

A vision to educate more optometrists

Mount Royal University and University of Waterloo taking first steps toward establishing a school of optometry in Alberta

The University of Waterloo and Mount Royal University have signed a memorandum of understanding to explore the creation of a school of optometry in Alberta. A new school of optometry would be the first in Western Canada and only the third nationally.

The University of Waterloo is currently home to the only English-language school of optometry in Canada. Without sufficient seats in Canada, many qualified candidates go to the U.S. to study – and this presents barriers for many potential optometrists.

Doctors of optometry take a leading role in eye and vision care as well as general patient health and well-being. As primary healthcare providers, optometrists have extensive and ongoing training to examine, diagnose, treat and manage ocular disorders, diseases and injuries and systemic diseases that manifest in the eye.

The memorandum of understanding between the two universities is a strategic partnership to address the increasing demand for vision care stemming from an aging and growing population.

An important goal of this partnership is to better address ocular and systemic diseases – such as age-related macular degeneration, glaucoma, hypertension and diabetes – that are prevalent in rural and Indigenous communities. The partners therefore aim to improve access to optometric education particularly for qualified applicants from these communities.

“We’re delighted to partner with Mount Royal University as it seeks to expand access to optometric education in Alberta,” said Dr. Stanley Woo, director of the University of Waterloo School of Optometry and Vision Science. “What’s unique about this initiative is the recognition that a partnership model leveraging the respective strengths of two reputable institutions with aligned values may be the key to recruiting a diverse optometry student body including talented candidates from underrepresented groups.”

The School of Optometry and Vision Science has roots more than 100 years old and has been located at the University of Waterloo since 1967. It ranks third in North America – and fifth in the world – in research impact for schools of optometry and is seen as a national resource to provincial and national optometric associations and colleges. It is in the process of building the Waterloo Eye

Institute, a major expansion and renovation of its clinical space that will also allow it to increase enrolment at its Waterloo campus.

“Mount Royal University is pleased to undertake this exploration with the University of Waterloo’s School of Optometry and Vision Science to increase access to optometry education for Albertans,” said Dr. Chad London, provost and vice-president, academic at Mount Royal University. “We are especially excited about the opportunity this could present in reducing barriers for Indigenous students.”

Mount Royal University, located in Calgary, is one of Canada's top destinations for undergraduate education. It provides students with the critical skills and practical experiences that will prepare them to contribute to, and succeed in, an increasingly complex and ever-changing world.

The emerging partnership between the University of Waterloo and Mount Royal University is supported by the Alberta Association of Optometrists and the Alberta College of Optometrists.

“For more than 100 years, the Alberta Association of Optometrists’ members have been advocating for and providing exceptional vision and eye health care to Albertans,” said Dr. Sophia Leung, president of the Alberta Association of Optometrists.

“This partnership supports a crucial step forward to ensuring there are proficient optometrists ready to serve Alberta’s growing population, including those living in rural and remote areas, in accessing the comprehensive eye care they need and deserve. The time has come for Alberta to be an educational leader and move forward with the first school of optometry to serve students in this province while supporting those in Western Canada.”

“This partnership marks a transformative step in elevating patient care across Alberta,” said Dr. Kim Bugera, registrar and CEO of the Alberta College of Optometrists. “A new school of optometry will not only address our province's growing need for skilled optometrists but also ensure that diverse communities—particularly in rural and underserved areas—have improved access to essential vision care and comprehensive health support.”

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*Note: Both institutions' logos and higher-res photos are available upon request.