President’s report

Optometrists Association has continued to advocate tirelessly on behalf of its members. The Medical Benefits Scheme is subject to reform, as is registration and accreditation. The association continues to provide an excellent indemnity insurance product for members along with some world-class publications including the acclaimed Optometry Pharma and Clinical and Experimental Optometry. The association also has a number of marketing and communication campaigns.

We have witnessed the growth of consultations by about nine per cent this year. Given the challenging economic environment, this reflects the success of a number of strategies that encourage early detection and prevention. The association continues to enjoy working in partnership with other organisations and industry in much the same way individual optometrists work in partnership with others to deliver care and services to their patients.

The year just passed has again been dominated by the imminent change to the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme (NRAS). Registration of optometrists is the dominant legislative instrument that all members work within and its implementation is pivotal to the way optometry is and can be practised. The association has thrown resources, time, effort and expertise into ensuring that the legislative environment in which optometry is practised favours the delivery of primary eye care that exploits all optometrists’ skills and expertise. This includes lobbying for harmonised therapeutic legislation across state legislatures, the restriction on supply of plano contact lenses, and the provision of spectacle prescriptions by optometrists and medical practitioners alone. The compulsory continuing education provisions that will be introduced with the NRAS on 1 July 2010 continue to be developed, as are recency of practice, criminal checks and other requirements.

Discussions with the Department of Health and Ageing continue in a seamless fashion and include remuneration and PBS. Indexation of fees looks like it will be greater than inflation, which is an unusual but welcome result. More discussion continues to clarify which procedures can be charged outside the Medicare Schedule and agreement for new Medicare items seem to be tantalisingly close. The PBS list has been expanded to include anti-glucoma medications, Flarex and Framycetin. This will result in more effective eye care for the community.

The association has participated in other Australian Government initiatives such as the National Preventative Health Strategy and the National Primary Health Care Strategy, and we have worked with the Hospital and Health Reform Commission. As prevention is one of the areas of health in which the government has expressed it desires greater emphasis, the association has worked with Vision 2020 to deliver the story of preventable eye care tackling visual impairment and blindness. Working in partnership to deliver messages such as the promotion of early detection and intervention of preventable eye conditions is a strategy more likely to deliver positive change. We believe this is the case on both an organisational level and individual professional level. More discussions with Australian General Practice Network (AGPN) will hopefully result in more optometrists joining their local General Practice Network to help deliver better co-ordinated, more connected primary care.

In the same vein optometry and ophthalmology continue to walk closer together. Public access to anti-glaucoma medications prescribed by optometrists was for the most part negotiated amicably and fairly by the two organisations. Once more the delivery of care has been enhanced by this change with the embracing of arrangements between individual health professionals caring for their patients ‘on the ground’. The same can be said in the complex and fraught area of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) eye care delivery. The association has set up an Indigenous Working Group to ultimately help optometrists keen to be involved in delivering services for ATSI people in an effective way, determined by local context and best practice. The Visiting Optometrists Scheme (VOS) is being used to deliver care to remote and very remote communities that often include ATSI communities.

A change in the association database and website will help to better deliver services to and communicate with our members. The accurate compilation of CPD points, understanding member interests and concerns and quickly relaying information relevant to practice are improvements we are working towards. Electronic forms of communication and connection are the mechanism to achieve this. It has been a huge undertaking and as is the way with these projects, has not been without hiccups. That said, the strategy is correct and in the medium- to long-term the time and effort will be more than worthwhile.

The association has embarked in a number of campaigns ranging from children’s vision to UV. We have also advised the Australian Government on its ‘get tested’ campaign and others such as the MD Foundation in their various activities. The association has continued to supply
templates for optometrists to generate stories and campaigns in their local media. They have had great take-up and use, and without doubt have contributed to the increase in primary eye care services delivered in this 12-month period.

At the 2008 AGM a major overhaul of our constitution was passed unanimously by the state division members. This was accompanied by a change in personnel on the National Board and gave the board the ability to co-opt expertise, as it sees fit. The change in the constitution was recommended to give the board the best chance to effectively govern the association now and in years to come. The association has extremely strong membership from which it derives its greatest strength. Remaining connected, relevant and useful to the membership is inextricably tied with being well governed by the members through the National Board. By being strategic, making the right decisions and using our resources efficiently and effectively, the National Board will determine our success and achievements over the coming years and decades.

On behalf of the National Board I thank members of Optometrists Association and their divisions for their energy and input. I also thank all the councillors and board members who served on the National Council or National Board in 2008-2009. Those members have sacrificed many hours and undergone some heartache to contribute to governing the association. I thank our chief executive officer Joe Chakman and his staff for their efforts in providing services for the membership. I appreciate the support and input that have come from the greater eye-care industry and I thank colleagues from all health sectors for their support and collegiality.

Our achievements are the sum of many parts and I trust we will all celebrate many more to come.

