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INSIDE THIS NEWSLETTER

03**MESSAGE FROM
THE PRESIDENT**

04**ECOO AUTUMN
MEETINGS IN UTRECHT**

06**ON THE EU AGENDA**

NEXT STEPS ON THE EUROPEAN
COMMISSION PROPOSAL FOR REVISION OF
THE DRIVING LICENCES DIRECTIVE

RESPONDING TO THE PER- AND
POLYFLUOROALKYL SUBSTANCES (PFAS)
RESTRICTION PROPOSAL

07**NEWS FROM THE ECOO
ACCREDITATION AGENCY**

08**THE EXPERIENCE OF ECOO'S
RECENTLY APPOINTED
STUDENT VISITORS ON THE
ACCREDITATION PANEL**

09**COUNTRY UPDATES**

LATVIAN ASSOCIATION OF
OPTOMETRISTS AND OPTICIANS – MEET
OUR NEW MEMBER

ECOO TO VISIT HELSINKI, THE CAPITAL
OF THE HAPPIEST COUNTRY IN THE
WORLD

13**GET TO KNOW THE
PEOPLE INVOLVED IN ECOO:
PETER GUMPELMAYER**

15**UPDATE FROM THE
EUROPEAN ACADEMY OF
OPTOMETRY AND OPTICS**

17**UPDATE FROM THE WORLD
COUNCIL OF OPTOMETRY**

18**UPCOMING MEETINGS/
FOLLOW US ON SOCIAL
MEDIA/SUBSCRIBE TO THE
NEWSLETTER**

DEAR COLLEAGUES, DEAR FRIENDS,



*Dr Matjaž Mihelčič,
ECOO President*

It was nice seeing so many of you in Utrecht. It was a great, well organised meeting, for which I thank our members Gabrielle Janssen, Wilfred de Jong, Norbert Hofstede and their team of the three Dutch associations: ANVC (Dutch association of contact lens specialists), NUVO (Dutch association of optical shops) and OVN (Dutch association of optometrists). ECOO's member countries were really well represented in Utrecht – and we welcomed a new one: Latvia has joined ECOO. We very much appreciate the addition of a new country with well established optics and optometry programmes, and the University of Latvia also aims to gain accreditation of European Diploma in Optometry (EDO).

During the autumn, there were a number of ceremonies at which we had the pleasure of handing out diplomas; I visited the Fachhochschule Nordwestschweiz in Switzerland. It was, again, a great pleasure to see all the students receiving their diplomas. This time it was a French course laureate and some of the young people had even come from France to study optometry in Switzerland. It is great to see them “export” the highest standard of our profession to their home country. Peter Gumpelmayer also attended the graduation ceremony of the ZVA Akademie in Knechtsteden, Germany. You will find more information on the various ceremonies in this Newsletter.

The European Academy of Optometry and Optics has been revitalised – a new administrator, Kristina Mihić, has joined them, facilitating among other things the organisation of events. ECOO has signed an updated Memorandum of Understanding with the Academy, demonstrating our ongoing commitment to working together. The Academy is a very important institution of ongoing education and inclusion of students into the living practice. We are looking forward to the upcoming joint spring meeting in Helsinki.

I wish you a pleasant winter.

Matjaž

Autumn Meetings

2023

Utrecht
the Netherlands



ECOO Executive, left to right: Julie-Anne Little, Peter Gumpelmayer, Ann Blackmore, Matjaž Mihelčič, Gabriëlle Janssen, Cindy Tromans, Jesus Garcia Poyatos, Per Michael Larsen and Sylwia Kropacz-Sobkowiak

ECOO's autumn meetings and General Assembly were hosted in Utrecht, The Netherlands, by our three Dutch members, the ANVC (Dutch association of contact lens specialists), NUVO (Dutch association of optical shops) and OVN (Dutch association of optometrists).

