



# Membership Survey: Demographics, Perceptions, and Needs

December 2020

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# Executive Summary

## Overview

The ACAO Council has identified three key strategy objectives in alignment with the 2020-2023 Strategic Plan:

Pillar	Annual Objectives
1. <b>Building Relationships:</b> Opticians are often a patient’s first touchpoint for eye care; the care opticians provide is in collaboration with other healthcare providers.	a) Develop a stakeholder relations strategy including identification of all key stakeholders and an assessment of their needs and interests.
2. <b>Educating Through Awareness:</b> Opticians are healthcare professionals contributing to and improving Alberta’s healthcare system.	b) Develop an organizational communication strategy, including identification of the communication needs of key stakeholders.
3. <b>Strengthening Governance:</b> Opticians are granted the privilege of self-regulation for the purpose of protecting and serving the public.	c) Develop a governance strategy including identifying Council’s competency gaps/needs.

As part of the development of these strategies, the Council undertook both a benchmarking study with relevant stakeholders and a membership survey with ACAO members. The following report outlines the methodology and results of the membership survey.

## Summary of Survey Methodology

The 2020 ACAO Membership Survey is intended to assist the Council to better understand the membership and the optical profession in Alberta. A standardized questionnaire was used to allow for a valid and reliable interpretation of survey results, as well as to establish a baseline for future surveys so that the ACAO can begin to monitor data and evaluate trends over time.

A standardized electronic questionnaire was developed based on a review of historical and benchmarking data, reviewed by a communications consultant, and approved by the ACAO’s Association Committee (population subsample). Survey variables reviewed focus on the following key areas: (1) member and employment information; and (2) member perceptions of the ACAO and the profession.

A total of 1,192 survey invitations were sent directly to registered members via email. The survey resulted in 30.3% response rate with a 92% completion rate and a median completion time of 10 minutes.

## Highlights of Results

### *Member and Employment Information*



#### *Respondent Characteristics*

Most survey respondents were Registered Opticians (65%), of which 24% were Registered Contact Lens Practitioners.

For those respondents who shared a response, most are in the 41-60 years (50%) or 25-40 years (38%) age range. Approximately 38% of respondents have been licensed for more than 15 years, followed closely by respondents with licensure for 5 to 15 years (32%).

For those respondents who shared a response, most identified as female (76%).

#### *Education and Employment*

The majority of respondents have a post-secondary diploma (72%), although additional degrees and professional development certificates were also noted. Most respondents make an annual salary between \$40,000 to \$79,000 or have an hourly wage in the \$25-34/hour range.

Of the 28% of respondents who indicated that the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted their employment, reasons cited include: temporary layoffs, reduction in hours, change of departments, and change of employers. Most respondents continue to work full-time (78%).

Most respondents (88%) work in community care (e.g., clinic, box store). Some respondents work in education, consulting, engineering, retail marketing and sales, and acute and continuing care. 16% of respondents aim to retire within five years. Most respondents are more than five years away from retirement (83%).

Of the 7% of respondents who indicated they have more than one employer, respondents generally worked for two employers or travelled to different practice locations. 11% of respondents also own their optical practice.

#### *Other Professional Affiliations*

Of the 14% of respondents who indicated other registrations or professional affiliations, most hold membership with the Opticians Association of Canada (OAC). Other organizations cited included the Alberta College of Optometrists, the Canadian Certified Optometric Assistant program, the Saskatchewan College of Opticians, and the Optical Women's Association.

## Member Perceptions of the Opticianry Profession



### Optician Education

Most respondents (89%) felt that their education adequately prepared them for their role as an optician. For those who responded “no” (11%), the following areas were identified for addition or improvement in the current education programs available (n=27):

- Management/leadership
- Conflict management
- Client/patient relations
- More hands-on experience versus mathematical training
- Quality practicum opportunities
- Problem solving
- Up-to-date technology
- Interpersonal communication
- More access to lab opportunities.

### The Role of Optician

Most survey respondents were very satisfied or satisfied with their role as an optician (81%). Respondents commented that opticians should be recognized and paid a higher salary for the technical and clinical nature of their work and should have an expanded scope of practice.

Most respondents strongly agreed or agreed that they are able to fully use their skills and knowledge at work (85%), have opportunities to participate in decision making (80%) and to serve as a leader or manager (75%), work in an environment with adequate resources to provide quality care (73%), and have positive relationships with other healthcare providers (93%).

Some respondents noted concerns with work volume and staffing resources due to COVID-19, as well as the impact on quality of care due to the use of unlicensed professionals in optical practices.

## Role of Opticians

- High cost of registration/low income
- Need to expand scope of practice
- Online eyewear dispensing
- Need for more public awareness
- Perception of opticianry as retail
- Non-licensed optical positions
- Job growth and security
- Continuing competency
- Rapid evolution of technology
- Professional ethics and trust

## Opticianry Profession

- Opportunity for growth and career expansion
- In line with British Columbia where refracting and prescribing is already an option for opticians
- There is a need for opticians who can refract and prescribe

## Upgrading

- Lack of interest or opportunity
- Age and proximity to retirement
- Volume of existing work
- Greater interest in eyeglasses
- CL fitting and refracting already done by optometrists
- Contact lens shopping online
- Cost and time challenges for education
- Low likelihood of job/income growth
- Will not improve credibility
- Not required for employment
- Concerns with remote refracting
- Requires additional education and responsibility
- Current issues associated with the regulation of refraction in Alberta and the impact on patient health/safety

Most survey respondents strongly agreed or agreed that they are proud to be an RO or RCLP (88%) and to tell others that they are an RO or RCLP (88%). Most also feel that being an RO or RCLP provides them with a sense of personal accomplishment (85%).

### *Opticianry Profession*

A majority of respondents feel optimistic about the opticianry profession (57%, but others were unsure (26%) or felt less positive about the future (17%). Similarly, a majority of respondents would recommend a career in opticianry (65%), but others were unsure (22%) or would not recommend the career to others (12%).

Concerns with the career path and profession include low income, lack of job security and growth opportunities, proliferation of online eyewear dispensing and use of unlicensed professionals, lack of awareness and recognition of opticians as healthcare professionals, limited training opportunities, and poor regulation of optical appliances.

### *Upgrading: RCLP and Refract/Prescribe*

A majority of survey respondents are not interested in upgrading from a Registered Optician (RO) to Registered Contact Lens Practitioner (52%) or in upgrading to refract and prescribe (51%).

### *Healthcare vs. Retail*

Most survey respondents personally identify as healthcare professionals (88%), but a majority do not feel that the public (63%) or other healthcare practitioners (54%) recognize them as healthcare professionals.

Reasons cited for this discrepancy include the perception of opticianry as administrative and retail-oriented rather than technical and clinical. Some respondents noted that other healthcare professionals and the public lack awareness about the education, skills, and knowledge of opticians and their status as licensed professionals. The location of some practices within shopping malls contributes to the perception of opticians as sales professionals.

## Image/Reputation

- Fees too high compared to other regulated health professionals
- Services do not reflect the level of fees
- Lack of professional and public awareness of the ACAO and its role
- No protection against the growth of unlicensed professionals in the optical field
- Inability in legislation to protect against unlicensed professionals in the optical field or unprofessional clinics/dispensaries
- Outdated board and box store employees out of touch with independent retailers
- Lack of support for members and the low wages paid to opticians
- Need to improve transparency, public awareness, and online presence

## Purpose/Direction

- Staff have helped to advance and uplift the profession
- Outdated equipment used in national examinations
- Need to strengthen profession and professional purpose
- Fees too high and lack of support for members and the public
- Limited information provided to support practice or career
- Post-secondary education for opticians has declined in quality
- Limited transparency

## Member Perceptions of the ACAO



### Image and Reputation

A majority of survey respondents rated the image and reputation of the ACAO as very positive or positive (59%). Respondents also noted a number of concerns and proposed areas for improvement.

### Purpose and Direction

Most survey respondents strongly agree or agree that the ACAO prioritizes protection of the public (80%), provides reliable information (87%), helps opticians to practice safely and competently (77%), collaborates with related organizations (64%), and is a forward-looking organization (65%).

### Organizational Performance

A majority of survey respondents rated the performance of the ACAO as extremely or very effective both as a regulatory college (57%) and professional association (56%).

Comments included that the ACAO provides up-to-date information, has made positive progress as a self-regulating profession, and has been supportive during the COVID-19 pandemic. Respondents also noted a number of concerns and proposed areas for improvement.

### People and Relationships

Most survey respondents strongly agree or agree that the ACAO responds to the needs of members (67%), is accessible and approachable (79%), communicates openly with members (79%), has a reputation as a trustworthy organization (72%), and is a diverse organization (64%). Respondents also noted a number of concerns and proposed areas for improvement.

## Organizational Performance

- Need a better understanding of public needs
- Strive for a stronger profession and eliminate loopholes for unlicensed professionals
- Protect opticians against organizations that place pressure on workers to “bend the rules”
- Provide more information on workplace protocols rather than allow business to set direction
- Perform spot checks to ensure clinics/dispensaries are following college guidelines
- Improve public awareness of risks associated with online eyewear shopping
- Offer improved education options and support for continuing competency
- Support members to increase wages and project job security
- Work towards more effective employment standards for opticians
- Offer more services based on level of fees
- Help opticians with low vision testing

## People/Relationships

- Need to create and communicate roadmaps, goals, and objectives
- Focused more on protecting the public than fighting for the profession
- Too many emails about COVID-19 guidelines
- Preferred the previous program for continuing competency

### *Volunteering*

35% of respondents were very likely or likely to serve as an ACAO volunteer, in a role such as Council member, committee member at large, field supervisor, or exam administrator. Some respondents indicated that they already serve as volunteers or have served in the past and had a positive experience.

Other respondents were unsure whether they would like to volunteer (33%) or would not be likely or very likely to volunteer (32%).

### *Overall Service*

A majority of respondents were very satisfied or satisfied with the overall quality of service provided to members (70%), the overall range of services available to members (69%), and the overall quality of interactions with ACAO staff (75%).

### *Regulatory Services*

A majority of respondents were very satisfied or satisfied with the assistance they received with complaints or discipline (59%), practice advice, support, or guidance (62%), regulatory information (77%), and registration, renewal, and reinstatement (82%). 48% of respondents were very satisfied or satisfied with the new Quality Assurance Program, while 39% were unsure of the program.

### *Member Services*

A majority of respondents were very satisfied or satisfied with the continuing education offered by the ACAO (68%). 49% of respondents were very satisfied or satisfied with benefits available to members and 50% with events hosted for members, while 38% and 42% respectively were unsure of the benefits and events.

## Volunteering

- Time and scheduling constraints
- Travel distance
- More information needed about opportunities
- Availability of opportunities
- More openness to new people and ideas
- Incentives for volunteering
- Need for clear direction, objectives, and goals to promote the professional and increase value

## Overall Service

- Affiliation with Retired Teachers Association benefits plan is positive
- Approachable, friendly, and helpful staff
- Phone availability could be improved
- Unclear what services are provided to members
- Continuing education credits unclear/unavailable
- Limited interaction with organization

### Communication Channels

Most respondents were very satisfied or satisfied with telephoning the ACAO office (79%), emails from the ACAO (87%), the ACAO website (77%), the Eighth Line newsletter (73%), and email newsletters (77%). A majority of respondents were unsure of the Facebook page (59%), YouTube channel (88%), and webinars (51%).

### Programs and Services

A majority of respondents (65%) indicated that they had made use of the ACAO's programs and services (e.g., information, education) to assist in their practice.

### Preferred Communications

Most respondents prefer to receive communications from the ACAO office via direct email (93%), followed by the ACAO website (41%), and the Eighth Line newsletter (32%). The least popular communication channels were YouTube (3.85%), Facebook (7.10%), and webinars (13.61%). Comments (n=4) noted a preference for email, suggested the Eighth Line newsletter should have more content, and that emails should include links to website content.

A majority of respondents (54%) indicated that they would prefer not to receive text message updates from the ACAO. Reasons cited (n=5) include a preference for email and that too many notices were already received from the ACAO.

Most respondents (60%) indicated that they would not be interested in joining a social media group to connect and chat with other ACAO members. Reasons cited (n=14) include not using or avoiding social media, lack of time, already participating in other groups, and a concern that social media groups are primarily used by box store employees.

