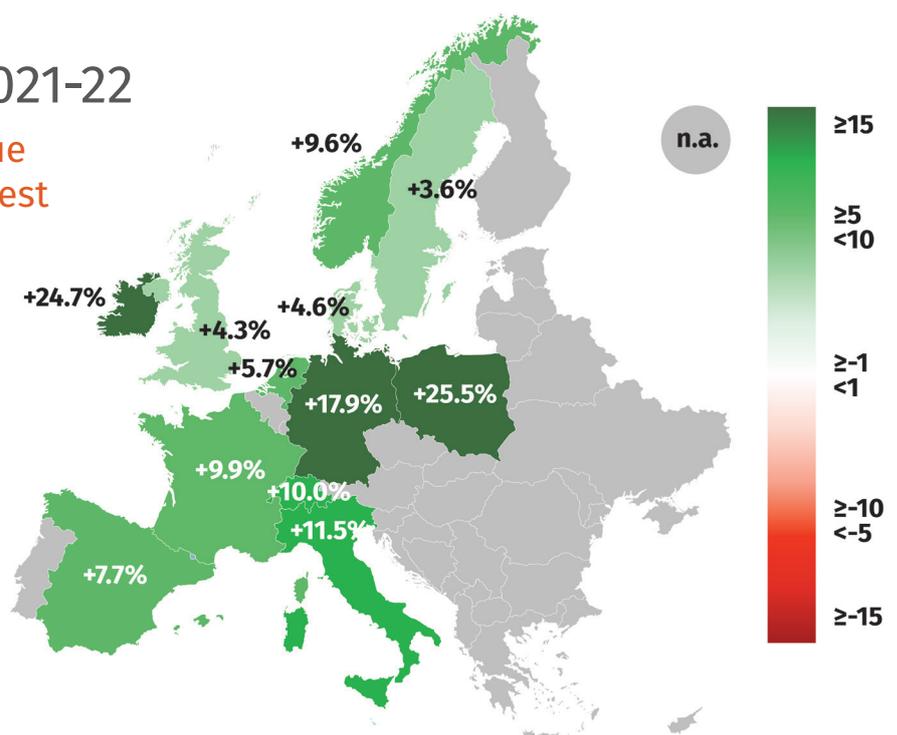
With European nations still reeling from the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic and the associated government responses, 2022 saw major conflict descend in Ukraine further disrupting regional supply chains in many areas from energy to agriculture. The resultant highly inflationary environment has brought a combination of rising goods prices, utility bills and interest rates prompting a cost-of-living squeeze for consumers across markets in the region. Here we consider how European optical markets have been impacted.

The contact lens market across EU12 countries<sup>1</sup> has seen a robust regional revenue growth rate of +9.4% through 2022 despite these challenges, suggesting that patients are willing to prioritise spending in this area even under the challenging economic backdrop. Poland and Ireland achieve the highest growth rates of over +20% while each of the 12 individual markets tracked has seen revenue increase as compared to the previous year. In each of the markets daily lenses are also accounting for a growing proportion of total volume sales. This suggests that customers are not only maintaining their spend, despite the increasing economic pressures, but also remain willing to upgrade - switching to more premium options.

### Contact Lenses - Sales Val Growth % 2021-22

All tracked markets see revenue growth through 2023 with highest rates seen across Poland, Germany and Ireland.

**Total EU12: +9.4%**



Within the spectacles market, where purchases are perhaps easier to delay, the story is less positive. Across the EU5 markets<sup>2</sup> tracked, spectacle frames revenues have grown by the far lower rate of +0.8% while spectacle lenses have seen revenues decline

by -3.5%. Both categories have seen the average price paid by customers increase at an accelerated rate through 2022 with declining revenues due to falling volume sales.

