

Culturally Diverse *Care*

by Sarah McGoldrick



The face of Canada's eyewear client is changing. A more culturally diverse country has led to the requirement of more specialized and culturally diverse care.

Eyecare providers (ECPs) in even the most remote parts of Canada are having to learn how to address the needs of patients whose care goes beyond that of strictly medical.

ECPs now have to look at both cultural and in some cases religious requirements to ensure their patients are getting the best care possible.

Leaders in the industry have been working hard to address these needs through the creation of resources and running studies to better understand this growing market.

"Canada is becoming more diverse and a lot of times ethnic minorities

are at greater risk for different eye health issues," said Manuel Solis, Multicultural Marketing Manager for Transitions Optical.

He added part of the risk is because many patients do not know how to access care in their own language or culture or have restrictions within their culture about getting care.

To ensure proper care, he notes respect is very important. ECPs must respect the needs of their patients and work to address them and accommodate them whenever possible.

Who Needs Care?

"It's important to create a welcoming environment and have staff on hand that can speak the language," said Solis. "It helps make people feel at ease."

He said these non-verbal cues tell a patient 'I'm accepted here'.

Solis noted the demographics between Canada and the US are slightly different.

In the US the greatest risk lies among Asians (Chinese-Korean), African-Americans (African decent) and Hispanics.

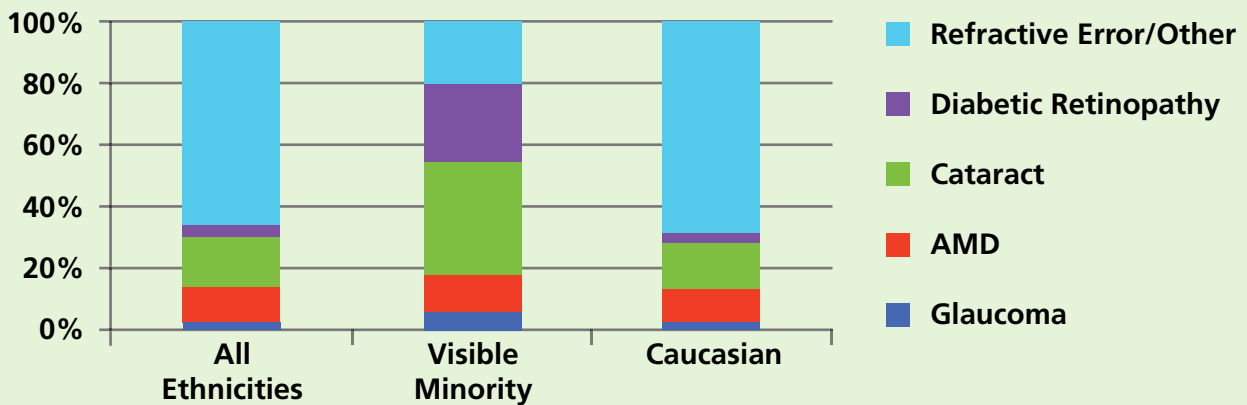
Research conducted by Transitions Optical found that there were three key groups under-served in Canada: Asian (Middle East), African-Canadian (Caribbean) and Aboriginal.

As a result, a greater effort is needed by the health care system to ensure they are getting to treatment in a timely manner.

Research conducted by Transitions found that four out of 10 ethnic minorities scheduled an eye exam in the past year.



Vision Loss by cause and ethnicity



This leaves a large segment of the population not receiving basic care.

“We are committed to raising awareness about eyecare in general as well as UV protection,” said Solis, adding many minorities do not take the steps to protect themselves against the sun which can lead to unnecessary damage. “With Canada’s cooler climate, there is a false sense of security.”

Education

ECPs need to educate themselves not just on the latest trends, but on the best way to care for patients with diverse backgrounds.

“We believe in the importance of education,” said Solis adding the number of patients ECPs will see from different backgrounds is going to increase significantly over the next few years as immigrant and migration continues within Canada and the US.

“Patients are not going to be the same as they were even two or three years ago. It’s important that ECPs better connect with patients through language, understanding and offering different ways of communicating,” said Solis. “Cultural competency will become more important.” •

Did You Know!!!

There are many cultural differences for specific eye conditions. For example:

- Older (60+) visible minority women have the highest rates of cataract while elderly visible minority males have the lowest rates.
- Men from visible minority populations have high rates of glaucoma.
- Caucasians are more likely to have vision loss from AMD than African-Canadians, while the reverse is true for refractive error.
- Chinese-Canadians have double the rate of AMD compared to Caucasians and may have twice the rate of diabetic retinopathy. Chinese-Canadian children are more likely to experience nearsightedness than children who are Caucasian.
- Aboriginal Canadians have higher rates of diabetic retinopathy. Inuit populations have much higher rates of primary open-angle glaucoma.

These variations reflect differences in treatment access and genetic factors.

Data Courtesy: The Cost of Vision Loss in Canada CNIB/Canadian Ophthalmological Society