## Regulatory Services

- Have not looked into the new Quality Assurance (QA) Program yet
- Need more information/confused about the new QA Program
- The QA Program and SMART goals are too complicated/too much work to complete
- Dislike the new QA Program/previous program was better
- The QA Program seems to align with big box store systems
- No ability to hold employers accountable for unprofessional practice
- Slow progress from government on the expanded scope of practice
- Website is confusing

## Member Services

- We are capable of wonderful things
- Adapting to COVID-19
- Happy with discounted rate on insurance
- Good speakers and presenters
- May benefit from professional speakers to make events more interesting
- Have not been able to attend any events/events during work hours
- Weekend virtual events are helpful for members who work through the week
- Events held in Edmonton or Calgary are not accessible for members in other areas
- Would like to have a convention every three years with opportunity to meet suppliers/industry leaders
- Difficult to find information on the website; continuing education is confusing on Moodle

## MEMBER COMMENTS

### Communications

- Presentations should be higher quality
- Would like more articles in the newsletter that are new news/explanation
- Website is difficult to navigate
- Not satisfied with new Quality Assurance Program
- Do not use/was not aware of social media channels or webinars
- Too many logins for different sites
- Most communication does not allow for feedback/announcements about decisions that were already made
- At times difficult to reach someone by phone

### Application to Practice

- Programs/services used: equipment loan; continuing education; information; COVID-19 guidelines
- Programs and services not applicable to practice/not prevalent

### Other

- Need to be transparent about the pandemic and the future of the college
- Would like more options for no-cost continuing education
- Opticians need to be better recognized as regulated health professionals
- Would like to see a wider range of member benefits offered
- The refracting system in Alberta must be overhauled for public safety
- Licensing fees need to be reduced in comparison to low wages for opticians
- Need to understand what licensing fees cover
- Would like to see website navigation improved
- Post-secondary optical programs need to catch up with current technology
- Start a conversation about some of these challenging topics
- Take a stronger lead for better optical insurance coverage
- Industry needs to shift to digitally secure files and move away from paper records
- College needs the ability to take action against unprofessional businesses
- Higher standard for recognized continuing education activities

## Recommendations for Consideration

The following recommendations for consideration are based on the responses to the membership survey and are organized into College and Association recommendations in anticipation of the pending separation mandated by Bill 46. The Council may determine that not all recommendations are relevant or feasible based on the current strategic plan and organizational budget, but they are provided here for subsequent discussion and evaluation.

### *Stakeholder Relations Strategy*

College	Association
1. Continue to collaborate with the National Alliance of Canadian Optician Regulators and support continuous improvement by providing member feedback on examinations and related regulatory activities.	1. Foster relationships with optical education programs in Alberta and support continuous improvement by providing member feedback on post-secondary education needs.
2. Complete a fee benchmarking study against other health regulatory colleges across Canada to evaluate current fees and determine if reductions are possible/reasonable to align with industry standard.	2. Complete an income benchmarking study against other related health professions and optician positions across Canada to evaluate optician income/wage levels in Alberta and determine an action/advocacy plan to support income growth.
3. Develop a stakeholder engagement/government relations plan to explore regulatory oversight of optical clinics/dispensaries and how to address regulation of non-licensed optical staff. (Note: It is recommended that discussions be held with Alberta's Optometrists and Ophthalmologists as part of the evaluation of this recommendation.)	3. Develop an education program based on member feedback and practice needs that includes no-cost content and sponsorship options; align the program design with relevant education programs offered by health associations across Canada to ensure alignment with national competencies, consistency, and quality of content; evaluate efficacy of existing continuing education delivery system (Moodle).
4. Work with provincial and national optical professions to discuss the proliferation of online eyewear dispensing and, subject to the results of these discussions, develop a stakeholder/government relations plan to explore public safety considerations and regulation of this area of practice.	4. Develop an association convention and member event plan based on member feedback that includes opportunities to highlight professional speakers, industry leaders, and key suppliers/vendors, as well as changes in technology and innovations in practice.

College	Association
5. Evaluate the new Quality Assurance program based on member feedback, make program updates to reduce complexity, and develop a member engagement plan to improve support/compliance with the program.	5. Evaluate existing member benefits and explore additional benefit opportunities to provide members with a diverse range of high-quality, relevant, and useful programs and services that benefit both individual members and their practice.
6. Evaluate existing telephone system to improve member ability to connect with staff members when phoning the office. <sup>1</sup>	6. Implement a telephone system that allows members to easily access and connect with association staff members.
7. Carry out regular benchmarking studies and surveys relevant to regulatory activities to gather ongoing feedback from stakeholders, engage in continuous improvement, and maintain engagement levels.	7. Carry out regular benchmarking studies and surveys relevant to association activities to gather ongoing feedback from stakeholders, engage in continuous improvement, and maintain engagement levels.
8. Develop a volunteer recognition program for service to the College and profession.	8. Develop a volunteer recognition and awards program for service to the Association and profession.

*Organizational Communication Strategy*

College	Association
1. Subject to approval of an expanded scope of practice to refract and prescribe, develop a robust communication plan to educate members about the expansion and related responsibilities	1. Subject to approval of an expanded scope of practice to refract and prescribe, develop a marketing plan to educate and attract potential and current members to upgrade licensure.
2. Review and update the College website to improve clarity and transparency for public and member users, including updates recommended by the Alberta Federation of Regulated Health Professions for standardization of web content across the health professions.	2. Develop an Association website based on clarity and transparency that highlights services available to members; evaluate/make improvements to IT infrastructure such as the Moodle system for continuing education.
3. Develop a new communication plan for the Quality Assurance program based on member feedback to improve member understanding of program requirements and program compliance.	3. Develop a public and professional awareness campaign to increase recognition of opticians as healthcare providers and improve understanding of the value, role, and responsibilities of licensed opticians (Note: To be considered in the context of the current national licensed opticians initiative.)

<sup>1</sup> ACAO staff are currently piloting a new cloud-based desktop telephone system that includes direct lines, extensions, and targeted call areas (e.g., registration/renewal) to improve member access to the information and staff members they need to speak with.

College	Association
4. Focus on targeted email communications to keep members up to date on key regulatory topics and ensure all email content links back to the website for ease of access and historical reference.	4. Focus on targeted email communications to keep members up to date on key association topics and ensure all email content links back to the website for ease of access and historical reference.
5. Develop a communication plan to improve member understanding of the importance of licensure and the breakdown of licensure fees by regulatory functions/requirements.	5. Expand the Eighth Line newsletter into a flagship publication that includes topical, cutting-edge, and engaging industry content.
6. Consider an opt-in text communication program for members who are interested in receiving a limited number of text messages on key topics such as new regulatory requirements or renewal/continuing competency deadlines.	6. Consider an opt-in text communication program for members who are interested in receiving a limited number of text messages on key topics such as new member benefits and membership renewal deadlines.
7. Maintain a Facebook page for social media updates on key regulatory topics and important deadlines; continue to use YouTube for video content. <sup>2</sup>	7. Develop a separate Association Facebook page for social media updates on key association topics and important deadlines; consider YouTube for video content.

*Governance Strategy*

College	Association
1. Develop a regulatory volunteer program with clear information for potential volunteers that highlights an openness to diversity of perspectives, a robust orientation process, and a variety of opportunities that align with member availability and location.	1. Develop an association volunteer program with clear information for potential volunteers that highlights an openness to diversity of perspectives, a robust orientation process, and a variety of opportunities that align with member availability and location.

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<sup>2</sup> The recommendations for consideration do not include expansion to additional social media channels. 93% of survey respondents prefer to receive communication via email and little interest was expressed in social media.

# Introduction

## Strategic Objectives

The ACAO Council has identified three key strategy objectives in alignment with the 2020-2023 Strategic Plan:

Pillar	Description	Annual Objectives
<p>2. <b>Building Relationships:</b> Opticians are often a patient’s first touchpoint for eye care; the care opticians provide is in collaboration with other healthcare providers.</p>	<p>BR 1: Opticians, optometrists and ophthalmologists partner to create a unified approach to patient care.</p> <p>BR 2: Opticians are stronger together through an engaged membership.</p> <p>BR 3: Opticians positively influence regulation in Alberta through collaboration with stakeholders.</p>	<p>d) Develop a stakeholder relations strategy including identification of all key stakeholders, an assessment of their needs and interests, and finalizing targets for measurement and monitoring of performance.</p>
<p>3. <b>Educating Through Awareness:</b> Opticians are healthcare professionals contributing to and improving Alberta’s healthcare system.</p>	<p>EA 1: Public can be aware and informed about opticians as health care professionals including how the ACAO protects and serves the public interest.</p> <p>EA 2: ACAO members are aware of and engaged to contribute to regulatory and association focused functions and activities.</p> <p>EA 3: ACAO members recognize the quality assurance program and the impact it has on improving opticians’ practice.</p>	<p>e) Develop an organizational communication strategy, including identification of the communication needs of key stakeholders and finalizing targets for measurement and monitoring of performance.</p>
<p>4. <b>Strengthening Governance:</b> Opticians are granted the privilege of self-regulation for the</p>	<p>SG 1: ACAO Council prioritizes recruitment of its governance officers and development of its processes to support legacy transfer in roles and committees.</p>	<p>f) Develop a governance strategy including identifying Council’s competency gaps/needs and finalizing targets for measurement and monitoring of performance.</p>

Pillar	Description	Annual Objectives
purpose of protecting and serving the public.	<p>SG 2: ACAO Council plans for and implements activities to increase and sustain governance knowledge in those who participate in governing the organization.</p> <p>SG 3: ACAO Council members commit to and make time for identifying and practicing governance skills and abilities.</p>	

As part of the development of these strategies, the Council undertook both a benchmarking study with relevant stakeholders and a membership survey with ACAO members.

### Survey Methodology

The 2020 ACAO Membership Survey is intended to assist the Council to better understand the membership and the optical profession in Alberta. A standardized questionnaire was used to allow for a valid and reliable interpretation of survey results, as well as to establish a baseline for future surveys so that the ACAO can begin to monitor data and evaluate trends over time.

The standardized electronic questionnaire for the 2020 survey was developed in the context of the ACAO’s strategic plan and objectives, and based on a review of the ACAO’s current membership information and a scan of surveys carried out by various analogous organizations in the health care sector.

The draft questionnaire was reviewed by a communications consultant and was approved by the ACAO’s Association Committee, which comprises ACAO Council members and members-at-large (population subsample). Survey variables reviewed focus on the following key areas: (1) member and employment information; and (2) member perceptions of the ACAO and the profession.

The survey was distributed via SurveyMonkey and ACAO staff tracked the number of invitations (including undeliverable), survey completion rate, and median time to complete the survey.

Invitations	Respondents	Completion Rate	Completion Time
1192 <sup>3</sup>	361	92%	10 minutes

An invitation and survey link were sent via email to ensure only registered members completed the survey. Notifications about the survey were also be posted to the website/social media and advertised

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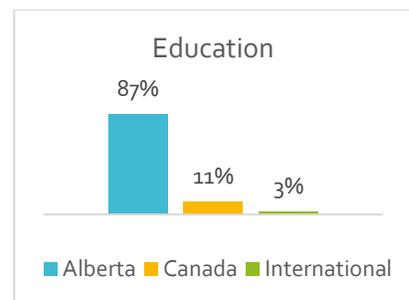
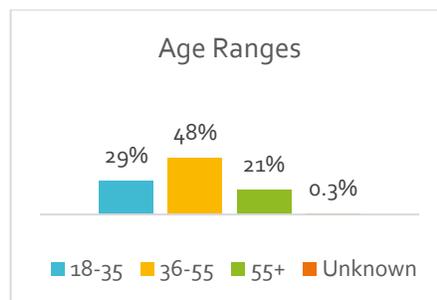
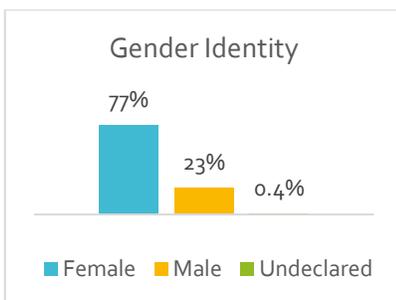
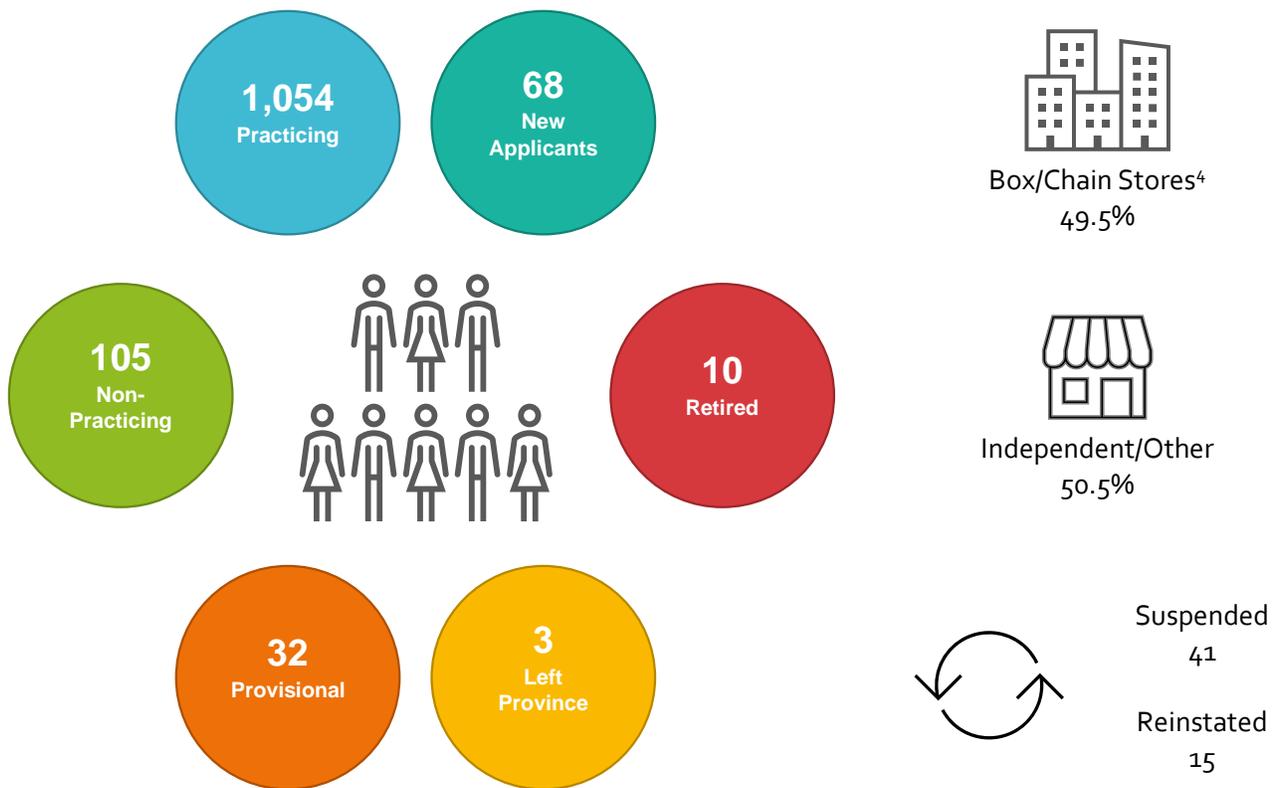
<sup>3</sup> A small number of email bounce backs were received but staff were able to resend to another email address on the member record.