## FOCUS ON POLISH MARKET

### FRANCISZEK MENDEZ VARELA

#### CUSTOMER SUCCESS MANAGER - OPTICS

It has already been a decade since we started to monitor the Polish contact lens market here at GfK! The ten years in question were a decade of huge growth and the latest year really was the icing on the cake. 2022 was the year of highest growth and sales recorded during the existence of the panel, true in both volume and value sales. Although all the different contact lens categories rose significantly during the ten-year period, some performed far better than others driving the market upward. We observe a strong uptrend for daily lenses that gain share from

those lenses with longer replacement frequencies. It is the daily lenses that are the main motor for the strong growth of the market. We also look at how different categories of contact lenses behave and see that even more niche ones such as multifocal lenses have a big potential to grow, after having more than doubled their market share during the panels ten years of tracking. Polish customers also show a strong preference to buying contact lenses online with Poland having one of the highest internet channel shares of sales across the EU12 markets<sup>1</sup>.

## ECOO GENERAL ASSEMBLY – POZNAN, 13TH MAY 2023

GfK will be presenting further detail on the above optical market trends, along with an overview of another area of increasing focus - the development of European consumers Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) concerns, at the coming ECOO General Assembly in Poznan, 13th May 2023.

FOR MORE INFO ON GfK OPTICS RETAIL PANELS PLEASE VISIT -

<https://www.gfk.com/products/gfk-optics-panel>



#### FOOTNOTES

1. Contact Lenses EU12 Countries: Denmark, France, Germany, Great Britain, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland.

2. Spectacle Lenses and Frames EU5 Countries: France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Great Britain (GB Spectacle Frames only)

## COUNTRY UPDATES



**Austrian  
Optometric  
Association**



*Peter Gumpelmayer, President of the AOA, and his fellow board members celebrate their acceptance into ECOO membership at the ECOO meeting in Dublin, May 2022*

### DEVELOPMENT OF THE AUSTRIAN OPTOMETRIC ASSOCIATION

*Since the beginning of the merger of GOMAC and the Pan European Group there has been strong interest in optometric development in Austria.*

The strong battle with ophthalmology over the fitting of contact lenses in the 1970s brought the necessity to upgrade the education of optics and optometry in Austria. In the first stage a Meisterschule (Master craftsmen school for opticians and contact lens specialists) was created. The full time teaching course was 3 semesters. In the 1990s this was enhanced to include the matric in form of a higher technical school (HTL). The full time course is now running 5 semesters includes the Meisterprüfung (Master Craftsmen Examination) and Contact Lens qualification (this is a separate diploma out of the historical battle with ophthalmology) and the matric. But the regulatory status is still in the handicraft sector.

With the creation of ECOO's European Diploma in Optometry, a benchmarking of the HTL syllabus took place. This showed deficits in pathology, pharmacology and basically all that is found in Part C of the ECOO Diploma in Optometry, as well as a lack in the portfolio which created a new challenge in the optometric teaching. To overcome this, the idea to form a graduate course in optics/optometry was born. It took another 10 years and again with fierce battles with ophthalmology before this BSc course in optics/optometry started at the University of Applied Science for health care professions in Innsbruck.

This was also the moment to establish an Association for Optometrists. So far 60 colleagues in Austria have been qualified as an optometrist via the Pennsylvania College of Optometrists or other University

Education programmes predominantly in the Anglo-Saxon sphere. In autumn 2020 the current executive initiated the birth of the Austrian Optometric Association. The first meeting was organised in 2021. The focus was on the use of the OCT in optometric practice. This attracted more than 40 participants and led to an increase of optometrists in Austria using this innovative examination technique.

In the same year the AOA gained membership with the World Council of Optometry.

The meeting in spring 2022 was held in cooperation with the University of Applied Science for health care professions in Innsbruck. With double the number of participants the focus point was on myopia management.

At 2022 ECOO's Spring meeting the AOA was accepted as a member of ECOO. We are very proud to be part of the most effective supranational optometric and optical association.

The membership of the Austrian Optometric Association is open to all master craftsmen opticians with special interest in optometric services and of course to all qualified optometrists and these can be employed or independent.