Despite another tumultuous year on the world financial stage, I am pleased to report that the national body of Optometrists Association Australia remains in sound financial health with money in the bank and a strong balance sheet.

For the year ending 30 June 2009, the association recorded a deficit of $485,000 but this was entirely due to the decrease in the value of our portfolio. Without this fall in value, the organisation would have recorded a moderate surplus of about $130,000. Despite this decrease the board considers such a portfolio to be a sensible part of the association’s financial foundations.

Membership fees remain the association’s major source of income but significant efforts by our staff mean that other sources of income such as sponsorship and commissions now account for about 35 per cent of total revenue.

Major areas of expenditure include salaries ($1.38 million), our members’ professional indemnity insurance ($715,000), member services such as our newspaper, the journal and magazine supplements ($600,000), and marketing outlays ($400,000). The association has also spent $200,000 over the past year assisting our smaller state divisions lobby governments and assist members. Other member services such as the bookshop and brochures are provided by the association at a small cost.

The board retains a conservative outlook and has forecast a balanced budget for the new financial year despite only a small increase in member fees, the first increase for a number of years. There has also been a recent increase in the value of the association’s portfolio, which is extremely pleasing.
Executive Director’s report

Joe Chakman

The global financial crisis has made the difficult task of managing the association more complicated. Income from sponsorship and advertising in our publications has declined and in tight times one must show restraint with membership fees. We have managed well in the circumstances by being careful in how we spend our funds and being selective in what we do.

Many dedicated people contribute many hours and much expertise to the work of Optometrists Association—the directors, subcommittee members, a variety of volunteers and National Office staff. The profession is indeed fortunate to have such an array of talented and dedicated people contributing to its work.

My personal thanks go to the staff at National Office. Optometrists Association members should be particularly grateful for their efforts on behalf of the association.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

At 30 June 2009, the Board comprised:
Mr Andrew Harris: President and Chairman of the Board
Mr Micheal Knipe: Deputy Chairman and Director
Mr Simon Hurwood: Treasurer and Director
Mr Andrew Godfrey: Director
Mr Andrew Hogan: Director
Mr Anthony Hogan: Director
Mr Gavin O’Callaghan: Director

National Historian
Mr Colin Waldron

NATIONAL OFFICE STAFF

At 30 June 2009, National Office staff comprised:
Mr Joseph Chakman: Chief Executive Officer
Ms Sandra Shaw: National Publications Manager
Ms Lainie Tomming: National Marketing Manager
Ms Shirley Loh: National Professional Services Manager
Mr John Beever: Chief Executive Officer, Canberra
Ms Genevieve Quilty: National Policy Manager, Canberra
Mrs Maria Wallis: Executive Assistant
Mr Rod Baker: Features Editor
Ms Amanda Fisher: Assistant Editor
Ms Melanie Whiteside: National Campaign Co-ordinator
Ms Heidi Tuck: National Marketing Co-ordinator
Mrs Natalina Bortone: Bookshop and Brochures Manager
Ms Rosy Dolan: Receptionist/Administrative Assistant
Mrs Christine Hayward: Bookkeeper
Dr Patricia Kiely: Research Officer
Mr Matt Trollope: Journalist
Ms Jennifer Greive: Journalist
Ms Monique Donato: Journalist
Mr Peter Nicholls: Graphic Designer
Ms Bronwyne Thomason: Journal Administrator

ORGANISATION AND STRUCTURE

Office Bearers

Mr Rodney Hodge retired from the board, replaced by Mr Andrew Godfrey.
Mr Rod Baker retired from the board, replaced by Mr Micheal Knipe.
Mr Tony Lord retired from the board, replaced by Mr Anthony Hogan.

Constitution

The association adopted a new constitution at its AGM in November 2008. The new constitution is in line with modern governance practices and sees the association being run like business companies are run. The National Council has become the National Board and councilors have become directors.

Board Meetings

The board met six times in 2008-2009. Four of these meetings were at National Office in Melbourne. One meeting was held in Canberra and one in Adelaide.

Chief Executive Officers Meetings

At 30 June 2009 was 3,787, an increase of two per cent. Membership by state was New South Wales 1,437, Victoria 952, Queensland and Northern Territory 838, Western Australia 295, South Australia 198 and Tasmania 67. The association is proud to be one of the very few voluntary membership professional organisations to have more than 95 per cent of eligible persons as its members.

ADVOCACY

The prime reason for the association’s existence is to advance optometry and eye care through advocacy. That is the leading theme in the association’s updated statement of strategic directions. Advocacy is the driver of most association campaigns and operations.