in the November newsletter so that members who may have missed the initial email had the opportunity to contact ACAO staff to request a resend, or look for follow-up reminder emails. The survey remained open from November 1 to 30, 2020, with regular reminders to encourage participation.

## Current Membership Demographics

The ACAO regularly collects basic demographic data from applicants and registrants for the purposes of assessing applications and maintaining a member register.

### ACAO Membership as of December 7, 2020



<sup>4</sup> Costco, Superstore/Loblaws, Walmart, FYI Doctors, Hakim Optical, Iris, Lenscrafters, Optiks International

# Survey Results

## Member and Employment Information



Most survey respondents were Registered Opticians (65%), of which 24% were Registered Contact Lens Practitioners. Approximately 38% of respondents have been licensed for more than 15 years, followed closely by respondents with licensure for 5 to 15 years (32%). For those respondents who shared a response, most are in the 41-60 years (50%) or 25-40 years (38%) age range

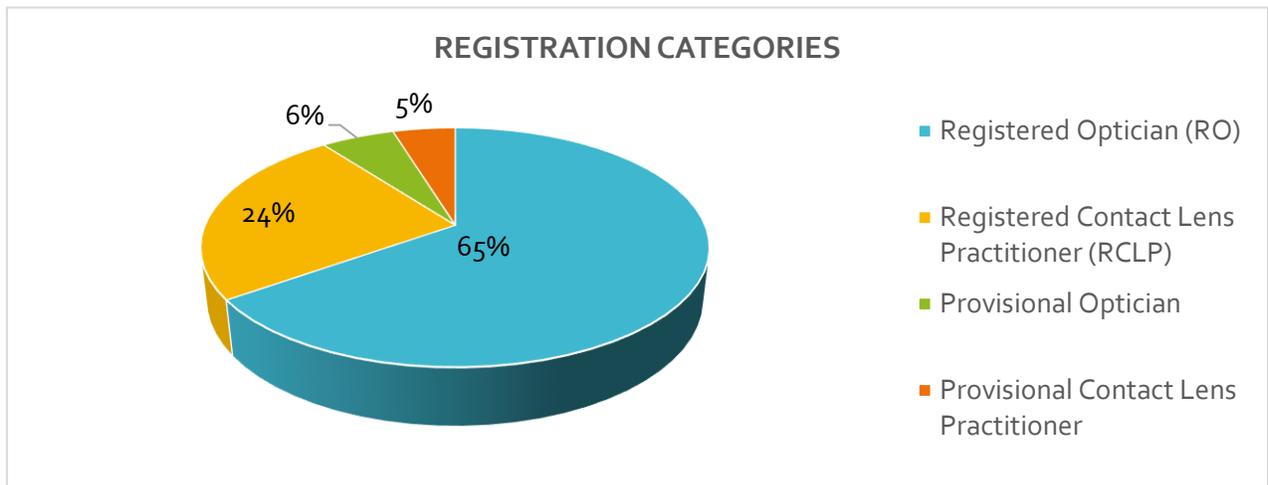


Figure 2 - Registration Categories of Survey Respondents (n=359)

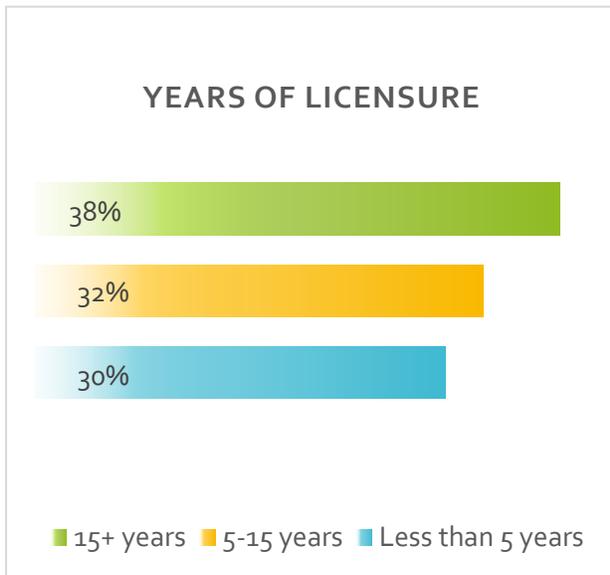


Figure 3 - Years of Licensure (n=361)

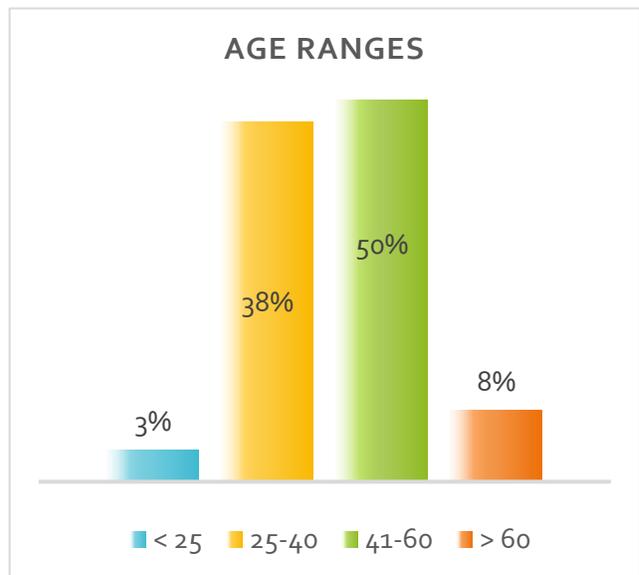


Figure 4 - Age Ranges (n=360)



For those respondents who shared a response, most identified as female (76%). The majority of respondents have a post-secondary diploma (72%), although additional degrees and professional development certificates were also noted. Most respondents make an annual salary between \$40,000 to \$79,000 or have an hourly wage in the \$25-34/hour range.

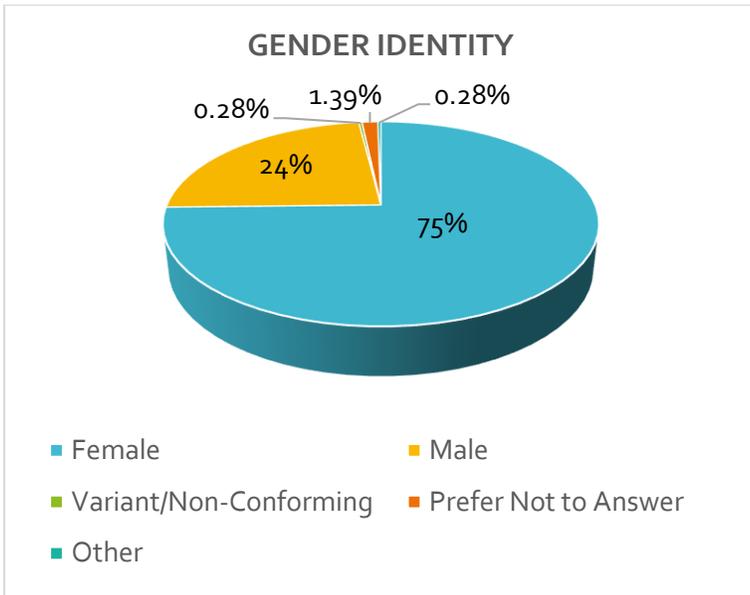


Figure 5 - Gender Identity (n=359)

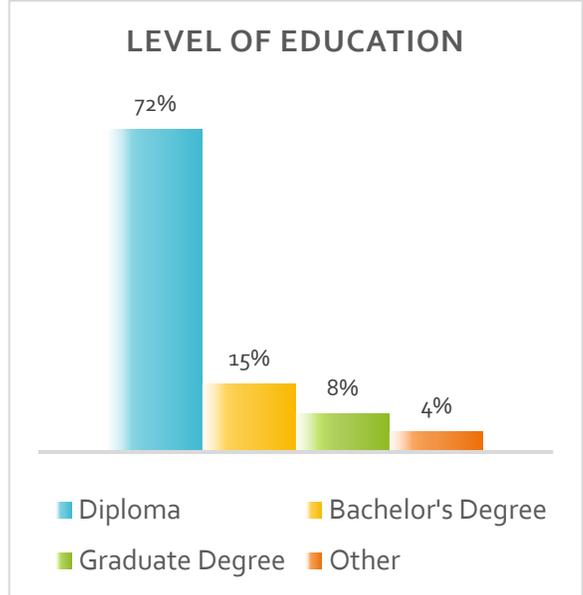


Figure 6 - Level of Education (n=360)

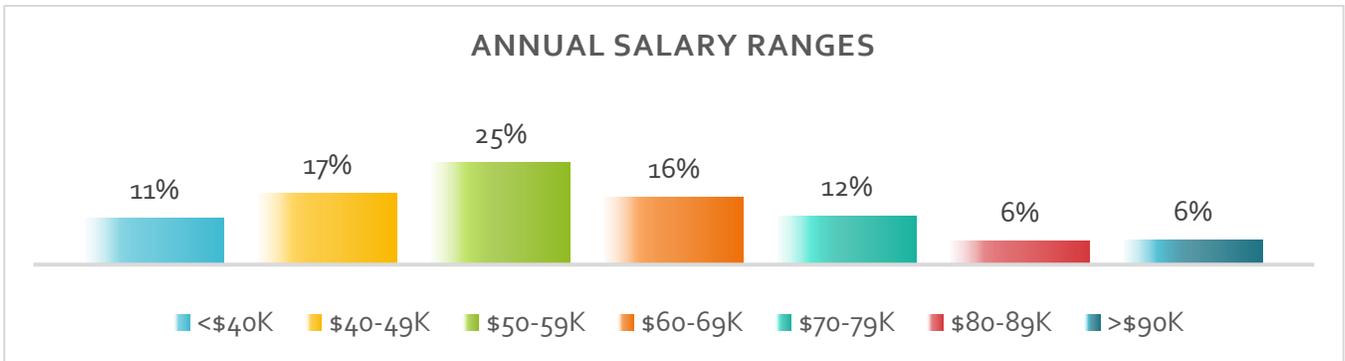


Figure 7 - Annual Salary Ranges (n=330)

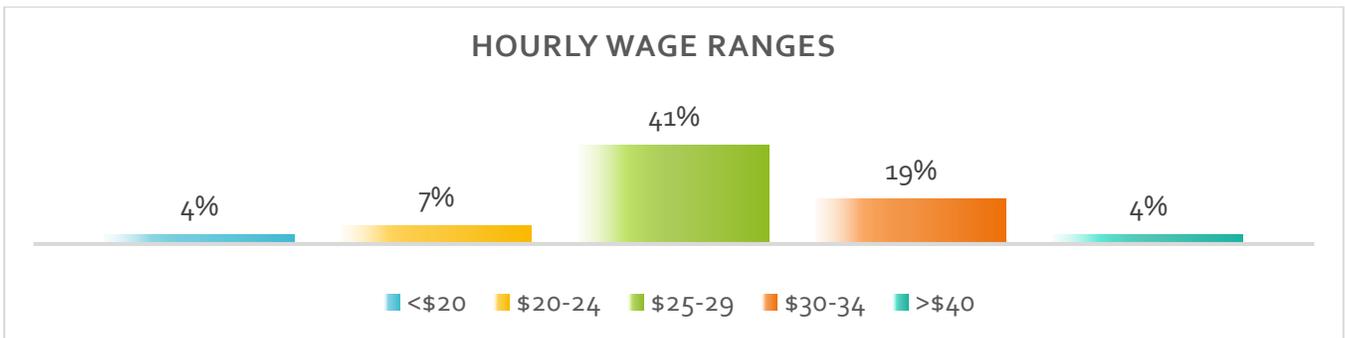


Figure 8 - Hourly Wage Ranges (n=27)



Of the 14% of respondents who indicated other registrations or professional affiliations, most hold membership with the Opticians Association of Canada (OAC). Other organizations cited included the Alberta College of Optometrists, the Canadian Certified Optometric Assistant program, the Saskatchewan College of Opticians, and the Optical Women’s Association.