The professional goal is to gain legislation on optometry as a health care profession as defined by the World Council of Optometry.

Further information is on our website [www.aoaoptom.at](http://www.aoaoptom.at)

## NEW LEGISLATION FOR OPTOMETRISTS IN SWEDEN HOPEFULLY IN PLACE BY 1 JANUARY 2024

Optometrists (“Optiker” in Swedish) are one of 22 licensed health care professions in Sweden. However, the legislation regulating optometry differs significantly from the other 21 professions since it regulates in detail what an optometrist can, cannot, shall and shall not do in several aspects. Some examples from the present legislation is that: (1) optometrists are allowed to refract and fit contact lenses for children independent of age, but not allowed to fit spectacles before the age of 8 years; (2) are allowed (with further education) to use diagnostic drugs but not allowed to touch the eye unless related to contact lens fitting; and (3) are to send a referral to a medical practitioner if they suspect an ocular disease independent of it being treatable or not (like dry AMD).

For the last 20 years the Swedish Optometric Association has tried to have the National Board of Health and Welfare (Socialstyrelsen) revise the legislation of optometry. We have been in direct contact with the Board and have even tried working through politicians, but without any success. However, during 2022 the Board initiated a revision and over last summer we and related professional bodies received a draft that we were able to comment on. Comments were made mainly by optometry and ophthalmology. The draft suggested that almost all “can”, “cannot”, “shall” and “shall not” requirements would be taken away and that optometry would be regulated similar to the other health care professions in that “you are allowed to do what you are competent to do”, except in the case of children younger than six years of age.

After receiving the draft we have had several meetings with the Board and just before Christmas we had hoped to have, at their suggestion, a consultation. That was delayed, but at the beginning of February it came out and we now have until the end of March to send in our official comments and suggestions. What is pleasing is that the Board has gone even further in suggesting a reduction in the regulatory restrictions on optometry compared to the draft from last year in that even the age limit of six years is also suggested to be taken away. This has been done despite the protests of ophthalmology who still wants a firm regulation on the scope of optometry. The Board have on the other hand not found any scientific evidence for the restrictions wanted by the ophthalmologists.

If this new regulation goes through it will take effect from the 1 January 2024. It will at the same time enable large changes in the care that optometrists can offer in Sweden and it will bring the first line of ophthalmic health care much closer and be more accessible to the public. On the other hand, it will force optometrists to be more aware of their own competencies since we now have to judge our selves whether we have the competence or not to take and interpret the measurements needed for the patient. But we have worked for this change for so many years and we are confident that we are ready to meet a new optometric world in Sweden in January 2024.

## Switzerland: Diagnostica application by optometrists BSc.

Switzerland has a complex healthcare system with 26 constituent states that are also very sovereign and autonomous in this respect. The national regulation of seven selected health professions - including optometry - which came into force in 2020 was a legal novelty for the country. The professional competences as well as the study programmes leading to the bachelor's degrees of the respective health professions are regulated nationally. However, the granting of licences and health police supervision remain under cantonal sovereignty.

The use of prescription medicines is regulated in an equally complex manner. In addition to the nationally valid Therapeutic Products Act, 26 different supervisory authorities also have their say here. The use of topical, diagnostic ophthalmics is one

of the proven competences of Swiss graduates of the Bachelor of Science in Optometry. In order for them to be able to apply this competence, however, many adjusting screws of the regulatory framework must be in position. A further step has just been taken: From 1 April 2023, optometrists BSc. will also be authorised under national therapeutic products law to use appropriate diagnostics to determine visual status. Of course, the cantons have the final say, not least in deciding which medicines may be used by optometrists. Currently, the Institute of Optometry FHNW and specialist lawyers from OPTIKSCHWEIZ, the association for optometry and optics, are working on proposing a list of suitable medicines to the cantonal authorities.

