

SCOPE OF PRACTICE - OPTOMETRISTS

1. Preface & Background

The Allied Health Professionals Council (AHPC), under the Ministry of National Health Services, Regulations and Coordination (MoNHSR&C), is mandated to regulate allied health professionals in Pakistan. Optometrist provides autonomous, primary eye care services essential for the prevention, diagnosis, treatment, and management of vision and ocular health disorders.

This document defines the Scope of Practice for Optometrists in Pakistan, harmonized with global standards, approved by the AHPC/National regulatory authorities.

2. Purpose of this Document

This Scope of Practice for Optometrists has been developed to:

- Define the competencies, responsibilities, and limitations of licensed optometrists in Pakistan.
- Provide clarity to healthcare institutions, employers, and policy makers regarding the role of optometrists in the healthcare system.
- Standardize practice across public and private sectors, ensuring uniformity in patient care.
- Align Pakistan's optometry standards with international best practices, thereby enhancing opportunities for recognition, mobility, and collaboration.

3. Guiding Principles for the Scope of Practice

The Scope of Practice is supported by the six Key Enablers

| Key Enablers | Description |
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| Regulation & Professional Boundaries | Determined by AHPC, licensure, prescribing rights, referral pathways, and ensures professional accountability and safe practice. |
| Education and Training | Scope aligned with AHPC/HEC approved curricula and the World Council of Optometry global competency model. |
| Capacity Building & Research | Continuous professional development (CPD), specialization tracks and applied research for practicing optometrists to strengthen |



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| | optometry's role in advancing eye care in Pakistan. |
| Ethics & Professionalism | Patient-centered, evidence-based, and ethical clinical practice. |
| Collaboration & Referral Pathways | Ensures safe patient care and integrated health system alignment. |
| Individual scope | Reflects which competencies optometrists are legally allowed to practice. Individual scope is based on the skill, knowledge and competency developed and maintained through training, experience and CPD |

4. Definitions of Optometry and Recognition of Optometry as a Category Type A Profession.

The World Council of Optometry (WCO) defines Optometry as:

“Optometry is a healthcare profession that is autonomous, educated, and regulated (licensed/registered). Optometrists are the primary healthcare practitioners of the eye and visual system who provide comprehensive eye and vision care, which includes refraction and dispensing, detection/diagnosis and management of disease in the eye, and the rehabilitation of conditions of the visual system.”

The World Health Organization (WHO) Eye Care Competency Framework (ECCF, 2023) further recognizes Optometrists as essential members of the primary eye care workforce. This scope also integrates elements of the American Optometric Association (AOA) Model Scope of Practice (2024).

Within the AHPC framework, Optometry is recognized as a Category Type A profession. Category Type A professions are autonomous and independent healthcare disciplines that directly deliver diagnostic, preventive, therapeutic, and rehabilitative services to patients and communities. By virtue of this classification, optometrists in Pakistan are acknowledged as primary eye care providers, distinct from paramedical support staff, and empowered with clinical decision-making responsibilities.




4. Independent practice of Optometrist.

Registered Optometrists in Pakistan are authorized for independent practice within the legal framework established by AHPC.

5. Core Scope of Practice

To strengthen the eye health system and reduce preventable blindness, a progressive and competency-based expansion of the optometry scope of practice is adapted. This ensures that optometrists are empowered to deliver safe, accessible, and comprehensive eye care services within their training and regulatory boundaries.

6. Scope of Practice of Associate Optometrist (Category Type B)

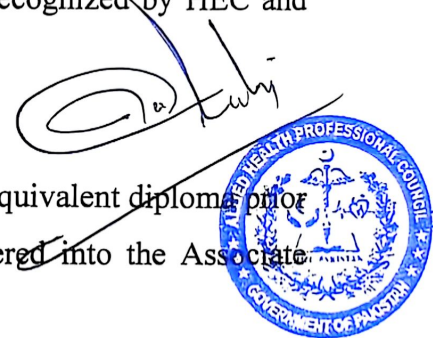
6.1. Eligibility Criteria/Educational Requirements

Eligibility for registration as an Associate Optometrist (Type B) requires:
- Bachelor of Science in Vision Sciences (3-year accredited program) recognized by HEC and AHPC.

6.2. Grandfather Clause

- Individuals who completed a BSc in Vision Sciences (3-year) or equivalent diploma prior to the enforcement of the AHPC Act, 2022 shall be grandfathered into the Associate Optometrist (Category Type B) register.
- Such practitioners will be recognized as fully licensed Associate Optometrists, provided they:
 - Submit valid proof of qualification from a recognized university or examination board.
 - Provide evidence of at least two (2) years of documented clinical or teaching experience.
 - Successfully complete any bridging modules, CPD credits, or assessments mandated by AHPC to align their practice with updated competency standards.