Of the 28% of respondents who indicated that the COVID-19 pandemic has impacted their employment, reasons cited include: temporary layoffs, reduction in hours, change of departments, and change of employers. Most respondents continue to work full-time (78%).

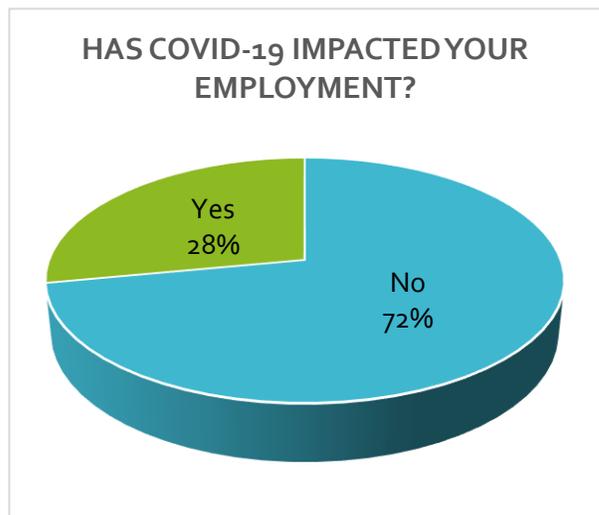
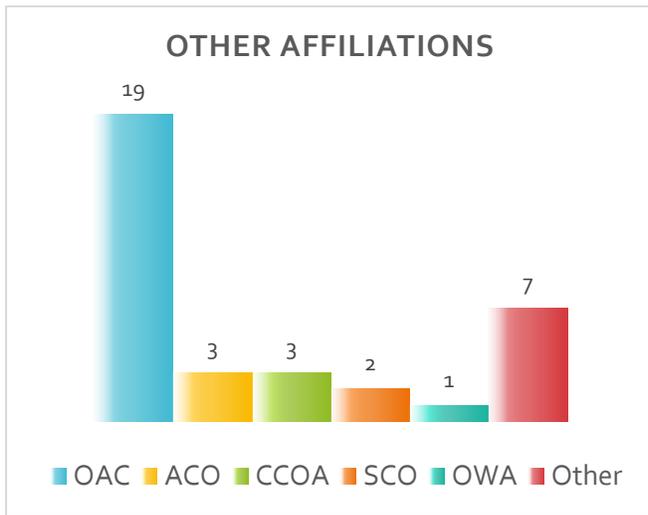


Figure 9 – Registration with other Colleges or Associations (n=356)

Figure 10 - Impact of COVID-19 on Employment (n=357)

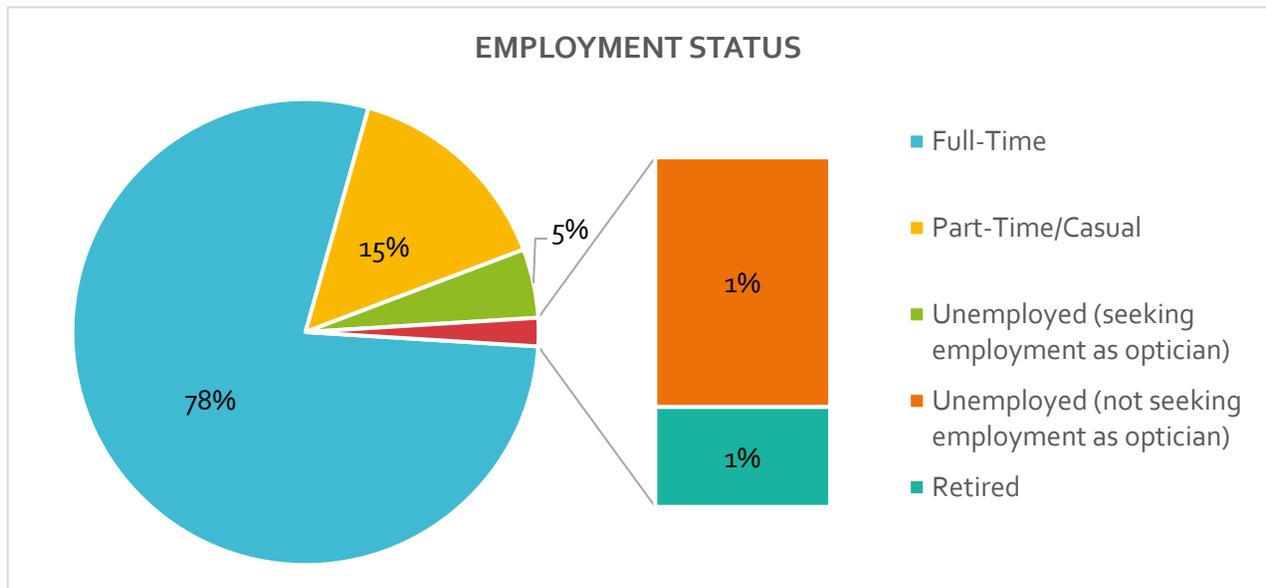


Figure 11 - Employment Status (n=356)



Of the 7% of respondents who indicated they have more than one employer, respondents generally worked for two employers or travelled to different practice locations. 11% of respondents also own their optical practice.

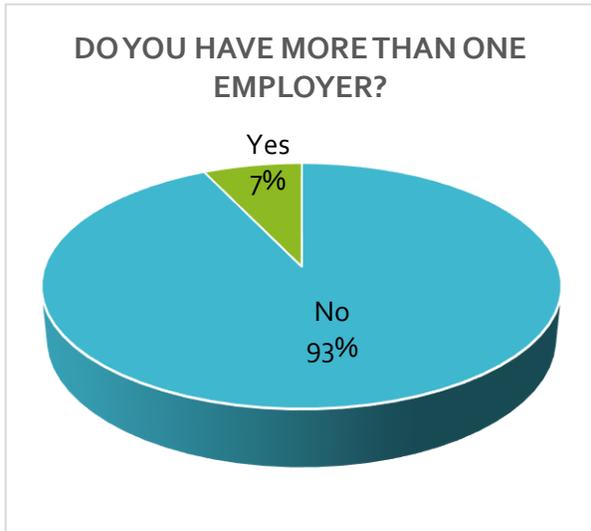


Figure 12 - Number of Employers (n=351)

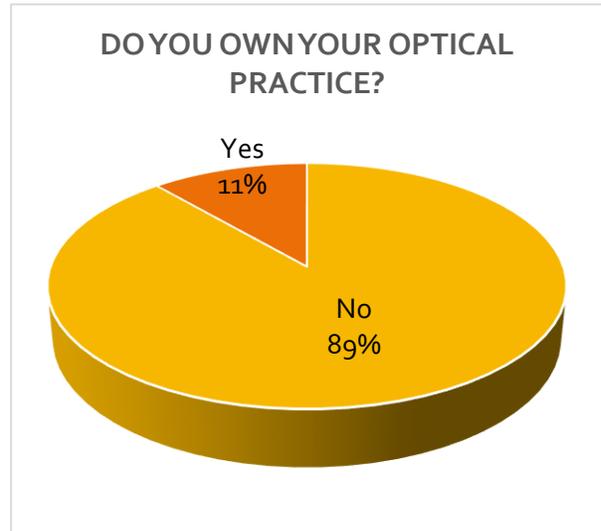


Figure 13 - Clinic/Dispensary Ownership (n=353)

Most respondents (88%) work in community care (e.g., clinic, box store). Some respondents work in education, consulting, engineering, retail marketing and sales, and acute and continuing care. 16% of respondents aim to retire within five years. Most respondents are more than five years away from retirement (83%).

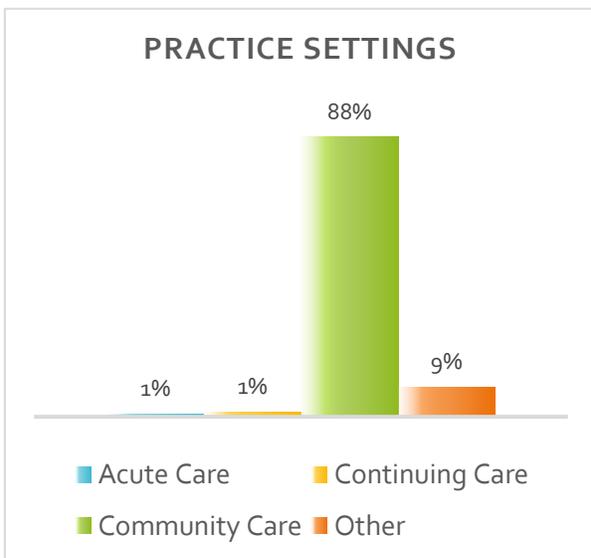


Figure 14 - Practice Settings (n=346)



Figure 15 - Years to Retirement (n=352)

## Member Perceptions of the Opticianry Profession



Most survey respondents were very satisfied or satisfied with their role as an optician (81%). Respondents commented that opticians should be recognized and paid a higher salary for the technical and clinical nature of their work and should have an expanded scope of practice.

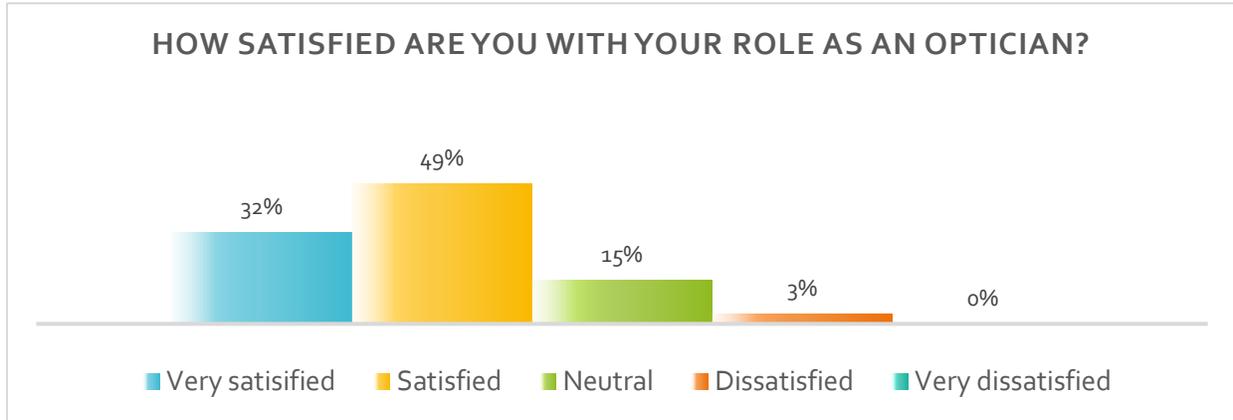


Figure 16 - Satisfaction with Role of Optician (n=350)

**MEMBER COMMENTS**

- High cost of registration/low income
- Need to expand scope of practice
- Online eyewear dispensing
- Need for more public awareness
- Perception of opticianry as retail
- Non-licensed optical positions
- Job growth and security
- Continuing competency
- Rapid evolution of technology
- Professional ethics and trust

Figure 17 – Role of Optician Concerns (n=76)

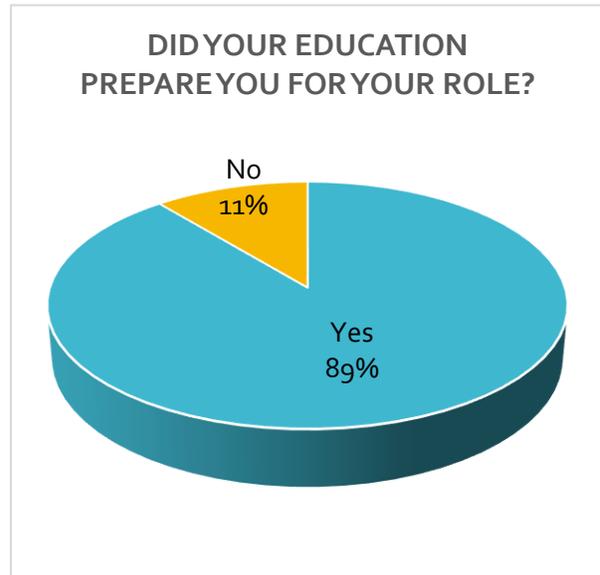


Figure 18 - Educational Preparation (n=350)

Most respondents (89%) felt that their education adequately prepared them for their role as an optician. For those who responded “no” (11%), the following areas were identified for addition or improvement in the current education programs available (n=27): management/leadership, conflict management, client/patient relations, more hands-on experience versus mathematical training, quality practicum opportunities, problem solving, up-to-date technology, interpersonal communication, and more access to lab opportunities.