# GET TO KNOW THE PEOPLE INVOLVED IN ECOO

## GABRIËLLE JANSSEN PRESIDENT-ELECT



Continuing our interview series of people involved in ECOO, we are delighted to present our President-elect, Gabriëlle Janssen in this edition.

### ***What is your professional background, and what is your role at ECOO?***

I have worked as a project manager and optometrist in both private and public sectors. I am now the Chair of the Optometristen Vereniging Nederland (OVN), where I am leading the efforts to strengthen optometry in the ophthalmic care sector throughout the Netherlands.

Having recently joined the ECOO Executive Committee as President-elect, I am excited about the opportunities that lie ahead. I believe that by working together, we can achieve great things and make a real difference in the lives of those we serve.

### ***What are the most important skills/personal attributes needed to do your job?***

Because I am an optician, optometrist, and also a business administrator, I need a diverse range of competences to tackle complex issues in a strategic manner.

The technical skills I have from my background as an optician and optometrist mean I can give informed recommendations and insights. But alone they are not enough. Analytical

and strategic thinking is essential to navigate the complexities of the business world and develop effective policies. Additionally, my years of experience have taught me that adaptability is key to success; it is essential to remain flexible and open-minded, always looking for new ways to tackle challenges and innovate.

But, above all, it is the love of the industry that motivates me to work hard and a commitment to excellence which means I continuously strive to improve the quality of the services we provide.

### ***What has taken you by surprise in your work with ECOO?***

ECOO is a warm bath, a place where people from different countries come together with a shared passion for our beautiful work. This shared passion makes me feel energized and inspired to get involved and contribute to the organisation.

The fact that ECOO is so well-run, the commitment and dedication of everyone involved make it effective in achieving its goals. But even more than that, it makes the time I commit to ECOO even more fun and valuable because I know we make the best use of everyone's strongest competences.

***What is your biggest achievement so far?***

One of my most significant accomplishments has been working in Vietnam with ophthalmologists and the Brian Holden Vision Institute with May Ho to establish an education programme for optometry. After many years of effort, our hard work paid off in 2013, and we successfully established the University of Optometry in Vietnam. Today, the University is thriving, and it is an honour to have played a part in its success.

I am also proud that, after years of lobbying, in the Netherlands we successfully reached a consensus in 2020 that a portion of eye care should be referred to optometrists instead of ophthalmologists by general practitioners. This allows optometrists to contribute more fully to the care of patients and provides greater access to care for individuals with eye health concerns.

But these achievements were not accomplished alone. The successes I have achieved are the result of the collective efforts of many committed individuals who came before me. I believe that we can all make a difference in the world by working together towards a common goal.

***What is the best piece of professional advice you have received?***

I have received valuable advice from many people that has helped me grow both personally and professionally. As human beings, we are social creatures, and we learn by observing and listening to others. If I had to choose one specific piece of advice that has helped me the most, it would be the importance of observing before judging. Taking the time to observe helps us make more informed decisions.

***Bonus question:******When you manage to escape from ECOO or your day job, how do you like to spend your time?***

Taking long cycling holidays with my husband brings me a lot of joy. We love exploring the Netherlands and other parts of Europe. There's something truly special about travelling slowly through a landscape on a bicycle. It allows us to notice so much more, and the rhythm of cycling gives us plenty of time to think, reflect, and develop good ideas. We can have deep conversations, discussing topics that we just don't have time for in our busy daily lives.

So if you're looking for a way to slow down, connect with nature, and spend quality time with someone you love, I highly recommend taking a cycling holiday. It's a wonderful way to explore new places, make memories, and nourish your mind, body, and spirit. You are welcome in Amsterdam as a stopover!