The ECOO Executive Committee led members through a number of business matters, including the appointment of Dorthe Kallehauge as ECOO's second auditor, alongside Gerhard Gschweidl. Dorthe replaces Per Michael Larsen, who stood down after joining the Executive Committee.

ECOO members voted unanimously to accept into membership the Latvian Association of Optometrists and Opticians. Aiga Švede, President of the Latvian association gave a short introduction to her association and its work (see page 9).



Aiga Švede with ECOO President, Matjaž Mihelčič

In addition to discussions on communications and regulatory matters (see page 6), there were also presentations from two of ECOO's strategic partners. Renato Sopracolle from the European manufacturers' association, Eurom1, gave delegates an update on the European market and also told them about a new environmental eye care standard that the Italian manufacturing association, ANFAO, would be launching at the

MIDO trade fair in Milan in February 2024. Liliana Stankova, President of the European Academy of Optometry and Optics, told delegates about the Academy's plans for their monthly online "Optometry Hour" sessions. And finally, Cindy Tromans, ECOO immediate past President, and since their General Assembly in September 2023, World Council of Optometry President Elect, gave delegates a short update on the WCO congress.



Delegates at the Professional Services Committee meeting



ECOO delegates on their way to dinner in Utrecht

The workshop session focused on strategic management for national associations, with group discussions on how to identify and engage stakeholders, knowing what members want and how to work with them, and putting in place a strategic plan. Delegates particularly appreciated hearing the range of different experiences and perspectives of colleagues on these issues.

The Professional Services Committee session developed previously discussed ideas on workforce efficiency, with several members explaining how they promoted eye care professions to the public and potential students in their country. Roger Crelier from the European Qualifications Board then gave a presentation on how to profit from the European Diploma in Optometry.

The Public Affairs and Economic Committee focused on two issues. Antonia Chitty of the Association of British Dispensing Opticians explained the work of ABDO to move towards becoming net zero and the support provided to members to become more environmentally sustainable. Guest speaker, Leonard Witkamp (Professor of Telemedicine, Department of Medical Informatics, Academic Medical Centre, Amsterdam) gave a very well received presentation and discussion on the development of his tele-medical centre.

Members continue to emphasise how important these opportunities to come together in person and discuss issues of shared concern and wider interests are – both in formal and informal settings.



ON THE EU AGENDA

NEXT STEPS ON THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION PROPOSAL FOR REVISION OF THE DRIVING LICENCES DIRECTIVE

ECOO and its members continued to work with politicians and other stakeholders over the summer to make the case for the limited number of amendments they consider necessary to the proposed revised Driving Licences Directive to ensure that the provisions in Annex III on medical fitness to drive are clear and can be applied consistently across Europe.

We are pleased that so many have understood the aims of the amendments we have put forward and the benefits that they will bring, and that they have been incorporated into the report of the European Parliament rapporteur Karima Delli, MEP which was published on 23 September 2023. ECOO remains committed to the two primary objectives behind the revision: to improve road safety and to facilitate free movement by removing or avoiding unnecessary or inadequate barriers. We appreciate that many other proposals have also been put forward. We will continue to work with the European Commission and MEPs to help ensure that when agreement is reached on the Directive these small but important clarifications are included.

RESPONDING TO PER- AND POLYFLUOROALKYL SUBSTANCES (PFAS) RESTRICTION PROPOSAL

ECOO responded in September to the European Chemical Agency (ECHA) consultation on the restriction proposal for PFASs, put forward by the Netherlands, Germany, Norway, Denmark and Sweden in early 2023.

ECOO is concerned about the impact this proposal, if adopted, would have on eye care, in particular for patients whose treatment requires the use of rigid contact lens polymers (RGP) and for which there is at present no alternative option. These concerns have also been raised by EuromContact, and Eurom 1 have highlighted issues that a total ban on PFAS would have on ophthalmic lenses more generally.