Optometrists Association has four advocacy objectives. These and the rationales behind them are to:
• Foster a positive regulatory environment for optometry
The delivery of the highest quality eye-care services requires that governments adopt and enact policies that recognise the contribution optometrists make to the health of the community. Achieving a regulatory environment that positively promotes optometric eye care of the highest standards is a prime goal of Optometrists Association.
• Promote the viability of optometric practice by ensuring appropriate and fair remuneration
High quality eye care cannot be delivered to the Australian public without optometrists playing a major part. Optometrists cannot deliver quality care if practitioners’ incomes are insufficient to attract people to the profession. To retain optometrists, remuneration structures must allow for adequate consultation times, take account of the costs of equipping and operating a modern practice, and lessen dependence of practices on retail sales.

- Address the growing demand for eye services by enabling optometrists to practise to the full extent of their competence.
- Deliver best patient outcomes by working with other health professionals and their professional associations.

The best patient outcomes are achieved when all the health-care professionals involved in the care of patients work together and acknowledge each other’s capabilities. Optometrists Association will work to ensure that all health professionals have a solid understanding and appreciation of the skills and training of optometrists.

Major advocacy priorities in 2008-2009 included optometry, often through Canberra CEO John Beever, continuing to contribute to the development of the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme, progressing Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme coverage of medicines prescribed by optometrists, and continued lobbying to enable optometrists in all states and territories to prescribe therapeutic medicines.

**Canberra staff**

During the year, the association added a second staff member, Genevieve Quilty, to its secretariat at the Canberra Office, significantly improving its advocacy capabilities.

**Australian Government**

This year there was intense policy development and change in the health sector. The new Australian Government guided three major research undertakings through the National Health and Hospital Reform Commission, the National Preventative Health Taskforce and the National Primary Health Care Strategy Report.

The association made various submissions to the reform process, in particular the work on Primary Health Care; and participated in the formation of policy submissions by the National Primary Health Care Partnership to these same reports.

The association’s policy capability was increased substantially by the appointment of Ms Genevieve Quilty, a former adviser to the previous Federal Treasurer. Ms Quilty has made an early and welcome contribution to our ability to articulate policy across many aspects of the association’s work. One of her key responsibilities is to lead the creation of a system that enables the large volume of policy material, including guidelines and position papers, to be identified and registered to facilitate access and updating.

The association continued to liaise with ministers and parliamentary secretaries as required throughout the year, but this contact was limited by the fact that the Government had more urgent reform priorities elsewhere and while supportive of eye care, did not regard this part of the health system as needing immediate reform.

The challenge ahead for optometry and others in the eye-care sector is to persuade governments that while the eye-care needs of the public are generally met now, more can and should be done and the sector is changing in ways that mean governments should not assume policy and programs can remain unchanged.

The association also participated in the Vision 2020 Parliamentary Friends’ Group functions, which allowed the association access to many politicians from all sectors of politics with an interest in health professions to ensure that legislative frameworks and instruments support rather than impede this goal. We also need to promote awareness of the skills and training of optometrists and the services they are able to provide, both within the community and among other health-care providers.

COAG

Implementation of the new National Registration and Accreditation Scheme (NRAS) that we described in previous reports gathered pace in 2008-2009, following the decision by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) in March 2008 to proceed.

Optometry continued to be closely involved in development of the NRAS. The association recognised that the NRAS was an opportunity to modernise and make consistent the aspects of professional regulation in Australia that are important to optometrists and their patients, and made it a priority for the Canberra Office in particular this year.

Optometry continued to chair the Professions Reference Group (PRG) for the project that became the main channel of communication between the 10 professions involved initially and government officials responsible for implementation. The group met six times in the year.

This year the association made submissions in response to seven detailed NRAS policy consultation papers between July 2008 and January 2009 and on the exposure draft of the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law 2009 released in June 2009. The association represented the profession at various national meetings for a period between June and November 2008.

Throughout the year we lobbied strongly against the inappropriate degrees of government involvement in accreditation of health professional education and the effective control of the new national boards by the proposed Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency’s control over resources and funding. We are pleased COAG heard our and other professions’ concerns on these matters and changed the scheme design to allow accreditation agencies such as OCANZ to retain operational independence, and for the boards to have discretion in the use of funds raised from practitioners through registration fees.

At the same time we were disappointed COAG persisted with its plans to enable
orthoptists to prescribe spectacles through legislation instead of regulation. Our objection was not to the policy intention—whether it is right or wrong is a matter for governments—but to the way in which it was to be implemented. At year’s end we continued our lobbying to rectify this optometry-specific weakness in the NRAS.

During these consultations the Community Affairs Legislation Committee of the Senate conducted an inquiry into NRAS. The inquiry considered the design of the scheme, including its impact on health services, patient care and safety, standards of training and qualification, and complaints management, as well as the role of state and territory registration boards if any, and alternative implementation models.

The National President, Mr Andrew Harris, National CEO Mr Joe Chakman and Canberra CEO Mr John Beever gave evidence in hearings held in Parliament House. Overall the committee concluded that the scheme was widely supported with concerns remaining only in relation to some aspects.