Most survey respondents strongly agreed or agreed that they are able to fully use their skills and knowledge at work (85%), have opportunities to participate in decision making (80%) and to serve as a leader or manager (75%), work in an environment with adequate resources to provide quality care (73%), and have positive relationships with other healthcare providers (93%).

Some respondents noted concerns with work volume and staffing resources due to COVID-19, as well as the impact on quality of care due to the use of unlicensed professionals in optical practices.

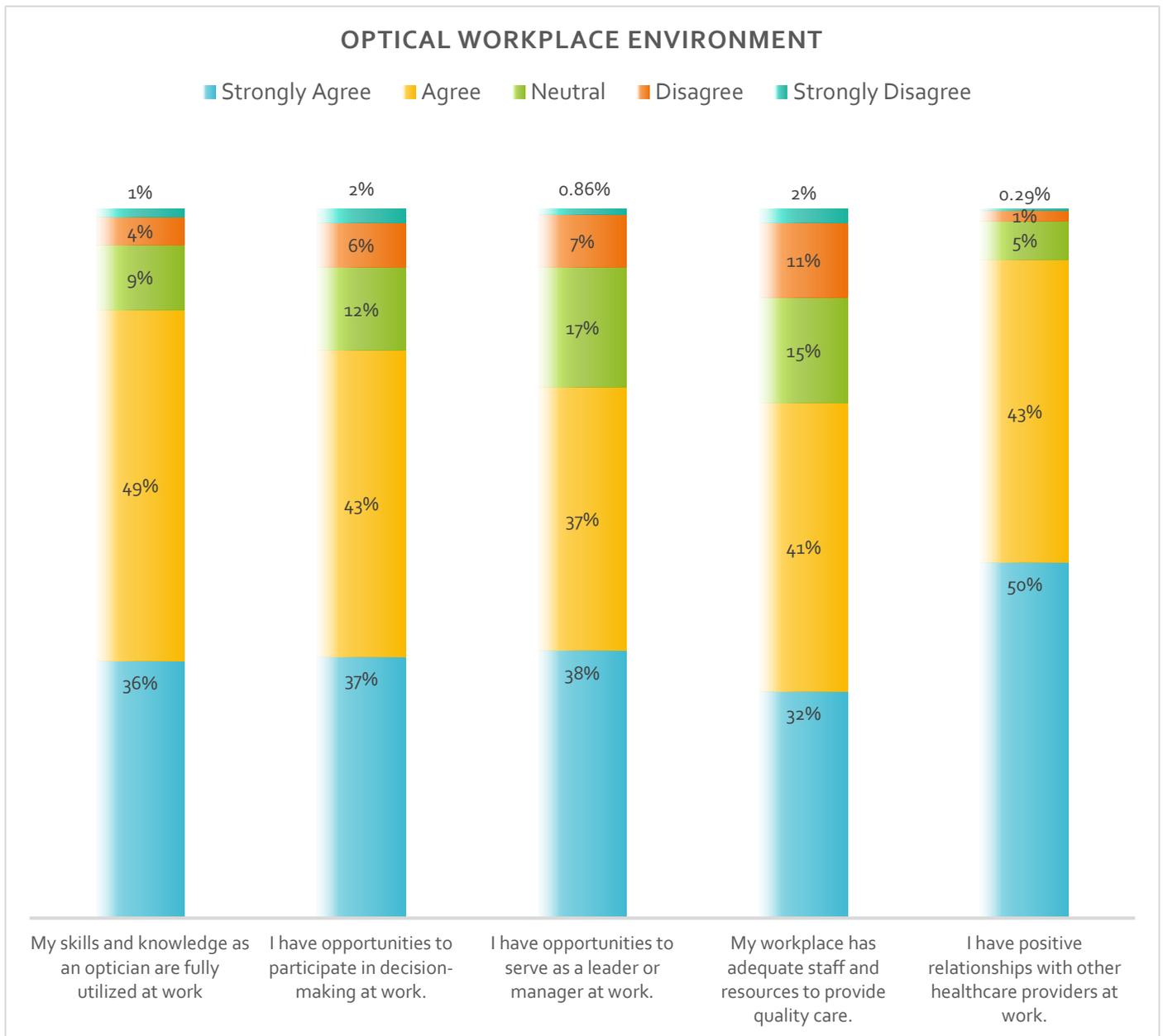


Figure 19 - Optical Workplace Environment (n=350)



Most survey respondents strongly agreed or agreed that they are proud to be an RO or RCLP (88%) and to tell others that they are an RO or RCLP (88%). Most also feel that being an RO or RCLP provides them with a sense of personal accomplishment (85%).

A majority of respondents feel optimistic about the opticianry profession (57%), but others were unsure (26%) or felt less positive about the future (17%). Similarly, a majority of respondents would recommend a career in opticianry (65%), but others were unsure (22%) or would not recommend the career to others (12%).

Concerns with the career path and profession include low income, lack of job security and growth opportunities, proliferation of online eyewear dispensing and use of unlicensed professionals, lack of awareness and recognition of opticians as healthcare professionals, limited training opportunities, and poor regulation of optical appliances.

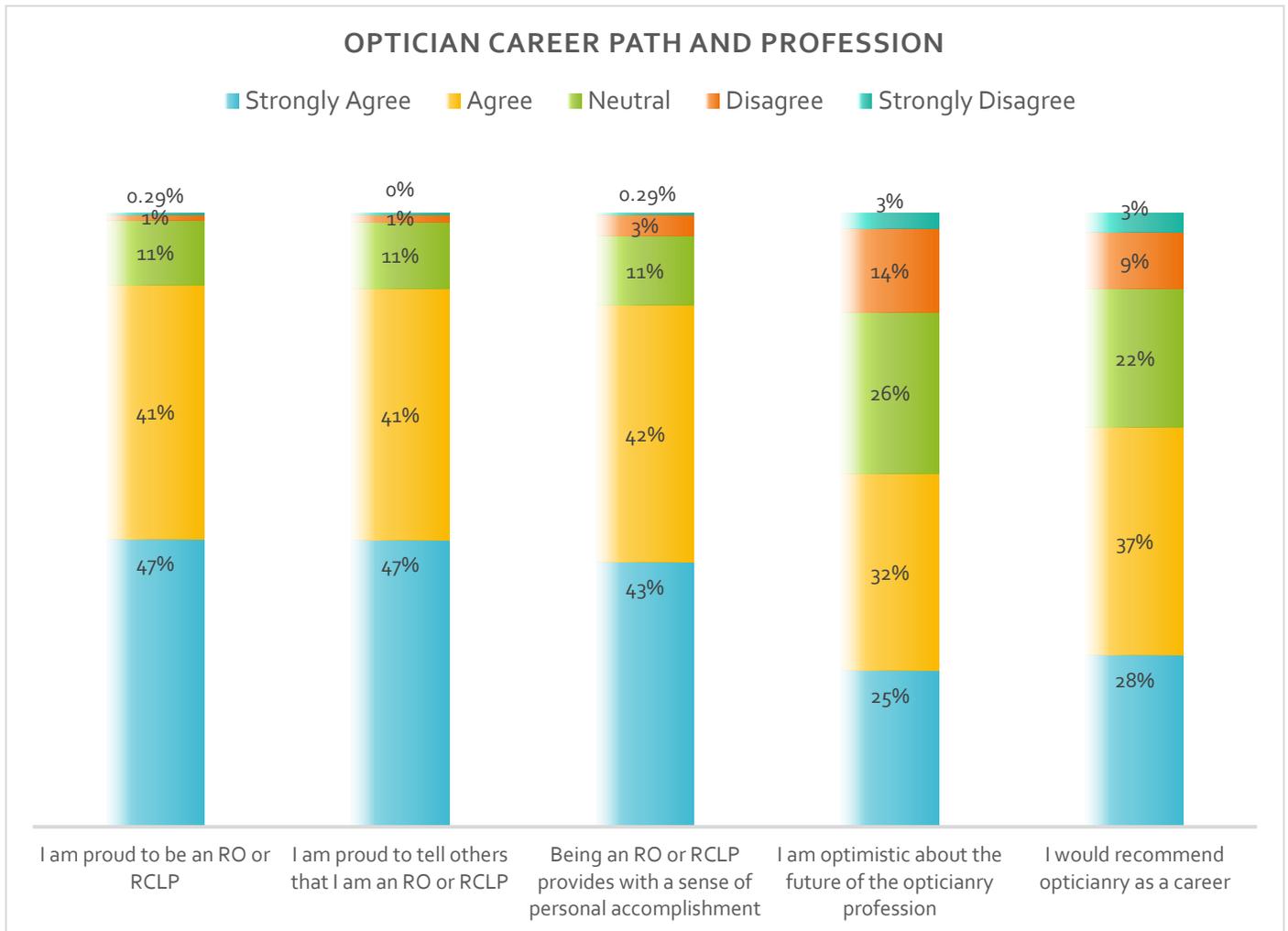


Figure 20 - Optician Career Path and Profession (n=348)



A majority of survey respondents are not interested in upgrading from a Registered Optician (RO) to Registered Contact Lens Practitioner (52%) or in upgrading to refract and prescribe (51%).

### ARE YOU INTERESTED IN UPGRADING TO AN RCLP LICENSE?

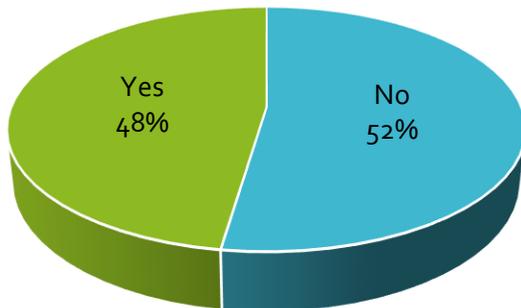


Figure 22 - Upgrading to RCLP (n=296)

### MEMBER COMMENTS

- Opportunity for growth and career expansion
- In line with British Columbia where refracting and prescribing is already an option for opticians
- There is a need for opticians who can refract and prescribe

Figure 21 - Upgrading Comments (n=273)

### ARE YOU INTERESTED IN UPGRADING YOUR LICENSE TO REFRACT AND PRESCRIBE?

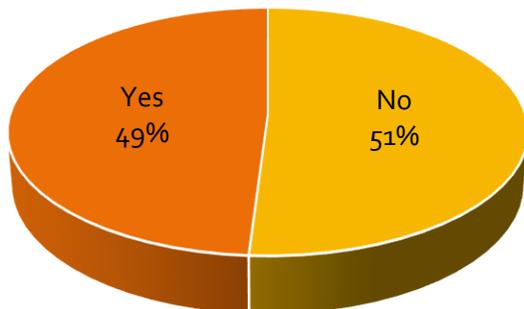


Figure 23 - Upgrading to Refract and Prescribe (n=343)

### MEMBER COMMENTS

- Lack of interest or opportunity
- Age and proximity to retirement
- Volume of existing work
- Greater interest in eyeglass dispensing
- Contact lens fitting and refracting already done by optometrists
- Contact lens shopping online
- Cost and time challenges for education
- Low likelihood of job or income growth
- Will not improve professional credibility
- Not required for employment
- Concerns with remote refracting
- Requires additional education and responsibility
- Current issues associated with the regulation of refraction in Alberta and the impact on

Figure 24 - Upgrading Concerns (n=273)



Most survey respondents personally identify as healthcare professionals (88%), but a majority do not feel that the public (63%) or other healthcare practitioners (54%) recognize them as healthcare professionals.

Reasons cited for this discrepancy include the perception of opticianry as administrative and retail-oriented rather than technical and clinical. Some respondents noted that other healthcare professionals and the public lack awareness about the education, skills, and knowledge of opticians and their status as licensed professionals. The location of some practices within shopping malls contributes to the perception of opticians as sales professionals.