We are aware that a number of MEPs have expressed concerns about the effect such a widespread ban would have on a variety of different European industries and the European citizens that depend on products likely to be affected. Suggestions have been made to consider derogations for particular industries, such as medical devices, or products with low levels of PFAS usage. The ECHA Committee for Socio-economic Analysis (SEAC) is expected to publish its opinions related to the socio-economic impact of the proposal in early 2024. We will continue to work with colleagues in industry to represent the interests of eye care patients.

NEWS FROM THE ECOO ACCREDITATION AGENCY

Another successful year for the European Diploma in Optometry (EDO) and European Qualification in Optics (EQO) comes to a close with 54 graduates having received the EDO, bringing it up to a total of 622. In addition 13 graduates received the EQO, with the total number now being 91.

Graduation ceremonies for the EDO have taken place at the ZVA Akademie (Knechtsteden, Germany), at the Fachhochschule Nordwestschweiz, (Olten, Switzerland), at the University of South-Eastern Norway (Kongsberg, Norway) and at the University of Applied Sciences Utrecht (Utrecht, the Netherlands). The OHI GmbH, Optometrie & Hörakustik Initiative (Vienna, Austria) awarded the EQO during their ceremony.



Graduation ceremony at the at the ZVA Akademie (Knechtsteden, Germany)

Graduation ceremony at the Fachhochschule Nordwestschweiz, (Olten, Switzerland)



The accreditation team has kept busy in the second half of this year with visits to the Institut des Sciences de la Vision in St Etienne, France and a visit planned in November to the University of Latvia. In light of the increasing interest in the accreditation scheme, ECOO has also expanded its pool of visitors.

ABOUT THE ECOO ACCREDITATION AGENCY

ECOO has developed the EDO and EQO as a syllabi and competency frameworks, and operates an accreditation scheme for institutions to benchmark against this framework. The Accreditation Agency has been set up to run this accreditation work.

TO FIND OUT MORE ABOUT THIS WORK VISIT:
<https://ecoo.info/ecoo-accreditation-agency/>



NEWS FROM THE ECOO ACCREDITATION AGENCY



Rita Dassouli is studying for the Bachelor in Optometry at the University of South-Eastern Norway, in Kongsberg and is in the third and final year of her studies.



Chiara Maria Mariani is a second year student, studying for the Professional Master Degree in Clinical Optometry at the University of Riga in Latvia.

The student visitors, who joined the accreditation panel at the end of 2022 undertook their first accreditation visits this year. ECOO interviewed two of the four students about their experiences so far as a visitor and their thoughts on the ECOO European Diploma in Optometry.

Chiara Maria Mariani and Rita Dassouli are two highly motivated students who decided to take on this extra task in addition to their studies. Rita's motivations to join the panel ranges from learning about how optometric education is structured and taught in other European countries to furthering her understanding of audit and quality assurance principles. Chiara's aim is to elevate the quality of optometry education in her home country, Italy, and become an influential educator for future generation.

In early 2023, Chiara joined the accreditation visit to Hadassah Academic College (HAC) in Jerusalem, Israel, while Rita joined a visit to the Bar Ilan University in Tel Aviv, Israel. They both appreciated and enjoyed the experience of observing the teaching methodologies, talking to students and staff. The dedication of teachers and researchers to prepare the students for their future profession was in particular highlighted by them.

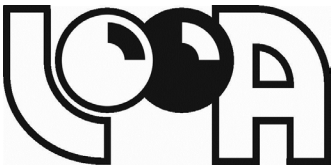
On the importance of involving students as visitors Rita noted that *"having a student visitor on the visitor panel is a good idea as it can be easier for them to interact with the students. More communication with the university students can provide more input on their thoughts, experiences and valuable input to the accreditation process."*

It is not only the accreditation process that is important to this new generation of visitors but also the European Diploma in Optometry (EDO) in itself because it ensures quality education, a common language and promotes professional development. For educational institutions Chiara recognises that the EDO *"not only validates their education but also reflects a commitment to maintaining high-quality eye care standards."* Rita highlighted that the accreditation process *"encourages universities to improve their standard of education and can provide them with useful recommendations on how they can increase competence and improve courses in their education programme"*.