Vision 2020 Australia
The association continues to be an active member and sponsor of Vision 2020 Australia. We believe Vision 2020 is a very effective voice for the eye health sector and promoter of awareness. The association in coming years will seek to be more involved in its activities. The Canberra Office continues to support the operation of the Parliamentary Friends’ Group, which is now established as a communication channel with MPs and senators who are interested in eye care and vision issues.

PBS
Having secured the listing of several of the main therapeutic medicines prescribed by optometrists on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) from the start of 2008, this year the emphasis was on working with PBS officials, helping endorsed optometrists to understand and use the PBS system, and lobbying for more medicines prescribed by optometrists to be added to those already listed.

Late in 2008 following consideration by an Expert Advisory Panel convened by the Department of Health and Ageing, which includes the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Ophthalmologists, the Australian Medical Association and Optometrists Association, the department published a General Statement for Topical Anti-Glaucoma Drugs Prescribed by Authorised Optometrists as Pharmaceutical Benefits. The statement contained Guidelines for Shared Care of Glaucoma Patients. Early in 2009, 13 anti-glaucoma medicines prescribed by endorsed optometrists were added to the PBS.

Other drugs added to the PBS for prescription by optometrists following submissions from the association included Flarex, combinations of Timolol with Bimatoprost, Brimonidine, Dorzolamide, Lanoprost and Travoprost plus Timolol and Framycetin. Systolic tear supplements have also been added to the opticometric list.

It is pleasing to report that to date there have been no reports of optometrists or patients experiencing any difficulties with PBS medicines prescribed by optometrists.

Therapeutic medicines
In 2008-2009 National Office and the divisions progressed substantially the Co-ordinated National Therapeutics Strategy 2008. Victoria, Tasmania, South Australia and Northern Territory all moved to a uniform list of medicines that endorsed optometrists may prescribe in those jurisdictions, while the lists in New South Wales and Queensland were similar, albeit shorter.

Western Australian optometrists remained without prescribing rights but in June 2008, the Western Australian Deputy Premier and Health Minister Dr Kim Hames told Western Australian members that his government intended to bring optometrists’ prescribing in the West into line with the rest of the country, preferably when national registration was introduced. This was the culmination of a joint effort by WA Division and National Office and came after years of frustration for Western Australian members.

Optometric benefits
Following major changes in the Department of Health and Ageing, we renewed negotiations with new staff responsible for the Optometric Benefits Consultative Committee (OBCC) concerning possible new benefits. We also started negotiations to clarify which procedures optometrists may legitimately bill outside the Medical Benefits System. Given that the Common Form of Undertaking was negotiated with the Australian Government more than 30 years ago and the profession has changed markedly in that time, it is becoming difficult to ensure certainty and clarity about all that is covered by these items. This will be an area of focus in 2009-2010.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Eye Health
The Indigenous Working Group, convened by Mr David Welch, met formally for the first time during 2008-2009. Membership includes many well-known optometrists working in ATSIs communities in urban and regional settings. The group intends to articulate a national policy to ensure that eye care is delivered to ATSIs communities in a sustainable, effective and culturally appropriately manner in 2009-2010.

The association continued in its participation in the National Indigenous Eye Health Survey.

Rural Optometry Group
The Rural Optometry Group also formally met for the first time during 2008-2009. Membership includes representatives from each state and territory other than the Australian Capital Territory, and has provided valuable information with which to inform the association’s advocacy work in rural optometry workforce issues. The ROG participated in a teleconference with the Office of Rural Health to outline the issues raised by the association in submissions to a review of rural health programs, and these issues were further discussed with the newly-appointed Minister for Indigenous Health, Rural and Regional Health, Warren Snowdon, following his appointment in June 2009.

ACCC
The association continues to liaise with the ACCC on a variety of matters. Discussion continues with the ACCC on preferred provider arrangements and the association continues to participate on the ACCC Health Sector Consultative Committee.

AGPN
The association continued to work with the Australian Division of General Practice and made early contact with its new CEO, Mr David Butt. The association continued to participate in the AGPN established National Primary Health Care Partnership (NPHCP). The NPHCP was established with the aim of providing an advocacy body and communications platform for the Australian Primary Health Care sector in light of the Federal Government’s review of the health-care system.

Department of Veterans’ Affairs
The association is represented on the
Department of Veterans’ Affairs Optical Advisory Committee. The arrangements for supply of optometric and services and optical appliances to veterans have improved considerably as a result of the association’s participation in the work of the committee.

**Visiting Optometrists Scheme**
The Visiting Optometrists Scheme is an Australian Government program that provides financial assistance to enable optometrists to provide eye care in remote areas. The association is represented on the VOS advisory committee and its efforts on the committee and with government in general have resulted in substantially higher levels of assistance and a more workable scheme.

The program now focuses on delivering optometric care to indigenous communities. The Government increased its budgetary allocation to the program after having seen its successful operation following the recent changes.