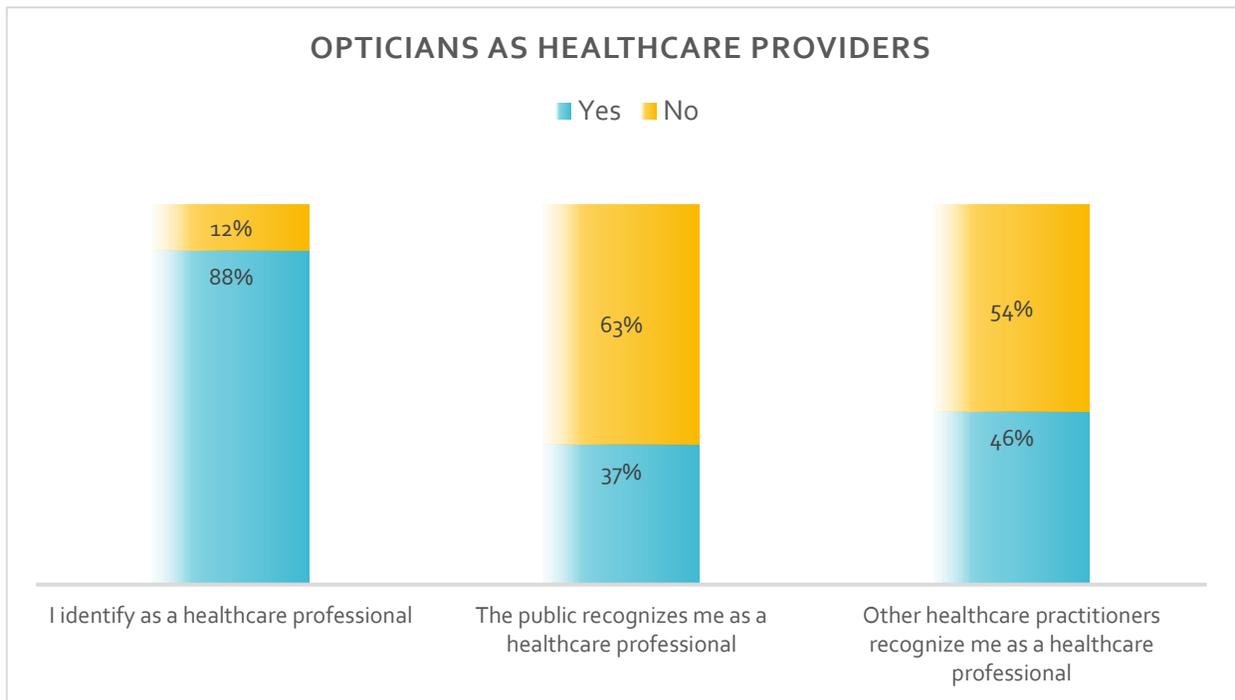


Figure 25 - Opticians as Healthcare Providers (n=347)

## Member Perceptions of the ACAO



A majority of survey respondents rated the image and reputation of the ACAO as very positive or positive (59%). Respondents also noted a number of concerns and proposed areas for improvement.

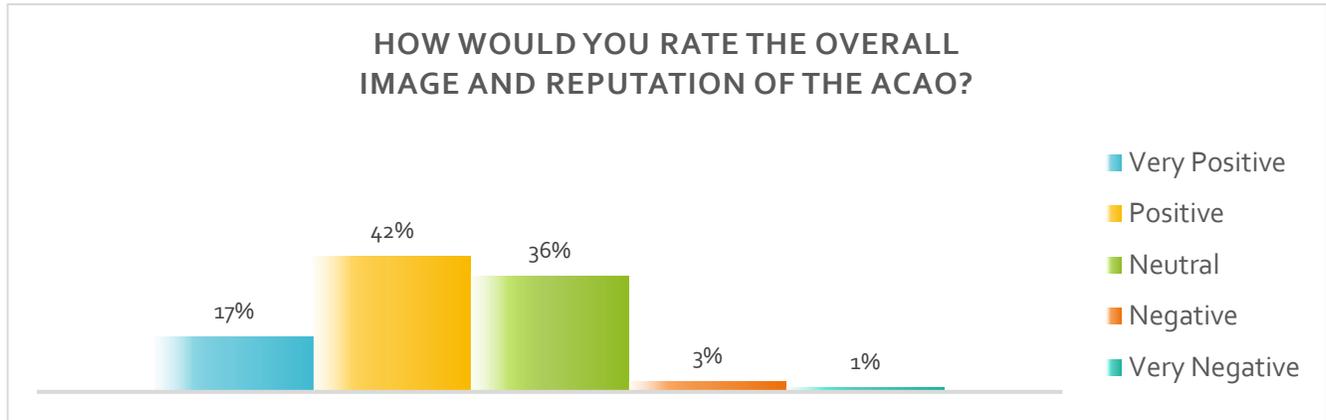


Figure 26 - Image and Reputation of ACAO (n=344)

### MEMBER COMMENTS

- Fees too high compared to other regulated health professionals
- Services do not reflect the level of fees
- Lack of professional and public awareness of the ACAO and its role
- No protection against the growth of unlicensed professionals in the optical field
- Inability in legislation to protect against unlicensed professionals in the optical field or unprofessional clinics/dispensaries
- Outdated board and box store employees out of touch with independent retailers
- Lack of support for members and the low wages paid to opticians
- Need to improve transparency, public awareness, and online presence

Figure 27 – Image and Reputation Comments and Concerns (n=13)



A majority of survey respondents rated the performance of the ACAO as extremely or very effective both as a regulatory college (57%) and professional association (56%).

Comments included that the ACAO provides up-to-date information, has made positive progress as a self-regulating profession, and has been supportive during the COVID-19 pandemic. Respondents also noted a number of concerns and proposed areas for improvement.

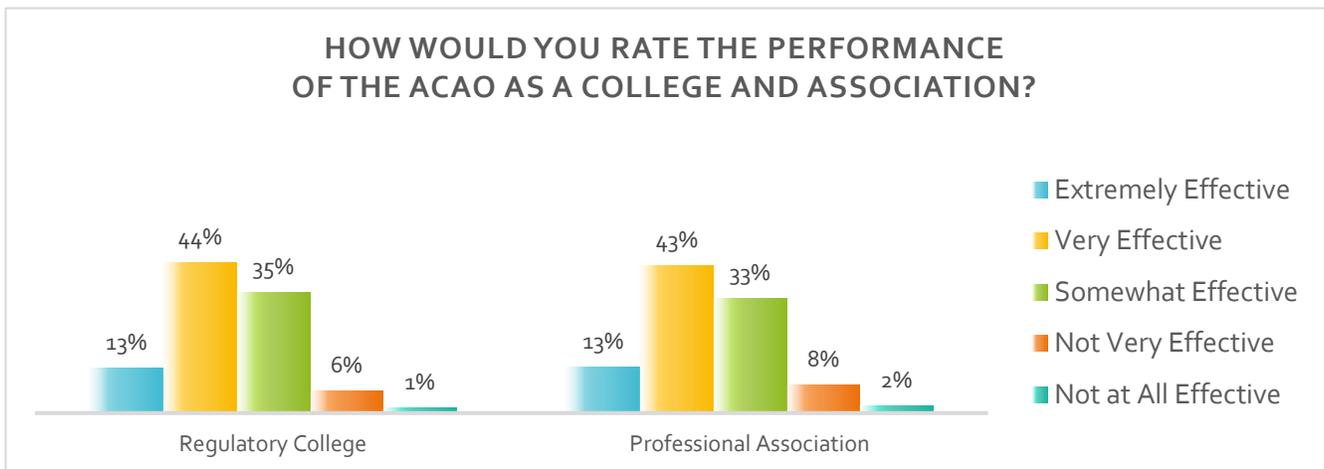


Figure 28 - ACAO as College and Association (n=342)

## MEMBER COMMENTS

- Need a better understanding of public needs
- Strive for a stronger profession and eliminate loopholes for unlicensed professionals
- Protect opticians against organizations that place pressure on workers to “bend the rules”
- Provide more information on workplace protocols rather than allow business to set direction
- Perform spot checks to ensure clinics/dispensaries are following college guidelines
- Improve public awareness of risks associated with online eyewear shopping
- Offer improved education options and support for continuing competency
- Support members to increase wages and project job security
- Work towards more effective employment standards for opticians
- Offer more services based on level of fees
- Help opticians with low vision testing

Figure 29 - College (n=22) and Association (n=21) Comments and Concerns



Most survey respondents strongly agree or agree that the ACAO prioritizes protection of the public (80%), provides reliable information (87%), helps opticians to practice safely and competently (77%), collaborates with related organizations (64%), and is a forward-looking organization (65%).

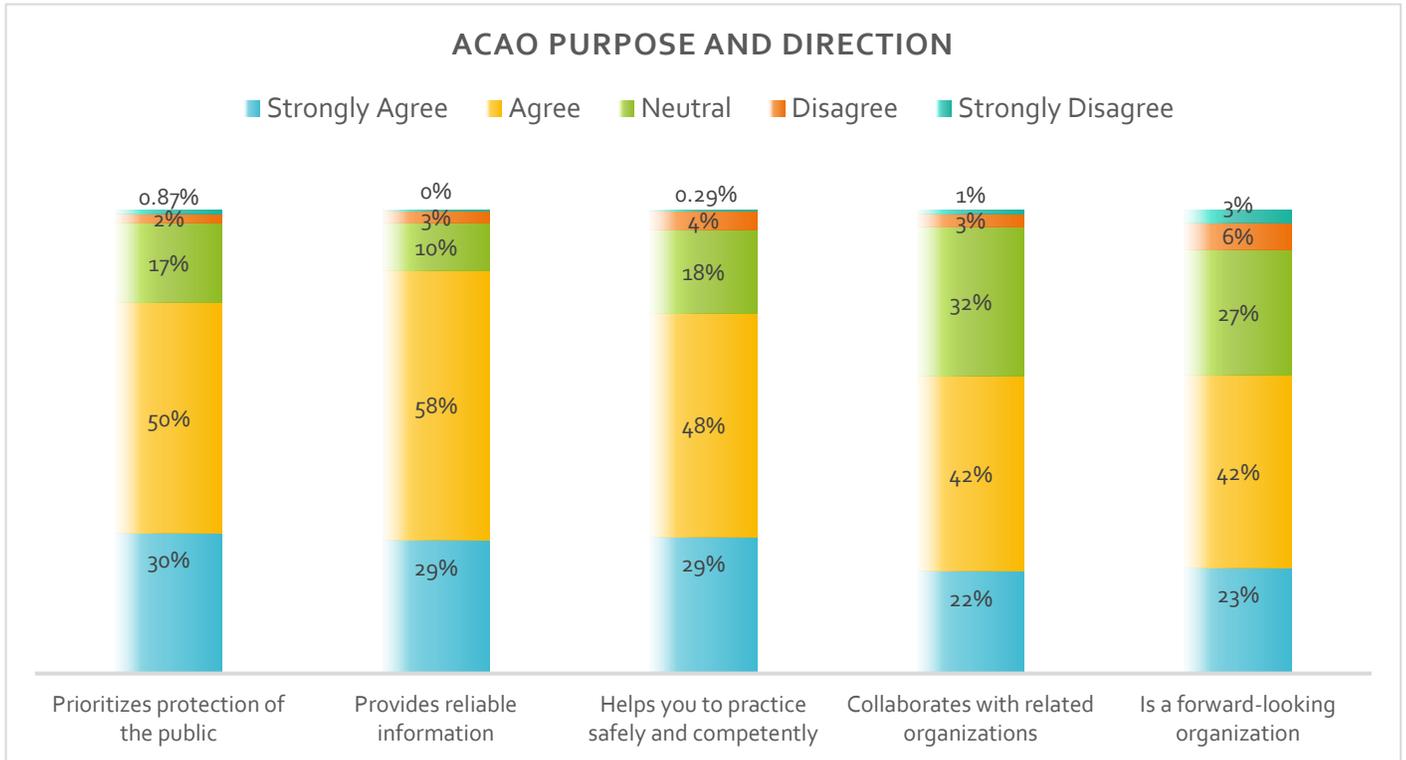


Figure 30 - ACAO Purpose and Direction (n=343)

## MEMBER COMMENTS

- Staff have helped to advance and uplift the profession
- Outdated equipment used in national examinations
- Need to strengthen profession and professional purpose
- Fees too high and lack of support for members and the public
- Limited information provided to support practice or career
- Post-secondary education for opticians has declined in quality
- Limited transparency

Figure 31 - Purpose and Direction Comments and Concerns (n=8)



Most survey respondents strongly agree or agree that the ACAO responds to the needs of members (67%), is accessible and approachable (79%), communicates openly with members (79%), has a reputation as a trustworthy organization (72%), and is a diverse organization (64%). Respondents also noted a number of concerns and proposed areas for improvement.

