FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

COLLEGE OF OPTICIANS OF ONTARIO Responds to CBC Marketplace Program on EyeWear

(Toronto, February 27, 2012): The CBC Marketplace program aired during the evening of Friday, February 24 made a number of allegations, inferences and innuendo pertaining to the dispensing of eyewear. The College of Opticians of Ontario (COO) was not interviewed for the program. The COO was established in 1993 by the Government of Ontario to regulate the opticianry profession in the Province. The sole mandate of the College is to serve and protect the public interest and, as such, feels compelled to set the record straight.

The Facts:

• The College of Opticians does not regulate the price or margins patients pay for eyewear in Ontario. Our primary role is to ensure that Opticians have the requisite competencies and use those competencies to practise to the highest professional and ethical standards. Public protection is our mandate, which includes protecting the public from unqualified practitioners and illegal practices.

• Under Ontario law, dispensing prescription eyewear is something that may be performed only by Registered Opticians, Optometrists and Physicians. It is a "controlled act" because there is a significant risk of harm if it is performed by untrained or unqualified individuals. This is the situation in the vast majority of comparable jurisdictions.

• Dispensing prescription eyewear over the Internet without the involvement of an authorized practitioner is illegal in Ontario. The Government of Ontario and most experts in the field believe that those who purchase their eyewear over the Internet are exposing themselves to risk of harm because of the number of functions that must be performed in person to ensure that the eyewear suits the patient’s requirements and expectations.

• In 2010, Ontario’s Health Professions Regulatory Advisory Council (HPRAC) urged the Colleges of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario, Optometrists and Opticians to work together "to analyze the trend to Internet dispensing of eyewear products and its implications for consumer convenience and public safety and develop joint proposals for regulatory responses and possible enforcement actions". This is an important part of the College’s strategic plan and an inter-professional working group is well underway.
Quotations:

"It is regrettable that the CBC relied so much on a discredited practitioner, namely someone who had his registration revoked by this College for illegal practice and was jailed for contempt of Court." said David Milne, College President and Public Member of the College Council.

"Proper and safe dispensing requires a valid prescription and careful selection and fitting of the lens and the frame to the health status, work, lifestyle requirements and facial configuration of the patient. These functions require the practitioner’s personal and face-to-face interaction with the patient. Ontarians who purchase their eyewear over the Internet risk sacrificing their health and safety for the sake of price." said Fazal Khan, College Past-President and Registered Optician.

“This College takes very seriously its public protection mandate that includes protecting Ontarians from unqualified practitioners and unsafe and illegal practices.” said Abena Buahene, College Registrar.

The College of Opticians:

The College of Opticians was established in 1993. It is one of the 21 (soon to be 26) professional regulatory bodies established and operating under the Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991 and regulations. The College is also responsible for administering the Opticianry Act, 1991. The College of Opticians replaced the Board of Ophthalmic Dispensers as the regulatory body for the profession in 1993. There are currently over 2400 Opticians authorized by the College to practise Opticianry in the Province. The College’s Website is www.coptont.org.

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