**EDUCATION AND STANDARDS**

**Workforce**
The fourth in the series of papers on the Australian optometric workforce was published in the July 2008 issue of *Clinical and Experimental Optometry* and can be accessed on the web at [http://www3.interscience.wiley.com/cgi-bin/fulltext/119880075/PDFSTART](http://www3.interscience.wiley.com/cgi-bin/fulltext/119880075/PDFSTART).

**Optometry schools**
Optometrists Association maintains communication with the schools of optometry and their staffs. The association and its members are indebted to the many academics who donate their time and expertise to doing work that benefits the profession. Approaches to government on many matters such as therapeutic drugs would be considerably more difficult if it were not for the help offered by people at the schools. The association has assisted research at the schools by distributing questionnaires on behalf of researchers on several topics. The association also maintains a good working relationship with the Victorian College of Optometry.

**Optometry students**
The association provides final year students with, among other things, complimentary subscriptions to *Australian Optometry* and *Clinical and Experimental Optometry*, and discounts for text books.

**Lectures**
National Office staff members have delivered lectures to students and members at division congresses and other events on a variety of opto-political subjects and on the association.

**Continuing professional development**
A total of 2,316 members earned 80 or more CPD points for the 2007–2008 biennium and achieved the required level of points. This represents about 76 per cent of members in active practice, a 10 per cent increase on compliance levels for the previous biennium. There are many initiatives that may have contributed to this increase, including regular updates to members in *Association News* regarding CPD events, and other reminders regarding CPD.

The association, in conjunction with Associations Forum, chaired a meeting regarding current and future CPD systems and involved eight professional organisations. Findings from the meeting assisted in drafting a document outlining CPD requirements for national registration.

**Assessing Fitness to Drive**
National office staff, with assistance from an expert committee consisting of Professor Joanne Wood (QUT), Professor Barry Cole (The University of Melbourne) and Dr Mark Lazarus (RANZCO), developed a set of proposed changes to the current document Assessing Fitness to Drive. The changes have been well received by the National Transport Commission and we are awaiting a response to know how many of our suggestions will be implemented.

**Standards and practice guidelines**
Clinical practice guidelines and position statements are continually being reviewed and updated. The standards and guidelines can be found in the members’ section of the association’s website.

The Position Paper on Vision Screenings was completed and adopted by the National Board.

**Practice accreditation**
The arrangement with Quality in Practice from Australian General Practice Accreditation Limited was discontinued and other options for practice accreditation explored. No suitable alternatives were found.

**Competency standards**
The process to revise competency standards for entry-level to the profession of optometry and therapeutic competency standards was finalised. ‘Optometrists Association Australia Universal (entry-level) and Therapeutic Competency Standards for Optometry 2008’ were developed and adopted by the Board.

**Infection control guidelines**
Work commenced on ‘Influenza A(H1N1) and infection control guidelines for optometrists’, co-authored by Carol Lakis, Ka-Yee Lian, Genevieve Napper and Patricia Kiely.

**Children’s vision**
The association continued its participation in a project conducted by the Centre for Community Child Health, Murdoch Children’s Research Institute, The Royal Children’s Hospital, on vision screening of children. The association provided extensive analysis and critique of the literature review prepared for the study and was a vigorous participant in meetings of the steering committee.

**National Health Workforce Forum**
Representatives of the association have been involved in the Victorian Department of Human Services’ discussions regarding Shared Competencies for the Health Workforce, which is directly related to the work currently undertaken by the National Health Workforce Taskforce.

**INTERNATIONAL OPTOMETRIC ASSOCIATIONS**
Optometrists Association has a strong commitment to the development of optometry worldwide and participates in the activities of the Asia Pacific Council of Optometry and the World Council of Optometry.

Immediate past president Ian Bluntish represented the association at the General Delegates Meeting of the World Council of Optometry.

**New Zealand Association of Optometrists**
A tradition has developed for the presidents of the two associations to visit the other country and attend council meetings on a yearly rotation. The two national bodies have a close relationship and there is a constant exchange of information and communication.

**Optometry Giving Sight campaign**
Optometrists Association Australia has
accepted the Optometry Giving Sight (OGS) campaign as its preferred charity. OGS is a joint program of the International Agency for Prevention of Blindness (IAPB); International Centre for Eyecare Education (ICEE); and the World Optometric Foundation (WOF), the humanitarian arm of the World Council of Optometry (WCO).

OGS was established to raise funds globally and to mobilise resources from optometrists, opticians and optical outlets to help achieve the aims of the World Health Organization-IAPB Program, Vision 2020: The Right to Sight, especially with regard to eliminating blindness and impaired vision due to uncorrected or under-corrected refractive error and developing programs to assist those with low vision.

**ADVICE**

**Public**
Providing information on vision and eye care to the public and to other organisations is an important part of the association’s role. Each day the association must answer questions from the public on various aspects of eye care, enquires from students doing projects, private and public institutions seeking information about optometry, overseas optometrists wanting to migrate to Australia and a host of other enquiries. The diversity of questions and people seeking information from the association is astonishing.