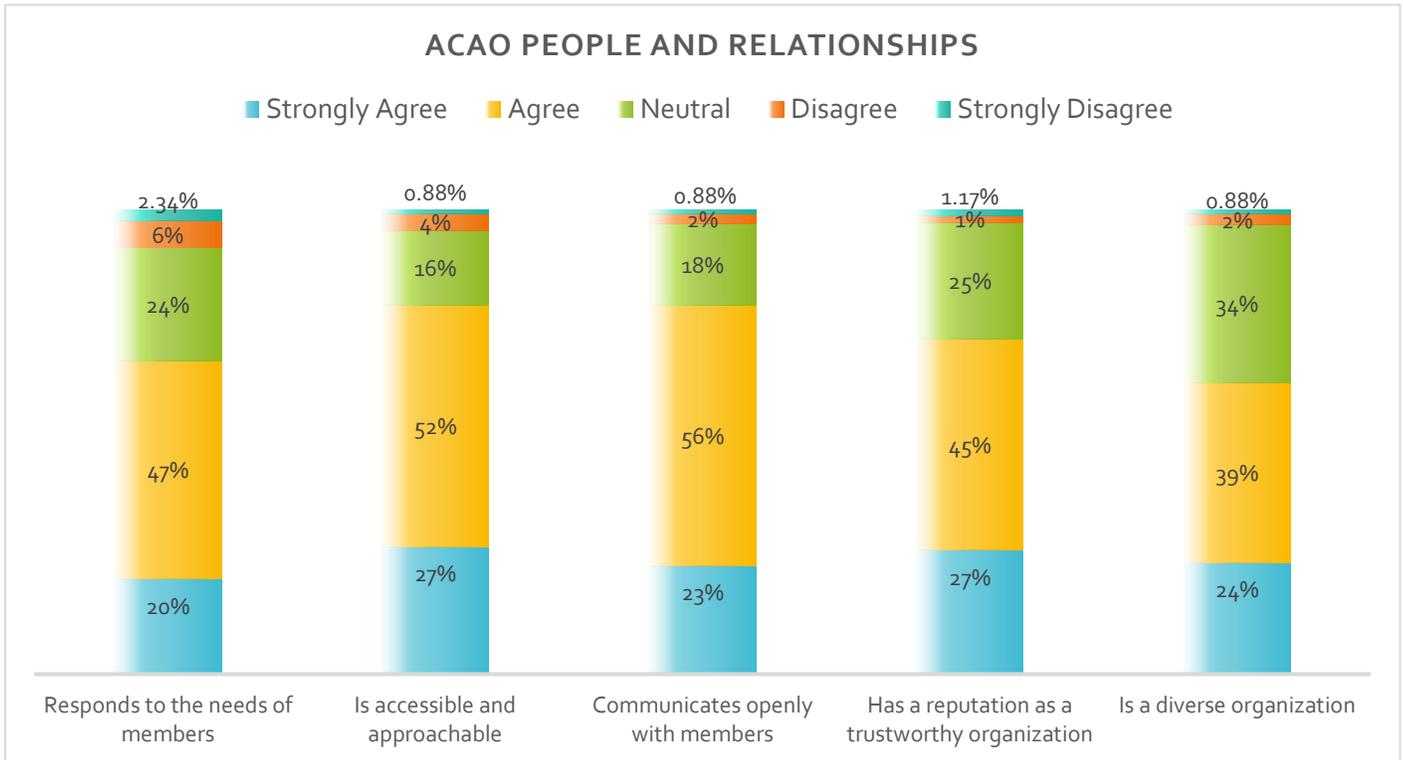


Figure 32 - ACAO People and Relationships (n=342)

MEMBER COMMENTS

- Need to create and communicate roadmaps, goals, and objectives
- Focused more on protecting the public than fighting for the profession
- Too many emails about COVID-19 guidelines
- Preferred the previous program for continuing competency

Figure 33 - People and Relationships Comments and Concerns (n=7)



35% of respondents were very likely or likely to serve as an ACAO volunteer, in a role such as Council member, committee member at large, field supervisor, or exam administrator. Some respondents indicated that they already serve as volunteers or have served in the past and had a positive experience.

Other respondents were unsure whether they would like to volunteer (33%) or would not be likely or very likely to volunteer (32%).

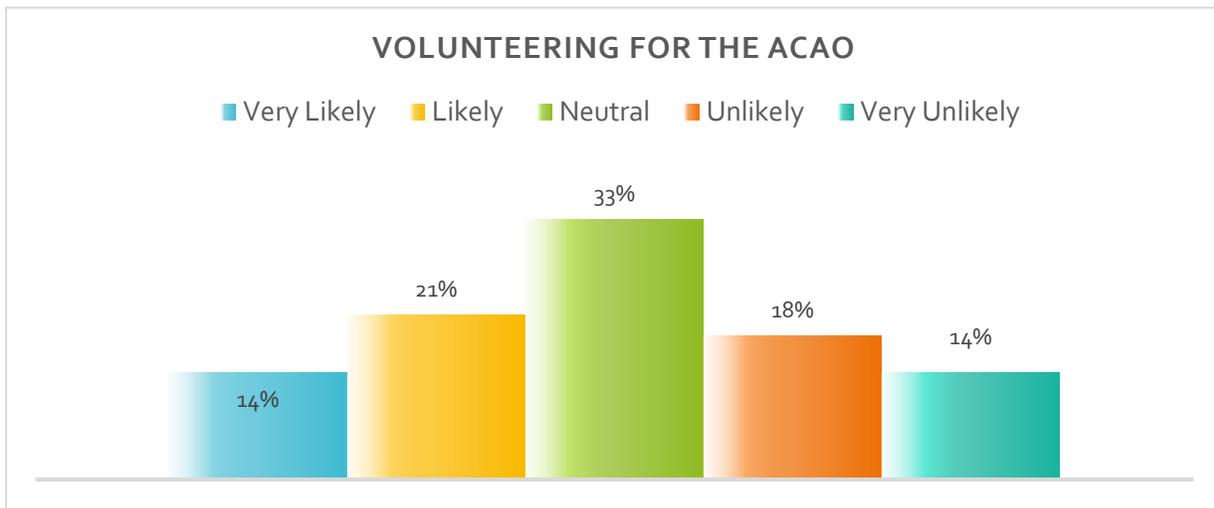


Figure 34 - Volunteering for the ACAO (n=343)

## MEMBER COMMENTS

- Time and scheduling constraints
- Travel distance
- More information needed about opportunities
- Availability of opportunities
- More openness to new people and ideas
- Incentives for volunteering
- Need for clear direction, objectives, and goals to promote the professional and increase value

Figure 35 - Volunteering Comments and Concerns (n=77)



A majority of respondents were very satisfied or satisfied with the overall quality of service provided to members (70%), the overall range of services available to members (69%), and the overall quality of interactions with ACAO staff (75%).



Figure 36 - Satisfaction with Overall Service (n=338)

MEMBER COMMENTS

- Affiliation with Retired Teachers Association benefits plan is positive
- Approachable, friendly, and helpful staff
- Phone availability could be improved
- Unclear what services are provided to members
- Continuing education credits unclear/unavailable
- Limited interaction with organization

Figure 37 - Overall Service Comments and Concerns (n=10)



A majority of respondents were very satisfied or satisfied with the assistance they received with complaints or discipline (59%), practice advice, support, or guidance (62%), regulatory information (77%), and registration, renewal, and reinstatement (82%). 48% of respondents were very satisfied or satisfied with the the new Quality Assurance Program, while 39% were unsure of the program.

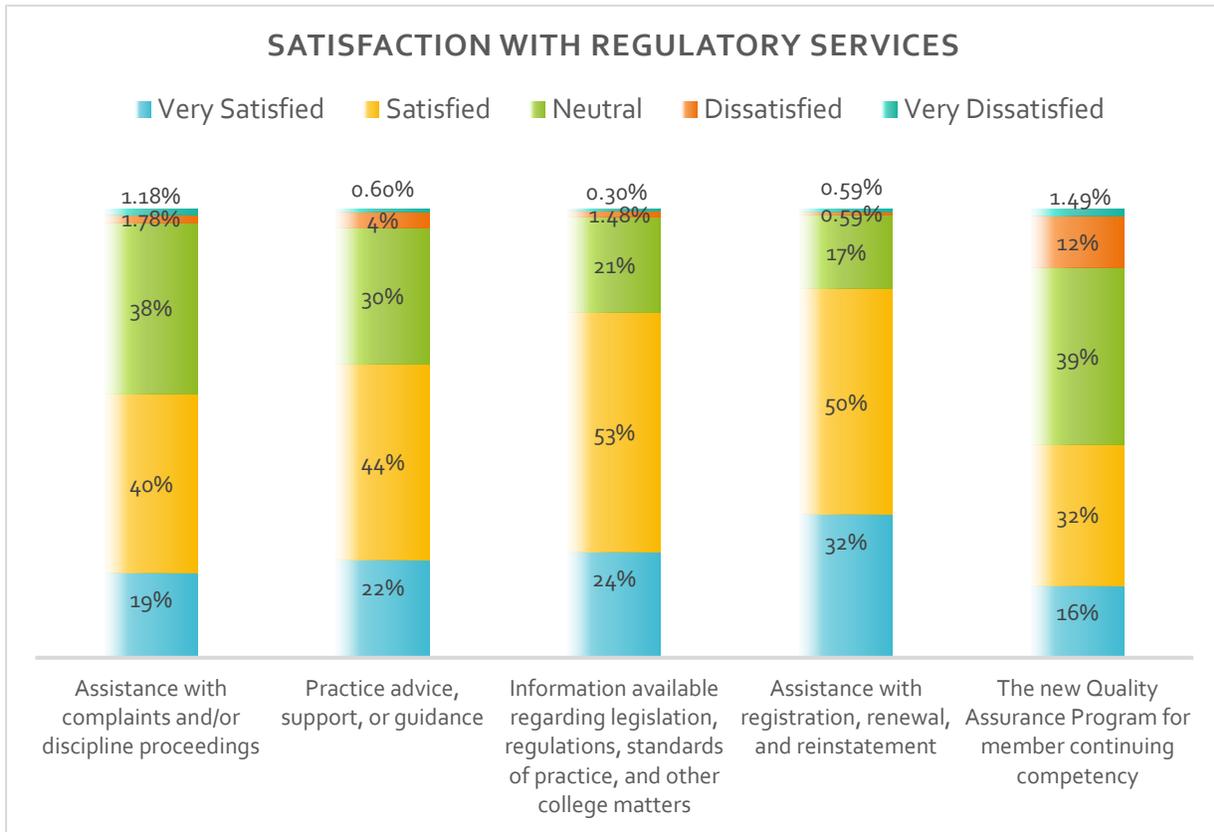


Figure 38 - Satisfaction with Regulatory Services (n=338)

## MEMBER COMMENTS

- Have not looked into the new Quality Assurance (QA) Program yet
- Need more information/confused about the new QA Program
- The QA Program and SMART goals are too complicated/too much work to complete
- Dislike the new QA Program/previous program was better
- The QA Program seems to align with big box store systems
- No ability to hold employers accountable for unprofessional practice
- Slow progress from government on the expanded scope of practice
- Website is confusing

Figure 39 - Regulatory Service Comments and Concerns (n=30)



A majority of respondents were very satisfied or satisfied with the continuing education offered by the ACAO (68%). 49% of respondents were very satisfied or satisfied with benefits available to members and 50% with events hosted for members, while 38% and 42% respectively were unsure of the benefits and events.

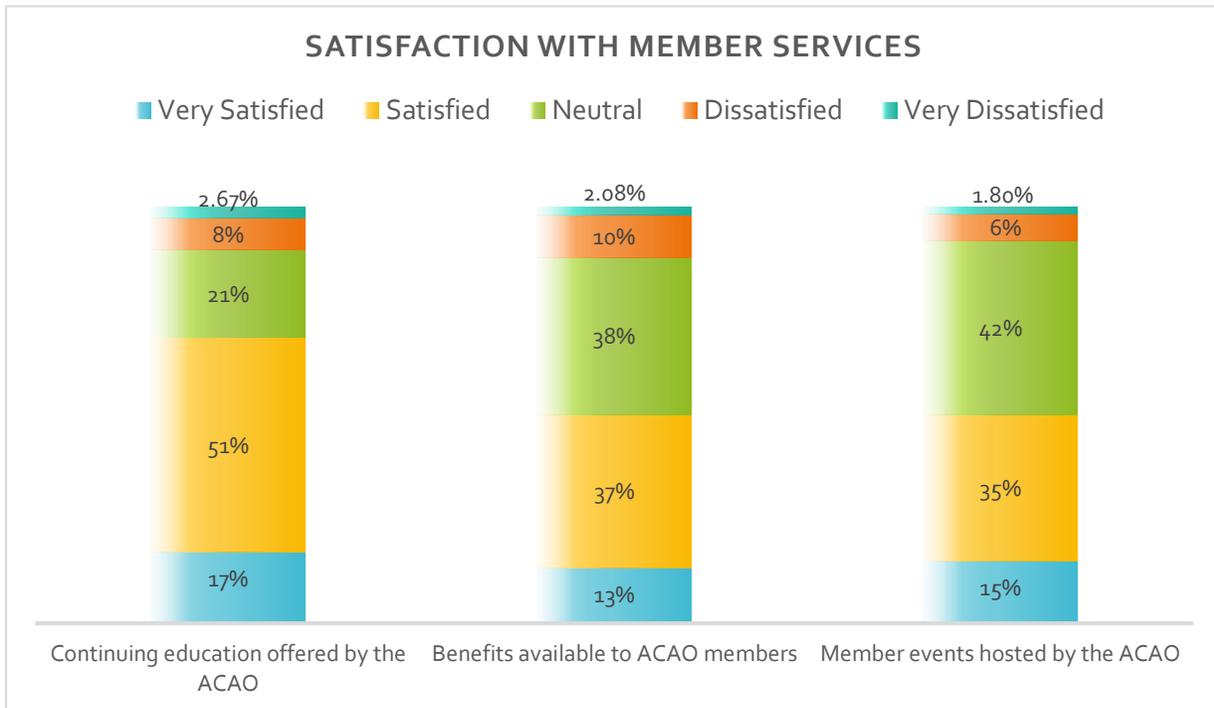


Figure 40 - Satisfaction with Member Services (n=337)

## MEMBER COMMENTS

- We are capable of doing wonderful things
- Adapting to COVID-19
- Happy with discounted rate on insurance
- Good speakers and presenters
- May benefit from professional speakers to make events more interesting
- Have not been able to attend any events/events held during work hours
- Weekend virtual events are helpful for members who work through the week
- Events held in Edmonton or Calgary are not accessible for members in other areas
- Would like to have a convention every three years with opportunity to meet suppliers and industry leaders
- Difficult to find information on the website
- Continuing education is confusing on Moodle

Figure 41 - Member Service Comments and Concerns (n=19)



Most respondents were very satisfied or satisfied with telephoning the ACAO office (79%), emails from the ACAO (87%), the ACAO website (77%), the Eighth Line newsletter (73%), and email newsletters (77%). A majority of respondents were unsure of the Facebook page (59%), YouTube channel (88%), and webinars (51%).