ECOO is delighted to involve students in its work and to also build a strong EDO alumni network that shares the vision of harmonising optometric and optical services and education across Europe at the highest level, leading to increased recognition of the professions across the board. *"For the future I hope that the different eye care professionals can collaborate to recognise the work of the speciality areas (paediatric, geriatric, training, sports, low vision, and more) to talk a common language and to have health as a fundamental common goal."* concludes Chiara.

Read the full interview with [Chiara Maria Mariani here](#) and with [Rita Dassouli here](#) to learn more about their background and future career plans.

COUNTRY UPDATES



LATVIA – HAPPY TO JOIN ECOO

By **Aiga Švede**, *President of the Association of Latvian Optometrists and Opticians*

After several years absence, the Association of Latvian Optometrists and Opticians (in Latvian: LOOA – Latvijas Optometristu un optiķu asociācija) is pleased to return to membership of ECOO. And I as the President of LOOA am honoured to introduce you to our association.

LOOA was founded in July 1997. It corresponds to the time when the first four optometrists graduated from the Bachelor study programme of optometry. The membership of the association was very varied at the beginning: opticians, optical practice owners, ophthalmologists, physicists, first graduates and optometry students. Over the years the LOOA has grown and by 1 October 2023, LOOA

had 270 members in two sections: 236 optometrists (certified, non-certified, and students) and 12 ophthalmologists in the optometrist section; and 22 members in the optician section (optometrist's assistants, opticians, entrepreneurs). The main governing bodies of the association are the Congress (all members); the President (elected by the Congress for 4-years term; duties: representation of LOOA and supervision of processes in LOOA); the Board (6 members, elected by the Congress for not limited term; last changes in 2022). The Board organises the general work and finances of the association and represents it in various state institutions etc. The Board also supervises the work of inner structures:

- **Ethics Commission** (5 members, elected by the Congress for four-years term) deals with resolution of disputes between professionals involved in vision care, as well as between optometrists and patients, optical stores and clients.
- **Qualification Board** (9-13 members elected by the Congress for four-years term) organises various annual activities for members (spring and autumn congresses, summer meeting, scientific conference together with the University of Latvia), as well as seminars and workshops.
- **Optometrist certification Commission** (7 members elected by the Congress for four-year term) organises the certification and re-certification process for optometrists.



LOOA President, Aiga Švede, centre, with other Board members

Professional development in Latvia

LOOA actively works to organise the legislation binding on the profession of optometrist and related professions in vision care system:

- 2001 • the profession of optometrist is among the regulated professions.
- 2005 • the first version of the **Professional Standard of the Optometrist** defining the basic tasks and responsibilities of the optometrist's activity, professional qualification requirements, the general and professional knowledge, skills, attitudes, and competences necessary for professional fulfilment. The standard is regularly renewed in accordance with the development of optometrist's profession and changes in legislation. The last version was approved in 2019.

LOOA starts certification process for optometrists to promote continuous (post-graduate) education, taking account of the rapid development of vision care in Latvia and the world. Optometrists must collect 250 continuous learning points (OTP) in five-year period. It is not yet mandatory but an optional process. However, LOOA optometrists are motivated to collect points and obtain certificates as a sign of prestige.
- 2019 • the first version of the **Professional Standard for the Optometrist's Assistant**. The Optometrist's Assistant dispenses glasses and contact lenses, as well as makes and repairs glasses, and deals with other product and goods sales used in vision health care. They cannot prescribe but can assist an optometrist by taking various measurements (with devices) and training contact lens users.
- 2020 • Optometrist officially becomes a medical practitioner; the profession is regulated now by the Medical Treatment Law and binding laws and regulations.

