



By Cory Soal  
R.H.A.D.

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## COUNCIL

# HALTON URGES FORD TO FOCUS ON RESOLVING OPTOMETRY ROW

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As Ontario's optometrists pause their job action and enter negotiations with the province on OHIP-insured eye care, Halton is pushing the Ford government to protect the crucial service and fund it fairly.

During its Nov. 24 meeting, regional council unanimously passed a motion that calls on those at Queen's Park to fund eye care services "at least to the cost of delivery."

The resolution, put forth by Halton Hills Mayor Rick Bonnette, explains that payments from OHIP for children's and seniors' eye care services have only increased nine per cent over the last three decades, "which has



Luke Edwards/Metroland

Ontario optometrists say OHIP currently only covers about 55 per cent of an eye exam cost for children and seniors.

not come close to matching inflation costs."

"We want to encourage the provincial government to resolve this issue," said Bonnette during the meeting. "I think it's something that's critical."

As part of the funding dispute, Ontario optometrists stopped providing OHIP-in-

sured eye care on Sept. 1 — something they resumed on Nov. 23 as a sign of good faith when both sides agreed to enter negotiations.

Bonnette said he's heard from local residents who have been directly impacted by the lengthy pause in services, like an 86-year-old woman suffering from glau-

coma.

Burlington Mayor Marianne Meed Ward, who seconded the resolution, said a lack of access to proper eye care impacts residents' abilities to participate in the community just as much as any other health issue.

"I think this (motion) is very timely because it does express our desire that they treat eye care as health care, and treat our eye care providers as valued members of our community providing an essential service that needs to be funded appropriately," she said.

According to the Ontario Association of Optometrists, the government currently covers an average of 55 per cent of the cost of an OHIP-insured eye exam, leaving optometrists' clinics to absorb the balance.

"With more than four million services delivered annually under OHIP and clinics under severe financial strain, the system is no longer sustainable," said a statement from the association.

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