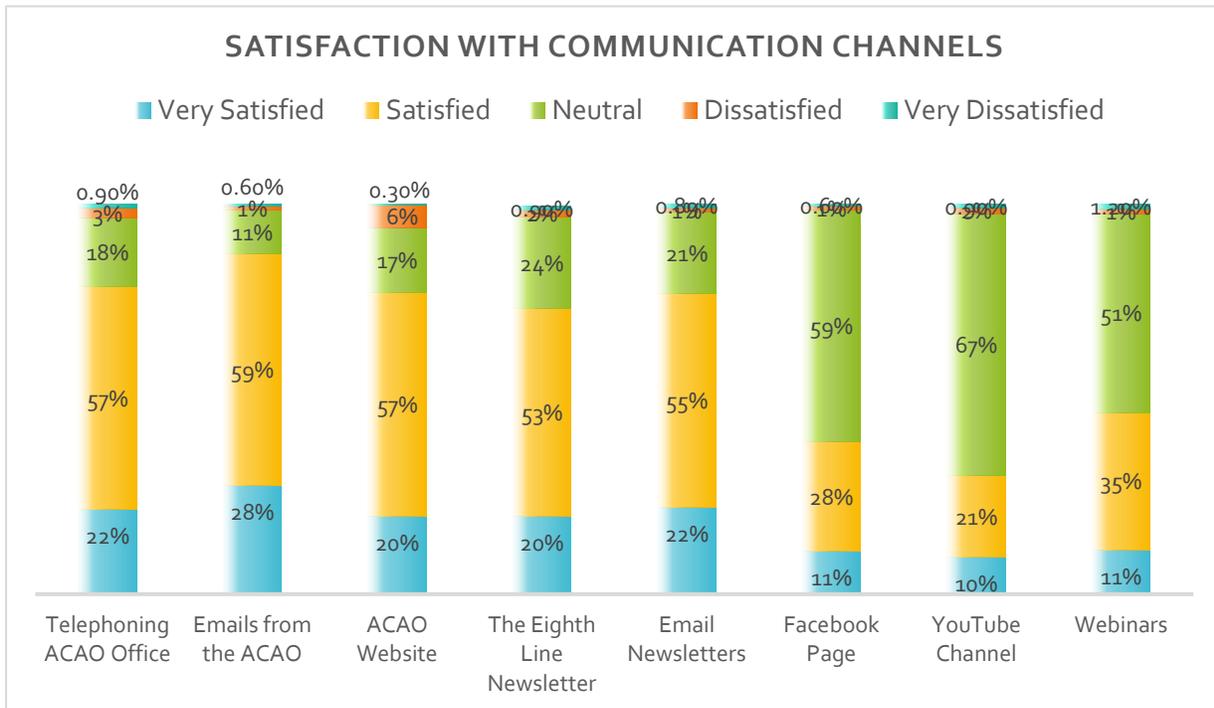


Figure 42 - Satisfaction with Communication Channels (n=338)

## MEMBER COMMENTS

- Presentations should be higher quality
- Would like more articles in the newsletter that are new news/explanation
- Website is difficult to navigate
- Not satisfied with new Quality Assurance Program
- Do not use/was not aware of social media channels or webinars
- Too many log-ins for different sites
- Most communication does not allow for feedback/announcements about decisions that were already made
- At times difficult to reach someone by phone

Figure 43 - Communication Channel Comments and Concerns (n=19)



A majority of respondents (65%) indicated that they had made use of the ACAO's programs and services (e.g., information, education) to assist in their practice.

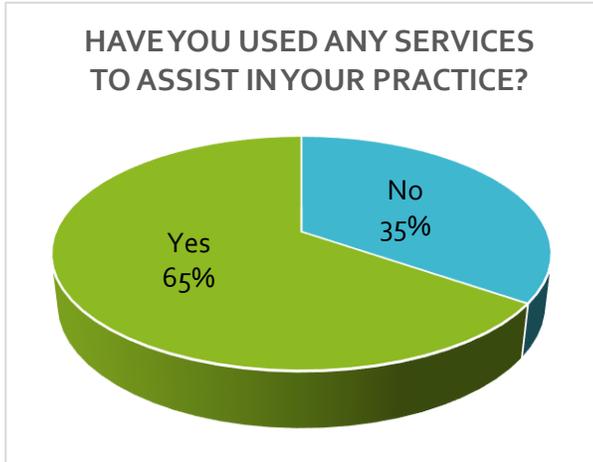


Figure 44 - Using Programs and Services in Practice (n=338)

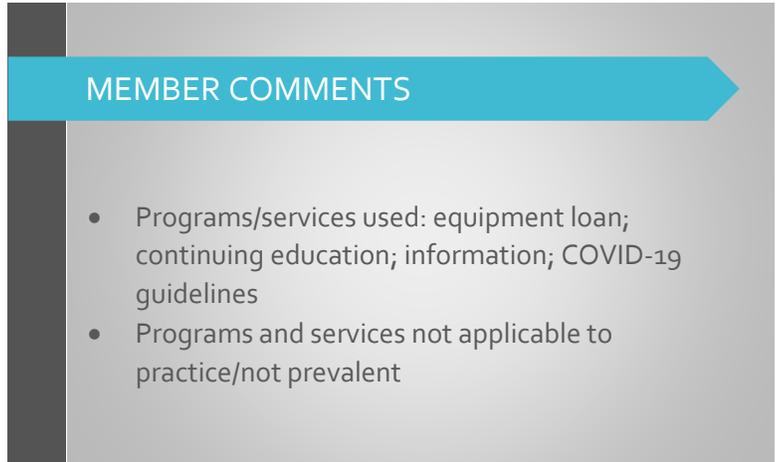


Figure 45 - Use of Programs and Services Comments and Concerns (n=15)

Most respondents prefer to receive communications from the ACAO office via direct email (93%), followed by the ACAO website (41%), and the Eighth Line newsletter (32%). The least popular communication channels were YouTube (3.85%), Facebook (7.10%), and webinars (13.61%). Comments (n=4) noted a preference for email, suggested the Eighth Line newsletter should have more content, and that emails should include links to website content.

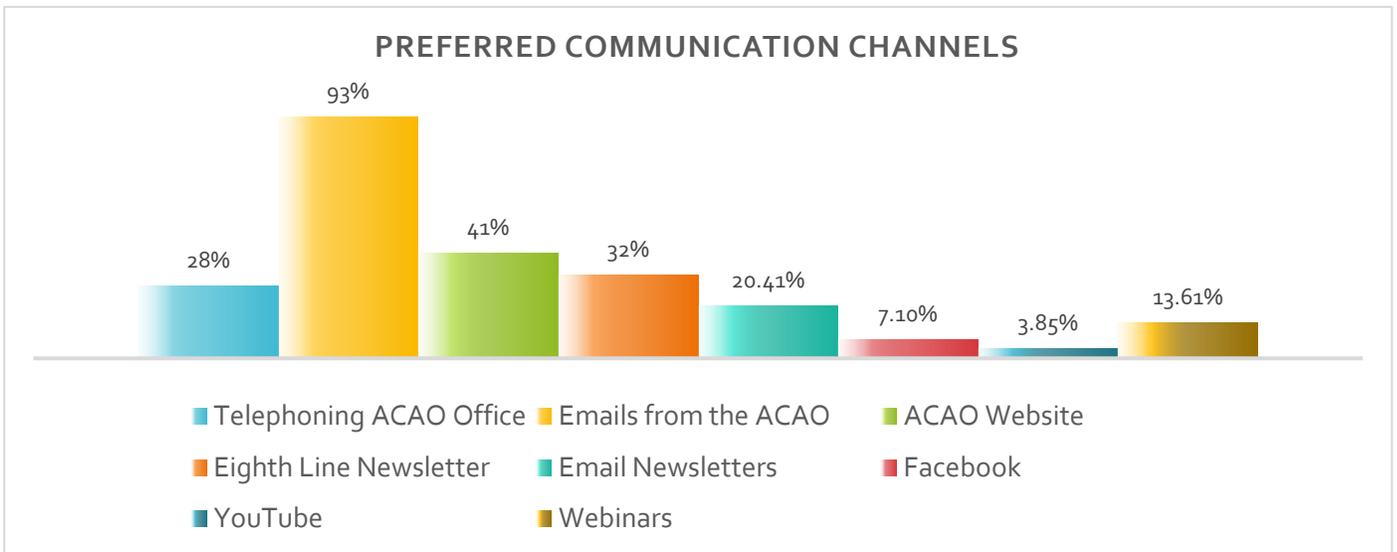


Figure 46 - Preferred Communication Channels (n=338)



A majority of respondents (54%) indicated that they would prefer not to receive text message updates from the ACAO. Reasons cited (n=5) include a preference for email and that too many notices were already received from the ACAO. Most respondents (60%) indicated that they would not be interested in joining a social media group to connect and chat with other ACAO members.

Reasons cited (n=14) include not using or avoiding social media, lack of time, already participating in other groups, and a concern that social media groups are primarily used by box store employees.

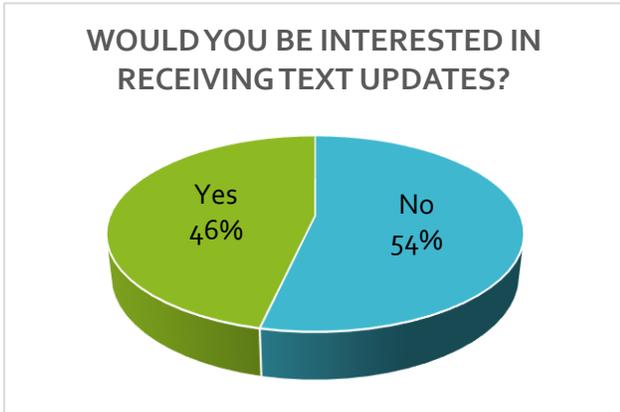


Figure 48 - Interest in Text Message Updates (n=338)

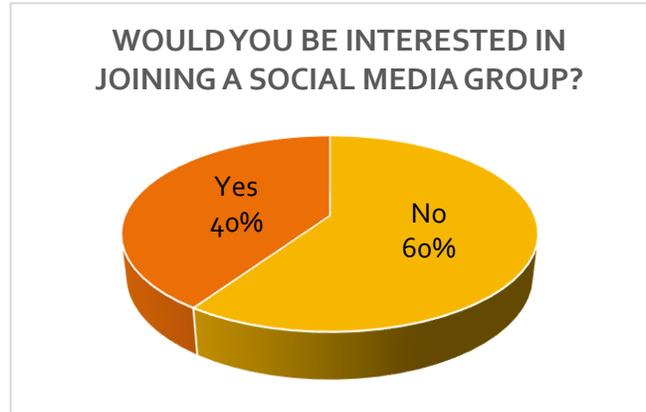


Figure 49 - Interest in Social Media Group (n=336)

## ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

- Need to be transparent about the pandemic and the future of the college
- Would like more options for no-cost continuing education
- Opticians need to be better recognized as regulated health professionals
- Would like to see a wider range of member benefits offered
- The refracting system in Alberta must be overhauled for public safety
- Licensing fees need to be reduced in comparison to low wages for opticians
- Need to understand what licensing fees cover
- Would like to see website navigation improved
- Post-secondary optical programs need to catch up with current technology
- Start a conversation about some of these challenging topics
- Take a stronger lead for better optical insurance coverage
- Industry needs to shift to digitally secure files and move away from paper records
- College needs the ability to take action against unprofessional businesses
- Higher standard for recognized continuing education activities

Figure 47 - Additional Comments and Concerns (n=97)