LOOA becomes a member of the umbrella organization for all medical practitioners – the Latvian Association of Medical Practitioners Professional Organizations (in Latvian: LĀPPOS – Latvijas Ārstniecības personu profesionālo organizāciju savienība).

the certification becomes mandatory for all optometrists (the previous optional certification is officially accepted by the Ministry of Health). Optometrists must collect 150 continuous learning points (TIP) in five-year period for re-certification. After graduation, there is mandatory certification – theoretical (100 MCQ) and practical (1 patient) examination. The certification is supervised by LĀPPOS but realized by LOOA.
- SINCE 2020 • **Only optometrists with a professional master's degree (five years of study) and optometrist qualification, as well as optometrist certificate can work as optometrist in Latvia.**

Moving forward

The processes do not go fast, but LOOA continues to work on new projects to improve and widen the legal scope of its members. The latest projects that LOOA is working on:

- To incorporate changes into the legislation governing the registration of optometrist workplaces (currently, an optometrist can only work in a medical institution);
- To involve optometrists in mandatory vision screenings for children, drivers, and other specific professions.

What do we expect from ECOO and why did we become members again? To be a member of ECOO means for us to get a strong partner in Europe, to be able to share our experience and gain the experience of other countries in organising and regulating vision care process (including education and professional scope of practice) more efficiently, and finally to be up-to-date on processes related to the scope of vision care in Europe and the world. We look forward to working with or fellow ECOO members.

ECOO TO VISIT HELSINKI, THE CAPITAL OF THE HAPPIEST COUNTRY IN THE WORLD

The European Council of Optometry and Optics (ECOO) spring meetings will take place in Helsinki, Finland 9-11 May 2024. The ECOO meetings will be held alongside the 15th annual conference of the European Academy of Optometry and Optics (EAOO), which starts on 10 May.

These events will take place in the **Scandic Marina Congress Center**. This imposing congress venue is located by the sea in the idyllic Katajanokka harbour district, right next to Market Square and Helsinki

city centre. The meetings are being organised for ECOO by Finnish member, the Finnish Association of Vision and Eyecare (NÄE ry).

The Finnish Association of Vision and Eyecare (NÄE ry) represents optical stores providing optometrist, ophthalmologist and eye laboratory services and manufactures, importers, wholesalers serving the industry, as well as professional and training organisations. NÄE is responsible for lobbying business and health policy issues in its sector.

Helsinki is a great place to visit in spring. After a long and dark winter, the nature has just awakened to a new flowering, the weather is warming up and the amount of day light is impressive. The stunning archipelago and green forests are only a stone's throw away from the city. Diverse and distinctive cultural



and design offerings, lively events and unique gastronomy make the city interesting also for companions to join the trip. The Finnish capital is served by 60 airlines operating direct

flights to over 140 cities globally. The excellent infrastructure makes moving around the compact city effortless and easy.

“We are privileged to host both the ECOO spring meetings and the annual EA00 congress in Helsinki. We are happy to welcome all delegates, researchers, eye care professionals and students to share the latest evidence-based information on optometry, optics and eye health. We are also looking forward to seeing and hearing latest innovations of eye health technology in our exhibition”,

says **Panu Tast**, CEO of Finnish Association of Vision and Eyecare NAE.

EA00 Helsinki 2024 - Advancing Optometry and Optics through Technology and Shared Care

The Finnish Association of Vision and Eyecare NÄE ry is also jointly organising with EA00 their conference, the [EA00 Helsinki 2024](#). The largest professional gathering for optometry and optics in Europe, is once again welcoming students, optometrists, dispensing opticians, opticians, vision scientists, academics, researchers, and all other professionals from across the sector. This year's Academy edition uncovers the theme “Advancing Optometry and Optics through Technology and Shared Care” offering a wide range of learning opportunities, inspiring best-practice, elevating

knowledge, but also raising awareness and helping embrace opportunities and challenges arising in Europe.