This provision ensures professional recognition and continuity of practice for the existing workforce, while gradually harmonizing qualifications with current WCO/WHO benchmarks



6.3. Authorized Scope of Professional Practice

Associate Optometrists are empowered to:

- Conduct comprehensive eye and vision examinations, including refraction, binocular vision, accommodative anomalies, functional vision and low vision assessment.
- Prescribe and dispense spectacles, prisms, filters, and low vision devices (LVDs).
- Conduct primary eye disease screening (e.g., diabetic retinopathy, glaucoma suspicion, and cataract) and refer when necessary.
- Provide rehabilitation services for patients with low vision and functional vision problems.
- Undertake public health roles, including school vision screening, rural eye care programs, and blindness prevention initiatives.
- Educate patients and communities on ocular hygiene, preventive care, and visual ergonomics.

6.4. Diagnostic & Equipment Authority

Associate Optometrists may operate and interpret findings from:

- Autorefractors, trial lens sets, phoropters, and lensometers
- Non-contact tonometers
- Slit-lamp biomicroscopes (anterior segment examination)
- Direct ophthalmoscopes and non-mydratic fundus cameras
- Visual acuity charts, contrast sensitivity, and color vision tests

6.5. Limitations of Practice

Associate Optometrists are not authorized to:

- Perform intraocular or laser surgery.
- Independently prescribe therapeutic pharmaceutical agents (TPAs).

6.6. Practice Autonomy & Referral

- Associate Optometrists may practice independently in community clinics, hospitals, and optical practices.
- Referral to Specialized optometrist/ophthalmologists is required for:
 - Complex neuro-optometric or systemic cases



- Disease management requiring TPAs
- Surgical cases

6.7. Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

- Associate Optometrists must complete mandatory CPD hours as prescribed by AHPC.
- Eligible for bridging to Doctor of Optometry (OD/PP-OD/T-OD) through approved transition pathways.

7. Scope of Practice of Optometrists (category Type A)

7.1 Qualifications eligible for registration as Optometrists:

1. Doctor of Optometry (OD) 5-year professional degree.
2. Bachelor of Vision Sciences 5 –year professional degree.
3. Bachelor of Vision Sciences 4 -year professional degree.
4. Transitional Doctor of Optometry (T-OD) – bridging for BS Optometry/ BSc Vision Sciences graduates.
5. Bachelor of Science in Optometry (4-year).

7.2 Equivalency & Nomenclature:

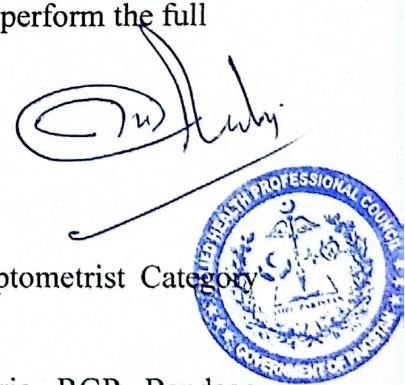
As per AHPC Notification F.No.08-AHPC-Imp/BoG-Dec/Admn/627 (15 May 2024), Doctor of Optometry graduates shall use the prefix 'Dr.' and the suffix 'OD'.

- BS Optometry and Bachelor of Vision Sciences graduates are authorized to perform the full range of professional duties but cannot use 'Dr.' or 'OD' titles.

7.2 Authorized Scope of Professional Practice

Optometrists (Type A) are empowered to:

- Perform all activities within the scope of practice of Associate Optometrist Category Type B
- Prescribe and dispense spectacles, prisms, contact lenses (soft, toric, RGP, Bandage contact lenses, scleral, Ortho-K), optical and pharmacological management of myopia and low vision devices.
- Perform advanced diagnostics: slit-lamp biomicroscopy, fundoscopy, tonometry, OCT, corneal topography, pachymetry, visual fields, fundus imaging.



- Deliver emergency eye care including superficial foreign body removal, anterior trauma stabilization, and urgent referral.
- Co-manage pre- and post-operative patients with ophthalmologists.
- Manage and treat with therapeutic pharmaceutical agents ocular disease, excluding posterior segment diseases.
- Diagnose and manage common ocular conditions such as dry eye, allergic conjunctivitis.
- Recognize /diagnose posterior segment ocular diseases (glaucoma, diabetic retinopathy, Uveitis etc.) and make timely referrals to ophthalmologists to prevent vision loss.
- Diagnose ocular manifestations of systemic diseases such as hypertension, diabetes, Graves' disease and others that are often first detected in the eye and urgent referral to physician/ endocrinologist
- Run their optometry clinics independently at public and private facilities.
- Provide visual status certification when required.
- Optometrists can run their optometry clinics independently at public and private facilities

7.3 Authorized Equipment & Technology

Registered Optometrists are authorized to independently operate and interpret findings from the following equipment:

- Slit-lamp biomicroscope with imaging
- Fundus camera (digital and non-mydratic)
- Optical Coherence Tomography (OCT) and OCT-Angiography,FFA.
- Corneal topographers and Scheimpflug imaging
- Pachymeters
- Autorefractors and keratometers
- Phoropters and trial lens sets
- Visual field analyzers, Hess screen test/ Lee screen
- Electrodiagnostic devices (ERG, VEP, EOG – where trained)
- Tonometry devices (applanation, rebound, non-contact)
- Gonioscopes
- Low vision assessment kits/devices
- Contact lens fitting sets (soft, RGP, scleral, Ortho-K, bandage CLs)



