POSITION PAPER

THE STRATEGIC ROLE OF EYE CARE PROFESSIONALS IN OPTIMISING VISION IN SPORT

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ECOO RECOMMENDS

ECOO calls on sporting organisations, healthcare providers, policymakers and eye care professionals across Europe to recognise vision as a vital component of sporting participation, performance and safety, and to ensure that athletes at all levels have access to high-quality, evidence-based sports vision care. ECOO asserts that:

- Vision and eye health should be recognised as essential for safe and effective participation in sport at all levels.
- All athletes, from recreational to elite, should have access to regular comprehensive eye examinations to optimise vision and identify eye health concerns.
- Primary eye care professionals should be recognised as the key providers of sports vision care, including visual assessment, refractive correction, prescribing appropriate optical and protective devices, and management of visual dysfunction.
- Appropriate eye protection should be promoted across sport, with eye care professionals helping to prevent avoidable eye injuries through evidence-based recommendations and recognised safety standards.
- Sports vision interventions, including visual and sensory-motor training, should be evidence-based and supported by multidisciplinary collaboration, professional education and ongoing research.

SUMMARY

Vision is an essential component of many sporting activities. From recreational participation to elite competition, athletes depend on visual information to interact with their environment, make decisions and coordinate their actions safely and effectively.

ECOO believes that eye care professionals have an important role to play in helping people participate in sport safely and achieve optimal visual function.

Sports vision brings together three main areas: visual and ocular health assessment; prescription, adaptation and customisation of optical and protective solutions; and, where appropriate, vision-based and sensory-motor training.

A comprehensive eye examination should provide the foundation of sports vision care. Beyond this, assessment may be adapted to the specific visual demands of the sport, considering factors such as viewing distances, target speed, peripheral awareness, lighting and glare, visual motor requirements, environmental conditions and the use of protective equipment.

Accurate refractive correction, appropriate management of visual dysfunction and the selection of suitable optical solutions are central to optimising visual function in sport. Depending on individual needs and sporting demands, these solutions may include spectacles, contact lenses or specialised sports eyewear, and primary eye care professionals have a central role in prescribing these optical aids and medical devices.

Protecting vision is equally important. Many sports-related eye injuries are preventable, and eye care professionals have an important responsibility in recommending appropriate protective eyewear and ensuring that it complies with relevant safety standards. Where a risk of ocular injury exists, safety should take priority over claims of performance enhancement.

Sports vision may also include visual, perceptual and sensory-motor training. This is an evolving area in which some approaches show promising results. However, improvements in laboratory or training tasks do not necessarily translate into improved competitive performance. Such interventions should therefore be evidence-based, sport-specific and focused on meaningful real-world outcomes.

Sports vision also provides an opportunity for multidisciplinary collaboration. Eye care professionals can work alongside coaches, sports physicians, sports scientists and other professionals to ensure that vision and eye health are appropriately considered within the wider context of sports participation and performance.

ECOO encourages European optometrists and opticians with an interest in sport to develop their knowledge and competencies in sports vision through appropriate education and continuing

professional development. This represents an opportunity to extend existing professional competencies into a specialised and developing field, while contributing to safer participation, optimal visual function and evidence-based sports care.

ECOO therefore supports greater recognition of vision and eye health within sport, appropriate education for eye care professionals, multidisciplinary collaboration and further high-quality research into the relationship between vision and sporting performance.

Sports vision is not simply about seeking marginal gains in elite athletes. It is about helping everyone who participates in sport to see clearly, protect their eyes and use their vision effectively to perform to the best of their individual ability.

This Position Statement is supported by an extended evidence assessment report prepared by the ECOO Working Group on Sports Vision, which provides a detailed review of the available scientific literature and the references underpinning the statements presented here.

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ABOUT ECOO

The European Council of Optometry and Optics (ECOO) is the European organisation which represents the interests of optometrists and opticians from 25 countries. It aims to promote eye health to the public across borders and to harmonise clinical and educational standards of optometric and optical practice throughout Europe.

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