The Academy programme features a large range of scientific, clinical, educational, and public health topics, including keynotes, lectures, interactive roundtables, posters, sponsored sessions, and an exhibition. Moreover, the live format of the forum offers a fantastic opportunity to networking for all delegates. The event lectures can also be attended remotely via a digital event platform.

Registrations for both the ECOO meetings and the EA00 conference open shortly and full details can be found [here](#).

INFO: www.naery.fi/en CONTACT: naery@naery.fi

GET TO KNOW THE PEOPLE INVOLVED IN ECOO

PETER GUMPELMAYER
TREASURER

What is your professional background, and what is your role at ECOO?

In 1982 I started my apprenticeship as an optician in the southern Austrian province of Carinthia. In 1985 I changed profession and started my training as a hearing aid practitioner. Finishing this I looked for a place to study optometry. Austria had no university offering an optometry course and at that stage was not a member of the European Union, so the UK Universities turned me down. So, through the contacts of my father via the International Optometric and Optical League I took the opportunity to study optometry at the University of Durban-Westville (now KwaZulu-Natal University). While there I learned a lot more than optometry: rugby, cricket and the diversity of the rainbow nation. Being at Nelson Mandela's rally after his release in the centre of Durban 1990 is an everlasting moment of admiration. Chapeau to his personality!

Back in Austria I started in daily optometric practice, specialising in contact lens and low vision work. In the evenings I started to study for the UK Professional Qualifying Examinations, successfully registering with the GOC in 1995.

At that time ECOO had started to get serious with the European Diploma in Optometry. I volunteered to be a guinea pig for this new way of optometric thinking. Wow and what an experience it was, I have never studied so hard in my life. Having my father heavily involved in ECOO at the



same time was not making it easier. I thoroughly enjoyed being presented with the ECOO European Diploma in 2004 in the Palace of Westminster, shouting "Vive L'Europe!" in this glorious building.

On the home front, in 2004 the Optical Guild in Upper Austria asked me to stand as their Chairman, a position I held for 16 years until 2020. My national association then endorsed me for the ECOO Education Committee failing to even ask me, only being told after the election that I have new job. That is how I got involved in ECOO. And on top of that, from 2010 to 2015 I chaired the National Association of Allied Health Care Professionals.

What are the most important skills/personal attributes needed to do your job?

Versatility, diplomacy, patience, interest in diversity, passion for optometry. Most of the work is done in the background, negotiating and finding consensus is a key aspect. To get to know the background of optics and optometry and the rich diversity of the scope of competence in Europe is most useful. The interest in the diversity of culture and language helps.

What has taken you by surprise in your work with ECOO?

The common passion in ECOO to promote optometry and optics, the spirit and "can do attitude". The friendliness of the ECOO members, the consensus finding to promote the scope of our profession, this makes the esprit of ECOO so special. No matter how big or small an association is there is mutual respect and the willingness to help each other.

What is your biggest achievement at ECOO so far?

Having been part of the Executive since 2010, the biggest achievements are: In Brussels after the hearing on the mutual evaluation of regulated professions, getting the response from the Commission: "Mr. Gumpelmayer ECOO was well prepared". Indeed we were. Delegates can tell a lot of stories about this exercise. The other one is still ongoing, the Medical Device Regulation and the interaction this requires. And the fluorescein story is another item that could fill pages.

What is the best piece of professional advice you have received?

Think beyond the horizon, there is always something new. Expect the unexpected, take nothing for granted.

Bonus question:

When you manage to escape from ECOO or your day job, how do you like to spend your time?

Next to my passion for optometry, I love railways: en grand and en miniature. This I share with all male Gumpelmayers, to the detriment of the ladies. So at Christmas time the railway runs around our Christmas tree and in summer we go for the real thing.