- Emergency tools: foreign body removal kits, irrigation systems

7.4 Authorized Clinical Techniques

- Objective and subjective refraction, including pediatric cycloplegic refraction
- Binocular vision and orthoptic testing (cover test, Maddox rod, vergence, stereopsis)
- Visual function testing (contrast sensitivity, glare)
- Low vision rehabilitation techniques and training
- Contact lens fitting (soft, toric, RGP, scleral, ortho-K, myopia-control)
- Anterior and posterior segment evaluation with diagnostic drugs
- Prescribing therapeutic agents for ocular surface disease management
- Emergency procedures (superficial corneal FB removal, trauma stabilization) and referral to ophthalmologist

7.7 Practice Environment Standards

- Dedicated examination room with adequate space and lighting
- Diagnostic suite with approved equipment (OCT, fundus imaging, VF analyzer)
- Optical dispensing and contact lens fitting area
- Secure records management (manual or electronic medical records)
- Infection prevention and control protocols in compliance with national guidelines
- Qualified support staff (technicians/assistants) for efficient workflow



7.8 Referral Protocols, Limitations & Prohibitions

- Mandatory referral to ophthalmologists for management of posterior segment diseases and surgical cases (cataract, corneal, vitreoretinal, glaucoma surgeries)
- Immediate referral to ophthalmologists for acute neuro-ophthalmic emergencies (cranial nerve palsies, optic neuritis).
- Strict prohibition of intraocular surgery by optometrists
- Misuse of the title 'Ophthalmologist' or assumption of surgical roles is prohibited.

7.9 Continuing Professional Development (CPD) & Licensing

- CPD is mandatory for all practicing optometrists
- Minimum 30 CPD hours per year across clinical, ethical, and patient safety domain
- Compliance with AHPC licensing renewal protocol

8. Scope of Practice of Specialized Optometrists

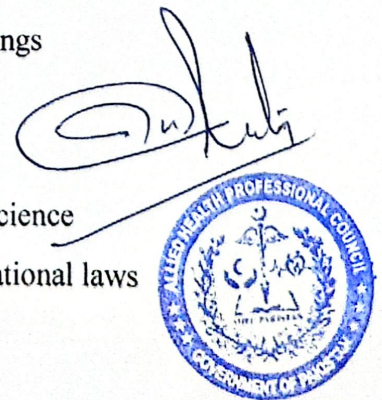
8.1 Qualifications eligible for registration as a Specialized Optometrists:

To be recognized as a specialized optometrist, an Optometrist must:

1. Hold a Doctor of Optometry/BS Optometry/Bachelor of vision sciences or equivalent degree (Post-Professional OD (PP-OD) – bridging pathway, Transitional OD (T-OD) – bridging pathway)
2. Completed formal postgraduate education such as MS, MPhil, Fellowship, Postgraduate diploma, PhD in the relevant field from HEC Recognized University.
3. In case of PhD from abroad, must have equivalency from HEC

8.2 Authorized Scope of Professional Practice

- Perform all activities within the scope of practice of Optometrist Category Type A.
- Diagnose and manage common ocular conditions such as dry eye, allergic conjunctivitis.
- Perform administrative responsibilities as bestowed.
- Manage and treat with therapeutic pharmaceutical agents ocular diseases, excluding posterior segment diseases
- Ensure compliance with the AHPC Code of Conduct
- Engage in clinical audits, case discussions, research and quality improvement initiatives
- Uphold patient confidentiality and practice ethics in line with national laws
- Collaborate with multidisciplinary teams including ophthalmology, rehabilitation, pediatrics, and internal medicine
- Develop and facilitate CPD programs, clinical case presentations, courses, workshops, seminars, conferences etc.
- Contribute to the development, curricula, courses, clinical guidelines and policy framework.
- Teaching and training of students in classroom and clinical settings
- Design, implement and evaluate primary eye care services
- Supervise undergraduate and postgraduate clinical rotations
- Conduct and publish applied research in optometry and vision science
- Uphold patient confidentiality and practice ethics in line with national laws



- Collaborate with multidisciplinary teams including ophthalmology, rehabilitation, pediatrics, and internal medicine

8.2 Referral Protocols, Limitations & Prohibitions

- Mandatory referral to ophthalmologists for management of posterior segment diseases and surgical cases (cataract, corneal, vitreoretinal, glaucoma surgeries etc.).
- Not allowed for surgical procedures

10. Work Settings

The work settings of optometrists include:

- Public sector hospitals (tertiary care hospitals, DHQ, THQ, BHU, RHC)
- Private optometry clinics and optical centers
- Teaching hospitals and academic institutions/University
- NGOs and mobile outreach units
- Telehealth and digital screening networks.



11. References

1. WHO Eye Care Competency Framework (2023).
2. World Council of Optometry (WCO) Global Competency Standards.
3. International Council of Licensure for Optometry (ICLPO) Guidelines (2023).
4. American Optometric Association (AOA) Model Scope of Practice (2024).

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