



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Eye and Vision Care in the Patient-Centered Medical Home

The purpose of the Patient Centered Medical Home (PCMH) is to ensure access to basic and preventive health care services, and to deliver appropriate, efficient, continuous and coordinated care from childhood through adulthood. Preventive health care is the foundation for better overall health outcomes for all and the underpinning for school readiness in children. As the PCMH is an approach to provide authentic comprehensive care for patients, it is critical that optometry be recognized as a principal provider of eye and vision care services within the PCMH and as a leader in the eye and vision care management model.

Optometrists are highly accessible providers of eye and vision care, often being the entry point into the health care system, and therefore, must be recognized as vital to the health of America's vision. Doctors of optometry are America's providers of primary eye and vision care, treating patients of all ages in over 6,500 communities across the country. In more than 3,500 of these communities nationwide, optometrists are the only eye care provider. Optometry has historically been and continues to be a provider of first-contact care for basic health services that are needed by most or all of the population as optometrists perform needed eye examinations for approximately 60 percent of America's population. ODs are among the only primary care health care professionals many relatively healthy patients see and, as such, optometrists continue to play a critical role in the delivery of primary and systemic preventive care and serve as a critical entry point into America's health care system. Optometrists are an integral part of the primary care team, play a significant role in improving the health and well being of the public and should serve as a principal vision care provider in the comprehensive care that the PCMH aims to provide.

While comprehensive and coordinated health care is the goal of the PCMH, eye care professionals are best to diagnose and treat vision disorders. Current screening methods generally employed by most medical homes fail to identify many vision or eye problems. Numerous eye and vision disorders require early detection; otherwise, irreversible health and visual deficits, including blindness, may occur. Furthermore, eye and vision health is an integral component of children's overall health and well-being as they learn and grow. The best health care management must include a regular eye examination by a practitioner whose primary focus is vision and eye care.

Making sure that only an examiner that has adequate training to diagnose, treat, and prevent eye disease can help ensure increasingly desirable results and overall healthier patients. As primary eye care providers, doctors of optometry are involved in managing the ocular manifestations of numerous systemic disorders such as diabetes and high blood pressure. Due to the specialized training and experience of doctors of optometry, they should be the principal eye care provider for patients as they are accessible, continuous, comprehensive, family-centered and culturally-effective providers of eye and vision care.