**Members**
Every day, many members of state divisions will contact National Office for information on a large variety of topics. A typical day may see members enquiring about dates of overseas conferences, services available through the Advantage Program, professional advice regarding patient treatment, methods of valuing a practice and problems with the claiming of Medicare benefits. National Office is proud of its record of being able to handle member enquiries.

National Office supplies members with information for use in their practices, such as vision standards, and information to use in promoting eye care, such as statistics on the prevalence of various conditions in the Australian population.

As well as factual information, National Office provides advice regularly to members on matters such as professional indemnity, ethical issues and dealing with government departments, including Medicare Australia. The association assists members with queries on Medicare regulations and rejected Medicare claims, and helps members in dealing with complaints from patients.

**State Divisions**
National Office regularly provides information and assistance to the divisions of Optometrists Association on a range of topics, ranging from technical information to assistance in drafting submissions to government.

National Office has provided divisions with a variety of resource documents on subjects as diverse as therapeutic drugs, driver vision standards, school medical service vision screenings, state government low-cost spectacle programs, membership retention, strategic planning and recruitment programs.

As examples, in the past year National Office has drafted submissions on behalf of divisions, participated in delegations to government ministers and senior public servants, held joint educational meetings with other professionals and staffed stands at exhibitions.

National Office assisted divisions with local public relations and marketing activities. Our particular role was to provide research materials in support of media questions, formulate answers for media officers and take direct control of media activities when divisions asked National Office to assist.

**State division conferences**
National Office staff members attended all state conferences, presenting lectures at some. The conferences provide staff with an excellent opportunity to meet members and better understand their needs.

**MARKETING**

In 2008-2009 the marketing department actively developed resources to assist members at a practice level while continuing to promote key eye health messages and the role of the optometrist to target groups.

**Partnership development**
During the year the association began to develop partnerships with groups and bodies that could assist in the broadcast of eye health messages based on a strategic collaboration. Examples of these partnerships include Lions Australia (Seniors’ eye health), Australian General Practice Network (Healthy Kids Check), and Safe Work Australia (Safe Work Week).

The association continued to work in conjunction with key partners Glaucoma Australia, the MD Foundation and Optometry Giving Sight.

**Network opportunities**
The association held the last in the series of Alcon-sponsored networking dinners for optometrists and pharmacists, offering both groups of professionals the chance to earn CPD points based on ocular allergy and dry eye content. Seven events were held during 2008-2009, attracting about 800 pharmacists and optometrists.

**Media coverage**
Throughout 2008-2009, the industry received about 2,246 media hits, many of which were the result of association marketing campaigns and the distribution of member media releases on topics such as transport drivers and vision awareness, falls and fractures, children’s vision, UV awareness and early detection.

**CAMPAIGNS**

**Good Vision for Life**
The association developed a brand—Good Vision for Life—and a template system that allows campaign materials to be tailored for members and used at a local level to market their practice. In the 2008-2009 series, Early Detection, and Falls and Fractures campaigns were made available, with 225 members taking advantage of this free initiative. The last campaign for release in 2009 will be Forty, Fit and Focused.

**Children’s Vision**
Firmly in place as the association’s flagship initiative, the Children’s Vision campaign continued to be sponsored by Transitions Optical for another year. Adopting a space theme on all direct mail, point of sale and competition materials, the association aimed to communicate the key campaign message ‘Not even the sky’s the limit’ to as many Australian primary-school teachers, students and parents as possible throughout school term one. Initial contact was made with 8,110 primary schools and all association members in Australia.

This year we saw a slight reduction in participation by schools (down 1.3 per cent) compared to last year but are pleased to report significant growth in member involvement (up 4.1 per cent), resulting in 17.8 per cent participation in the program.

The association also ran this year a campaign pilot focusing on children’s...
vision in Victorian kindergartens. While this campaign was considered a success, attracting participation equivalent to the ongoing primary school campaign, funding allowing for a national roll-out is yet to be sourced.

UV Protection
In an effort to capitalise on the full stretch of Summer, this year the decision was made to shift the timing of the annual campaign to October-November. In 2009, the UV Protection campaign was run for the last time in January-February and will also run in October-November for the first time.

Transitions Optical again supported this campaign, which included direct mail to optometrists, in-store displays of posters and counter-cards and patient information flyers and examination records.

Given an investment was required twice in the same calendar year to change the campaign cycle from January-February to October-November, a smaller scale public relations campaign was launched in January and the ‘Fried Eggs’ community service announcement will air in October 2009.

MD Awareness Week
The association continued its collaboration with the Macular Degeneration Foundation, Blackmores and Novartis to deliver MD Awareness Week.