UPDATE FROM THE EUROPEAN ACADEMY OF OPTOMETRY AND OPTICS

EAOO UNVEILS NEW WEBSITE, FELLOWSHIP OPPORTUNITIES, AND UPCOMING ACADEMY HOUR SESSIONS

The European Academy of Optometry and Optics (EAOO) stands at the forefront of vision care excellence, offering a multitude of opportunities for members to learn, engage, grow, and thrive. Recent activities include celebrating World Sight Day, welcoming new members, and announcing upcoming events that will shape the future of optometry and optics in Europe. The academy's dedication to improving eye health remains unwavering.

EAOO is excited to offer a series of Academy Hour sessions in the coming weeks, providing a collaborative environment for all learners. Importantly, these sessions are free virtual events, open to the public, fostering a spirit of inclusivity and learning. They are set to take place at 17.30 GMT on various dates, covering a range of topics. No matter your interests or goals, these sessions offer valuable insights and knowledge-sharing, helping you gain a deeper understanding of your field and connect with fellow learners.



The highlight of the EAOO calendar is the eagerly awaited annual conference, offering a platform for experts, professionals, and enthusiasts to share knowledge and engage with the audience in the latest research and best practices. The next conference will take place in Helsinki from 10-12 May 2024.

EAOO is delighted to launch its brand-new website, providing an engaging and user-friendly online experience. With a fresh and modern design, the website simplifies access to the latest information about optometry, optics, and the association itself. Explore this new online resource [here](#) to discover a wealth of information and opportunities.

The EAOO invites those interested in joining their prestigious fellowship programme to apply. This programme offers unparalleled opportunities for professional growth, networking, and collaboration. Seize the chance to take your professional journey to the next level by [applying for the EAOO fellowship](#). Application deadline is 29/12/23.

As the European Academy of Optometry and Optics continues to champion excellence in vision care and provide these exciting opportunities, they invite you to stay connected with their activities and embrace the richness of learning in the optometry and optics field.



WORLD COUNCIL OF OPTOMETRY

UPDATE FROM THE WORLD COUNCIL OF OPTOMETRY

WCO LEADERSHIP TRANSITION

On 26 September, the WCO Board of Directors officially announced the installation of Dr. Sandra S. Block (United States) as WCO President for the 2023-2025 term. Additionally, Dr. Cindy Tromans (United Kingdom) has been elected to the position of WCO President-Elect for 2023-2025. Prof. Peter Hendicott (Australia) will continue to serve the WCO Board of Directors for the next two years as the Immediate Past President. The Board looks forward to the continued growth of the organization under their leadership. [\[Read more.\]](#)



WORLD SIGHT DAY 2023

On 12 October, World Sight Day, the World Council of Optometry released a [statement](#) from WCO President Dr. Sandra Block, emphasizing the importance of comprehensive eye care.

Furthermore, WCO Members celebrated World Sight Day [across the globe](#), embracing the #LoveYourEyes campaign from our partners at the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness (IAPB) and contributing to IAPB's [13,141,412 World Sight Day pledges](#).



MYOPIA PLEDGE CHALLENGE

Actively managing myopia in childhood can slow onset and progression and prevent severe eye health conditions in adulthood. WCO has recently increased our myopia management pledge goal to 100,000 pledges! Learn more, take the myopia management pledge, and [share](#).

4TH WORLD CONGRESS OF OPTOMETRY

WCO held a very successful 4th World Congress of Optometry in Melbourne, Australia, September 8-10, in partnership with Optometry Victoria South Australia (OV/SA) and ODMA. [\[Read more.\]](#)

UPCOMING MEETINGS

The ECOO spring meetings will take place 9-11 May 2024 in Helsinki, Finland. The link for registration will be available on the ECOO website shortly.

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Please inform us of any additions to the mailing list or of staff changes in your respective organisations. Should you have any news or updates which may be of interest to ECOO members, please contact the ECOO Secretariat: secretariat@ecoo.info

SPECIAL THANKS TO OUR SUPPORTERS