# UPDATE FROM THE EUROPEAN ACADEMY OF OPTOMETRY AND OPTICS

## THE START OF 2023 HAS BEEN A BUSY ONE FOR THE EAOO

The EAOO and Polish Optometric Association – Polskie Towarzystwo Optometrii i Optyki (PTOO) have been in regular dialogue to finalise our collaboration as co-organizers for the 14th European Academy of Optometry and Optics annual conference, which this time is taking place in Poznan Poland. The education programme has been finalized, with a list of key note speakers released on 16 February to encourage press interest in this must-attend event. Key note speakers include Prof Kavin Naidoo (Global Head of Advocacy and Partnerships at OneSight EssilorLuxottica Foundation), Dr Matt Jaskulski (Clinical Research Software Developer at the Indiana University Clinical Optics Research Lab), Dr Greg Caldwell (Dr. Caldwell practices in Duncansville Pennsylvania, is a co-founder of Optometric Education Consultants and co-administrator of OCT Connect on Facebook) and Prof Joseph J. Pizzimenti (Tenured Professor at the Rosenberg School of Optometry at the University of the Incarnate Word in San Antonio, TX, USA). Special thanks must be given to the Education committee led by José Manuel Gonzalez Meijomé for the excellent programme and EAOO Communication Lead, Eva Lazuka Nicolaud who has been instrumental in bringing together all the press and social media activity around the event.

The link for registration for the event can be found here:

[Register - European Academy of Optometry and Optics 2023 \(eao2023.com\)](https://eao2023.com)

## EAOO PRESIDENT LILIANA STANKOVA ATTENDED THE ECOO EXECUTIVE BOARD MEETING IN MADRID IN JANUARY 2023

Closer to home, the EAOO are delighted to announce the arrival of a new Academy manager. Kristina Mihic is an optometrist based in the UK who trained as an optician and then an optometrist in Croatia. She has been instrumental in organising the OCSEE conference in past years. In recent years she completed a PhD at City University, London, and has worked at St Thomas' Hospital in London. She will provide a much needed supporting role to the President and EAOO Board, taking the reins of all the administrative tasks and member engagement thereby helping to develop the Academy and grow membership.



WORLD COUNCIL  
OF OPTOMETRY

## UPDATE FROM THE WORLD COUNCIL OF OPTOMETRY

### DRY EYE SPOTLIGHT 3: MANAGEMENT - 14 MARCH 2023

The World Council of Optometry (WCO) and Alcon have opened registration for “Dry Eye Spotlight 3: Management,” the third in a series of complimentary global dry eye disease education initiative webinars.

Register Today: <https://bit.ly/DryEyeManagement>

The first and second webinars in the series are now available on demand at <https://dryeye.worldcouncilofoptometry.info/>

Our world-renowned faculty shares tips on managing dry eye disease at our March 14 webinar.

# REGISTER NOW

WORLD COUNCIL OF OPTOMETRY **Alcon**

### OPTOMETRY PROGRAM IN ADVOCACY AND LEADERSHIP (OPAL) 2022 UPDATE

WCO's Optometry Program in Advocacy and Leadership (OPAL) recently completed its second year of providing education to optometrists on their leadership styles and how to design and implement advocacy programs in their region.

[Read the full update on the WCO website.](#)

### 4TH WORLD CONGRESS OF OPTOMETRY

8-10 September 2023 | Melbourne, Australia

WCO is looking forward to this year's 4th World Congress of Optometry (WCO4), 8-10 September 2023 in Melbourne, Australia. Early registration discounts will be offered until 30 April 2023. Learn more: <https://www.omega-event.org/>

## UPCOMING MEETINGS

The ECOO spring meetings will take place 11-13 May 2023 in Poznan, Poland. The ECOO meetings will take place in conjunction with the conference of the European Academy of Optometry and Optics and is kindly organised by the Polish Optometry Association (PTOO).

ECOO members can register via <https://eaoo2023.com/registration>

The ECOO autumn meetings 2023 will take place 13-15 October in the Netherlands, more details will be available over the summer.

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Please inform us of any additions to the mailing list or of staff changes in your respective organisations. Should you have any news or updates which may be of interest to ECOO members, please contact the ECOO Secretariat:

[secretariat@ecoo.info](mailto:secretariat@ecoo.info)

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