Running from 24 to 30 May, MD Awareness Week again used the ‘How’s your macular?’ theme on all promotional material. This year the foundation also launched the Eating for Eye Health cookbook in March, extending the awareness campaign over a three-month period. The book was made available to members through the association’s bookshop as well as a range of other channels managed by the foundation.

The foundation reported that the awareness week activities reached more than 15 million people across Australia, equaling the 2008 campaign audience reach; 11,500 information kits were distributed to health-care professionals, 60 per cent of whom were optometrists.

HICA
The association worked in conjunction with Health Insurance Consultants Australia (HICA) for another year, producing the ‘Looking for better cover?’ brochure. This brochure is available to members free of charge and can be used to assist patients to better understand health insurance choices and the restrictions of preferred provider arrangements. The campaign ran from November to March and resulted in 282 orders and the subsequent distribution of 72,000 brochures to members. HICA received 1,293 enquiries about health insurance options as a result of this campaign.

National Eye Health Awareness
In conjunction with Vision 2020 and RANZCO, the association was involved in discussions in relation to the Australian Government’s National Eye Health Awareness Campaign, launched to the public on 1 May.

Exhibition participation
During 2008-2009 the association participated in only one exhibition, AGFEST in Tasmania. This opportunity remains the most significant for the association in terms of public attendance and opportunities to promote eye health. This year 70,488 people attended the event and 422 people were screened using a retinal camera, corneal topographer and tonometer.

Vision Van
The association has provided support to the Vision Van collaboration between Novartis, the MD Foundation and RANZCO in phases 1 and 2 of this initiative. During these phases, 2,300 people were screened for AMD with about 12.9 per cent of patients showing possible signs of dry AMD and age-related maculopathy. A third phase for the Vision Van is scheduled for late 2009.

Website and e-marketing
Scheduled for launch on 1 August, the association’s new national website and database evolved significantly throughout the financial year. The second half of the financial year was spent outlining specifications for the migration of all state and national data.

On 3 June, the association launched its first electronic HTML newsletter, which has made a big impact on the style and frequency of communication to members via email.

Member resources
The most significant advancement in member resources was the launch of the ‘Good Vision for Life’ series.

Each year a new set of marketing templates will be developed for a variety of eye health topics and will include space for personalisation of individual member’s practice details.

The association also launched a new member guide designed to summarise the services available to members and be an ongoing reference for association, division and Advantage Program contact details.

Advantage Program
In 2008-2009 the association introduced a new Advantage Program partner, Neststarter. Through this arrangement, members have access to a range of website packages at reduced prices, to assist in creating a new or improved online presence for their practices.

The association also formed a partnership with Medici, and leader in Australia in the provision of business valuations to the health industry. Medici’s consulting, research, succession planning and brokerage services are available to members as part of the Advantage Program.

Partnerships with American Express, AMP, Guild Insurance and Financial Services, Guild Legal Services and Qantas Club remained in place, with the association undertaking regular reviews with each partner throughout the year to ensure program objectives were being met.

During 2008-2009, the association generated $132,000 in Advantage Program commissions.

Human resources and industrial relations support
Guild Lawyers continue to provide association members with expert, external advice on human resources and industrial relations matters.

Professional indemnity insurance
Optometrists association continues to provide professional indemnity insurance for its members. Cover was provided by Avant Mutual Group Limited, formerly known as AMIL. Members do not have to apply for the insurance but are covered automatically as a benefit of membership of the association. Cover remains at $10 million per member.

Practice insurance
Guild Insurance continues to offer business, home and motor insurance options for members. Industry consolidation throughout the past 12 months has seen a growth within franchise networks that maintain their own insurance products. This movement has created a reduction in Guild Business Insurance policies held by association members while home and motor policies have increased slightly.
Optometrists Association Bookshop

The Optometrists Association Bookshop is a highly valued resource for members and students. In 2008-2009, members and students purchased more than 770 optometric books from the bookshop with a total value of about $84,000, excluding GST.

The association website has a section for the bookshop, which contains a booklist, information on forthcoming releases, book reviews, new releases, best-seller lists and PR materials lists.

Brochures, point-of-sale and PR materials

Public information brochures, stands, patient newsletters and other public information materials continue to be one of the most popular services offered by Optometrists Association. In 2008-2009, more than 154,000 of these items were distributed, with a value of about $73,500, excluding GST.

Many members have taken advantage of the option to have the brochures and patient newsletters personalised with the members’ practice information.

All brochures are regularly reviewed and rewritten as is necessary. Many brochures were rewritten and redesigned in 2008-2009.

PUBLICATIONS

Australian Optometry

The newspaper highlighted the ongoing dealings of association representatives with politicians and bureaucrats, both at formal meetings and in networking situations. It gave prominence to articles on the progress of national registration and accreditation legislation, explaining the implications for members following the introduction of national registration in July 2010.

Australian Optometry promoted the association’s major marketing campaigns, in particular the Good Vision for Life program, and conferences run by the divisions in each state. In May, the newspaper included a six-page feature on the clinical aspects of contact lens practice, which complemented the business and marketing focus of contact lens prescribing in Practice in the same month. Special features were run on ProVision and Fitness to Drive.

Regular features included the Medicare and President’s columns, and articles contributed by the Rural Optometry Group, ACBO and the professional indemnity insurance company, Avant. The CPD diary was published when space permitted. Optometry Giving Sight was supported with editorial or complimentary advertising in all issues.

Clinical and Experimental Optometry

The highlight of the year was the release of the journal’s first Impact Factor, which for 2008 was 1.031. The calculation was based on the number of times papers published in the journal in the previous two years (2006 and 2007) were cited in other journals. This placed Clinical and Experimental Optometry second among optometry journals, and 35th in rank among the top international vision, optometry and ophthalmology journals.

Digitisation of most volumes of the journal dating from 1934 was completed by Wiley-Blackwell. The digitisation was done at no cost to the association as Wiley-Blackwell expects to recover costs by selling on-line access. The archive issues are freely available to members online. The association is attempting to obtain copies of all missing issues so that the archives are complete.

In January 2009, Clinical and Experimental Optometry was among the Blackwell journals that were transferred from the Blackwell online site to the Wiley InterScience site. Blackwell Publishing Asia, the publisher of Clinical and Experimental Optometry since January 2006, was acquired by UK company John Wiley and Sons in 2007.

All papers published in the journal were submitted, managed and tracked using the online program Manuscript Central.

The New Zealand Association of Optometrists and the Hong Kong Society of Professional Optometrists remain full partners in the journal with Optometrists Association Australia. All members of the three professional bodies receive subscriptions to the journal as a member service.

More than 7,000 institutions have access to the journal. Article downloads increased by 50 per cent in the past year and there was a 24 per cent increase in electronic access to abstracts. About 3,700 free or very low cost subscriptions were provided for nations with gross national income per person less than US$3,500.

The journal is edited by Emeritus Professor H Barry Collin. Under the chairmanship of Professor Barry Cole, the editorial board met in July 2008 at the Wiley-Blackwell head office in Melbourne. The editorial board defines general policy for the journal and agrees on a tentative editorial schedule for the following three years.

The J Lloyd Hewett Award has been revived after 14 years. It will be awarded this year for a paper published in the past three years. A paper has been selected and the editorial board will be asked to approve the recommendation at its annual meeting.

The selection process is nearing completion for the HB Collin Medal Award. The winner will receive $5,000, and be expected to submit a paper for publication in our journal and make a presentation on the topic at a major Optometrists Association conference.

The journal published a special 120-page issue on wavefront optics in May 2009.

Magazines

The association published six magazine titles.

Four annual magazines were produced: Ophthalmic Equipment, Guide4Grads, Ophthalmic Lenses, and Contact Lenses. Comparative data tables were included in all magazines apart from Guide4Grads.

The 2009 issue of Ophthalmic Equipment featured instruments used in eye disease detection, acknowledging the integral role equipment plays in the diagnosis and comanagement of disease. As well as Australian Optometry readers, the magazine was distributed to all ophthalmologists Australia-wide.

Guide4Grads was produced specifically for new optometry graduates. In addition to Australian Optometry readers, it was distributed to every optometry student in all year levels in each of Australia’s three optometry schools. The content was dedicated to information and advice for new graduates but was also of interest to employers.

Practice

The quarterly business management and marketing magazine Practice had a themed issue on contact lenses in May 2009.

Services provided by association’s Advantage Program partners were promoted with regular editorial contributions from Guild Finance and Guild Lawyers, and new partners Netstarter and Medici.

ProVision provided editorial in each issue, covering the benefits of its marketing support and business training programs.
Optometry Pharma
Themed issues of the quarterly magazine Optometry Pharma included glaucoma and dry eye in December and March, respectively. The magazine has been an outstanding success, receiving commendations and support from many sectors.

Since December 2008, all issues have been distributed to all optometrists in New Zealand at the request of the New Zealand Optometrists Association.

The editorial advisor, Associated Professor Mark Roth, assisted with selection of authors and clinical content. The magazine deals with all pharmaceutical preparations used by optometrists, from dry eye preparations, stains and topical anaesthetics, to anti-infectives and drugs used in the management of glaucoma.

All About Eyes
All About Eyes was made available free of charge in an electronic version for members to distribute to their patients. Members can still have printed copies of the newsletter personalised by National Office. The patient newsletter assists members in communicating with patients between consultations and in building patient loyalty.

Directory of Members
The 2009 Directory of Members is to be published in July and distributed to all members in hard copy. It lists optometrists alphabetically by location and by surname. The association acknowledges Johnson & Johnson’s sponsorship of the directory.

OTHER ORGANISATIONS

ProVision
Optometrists Association retains ownership of ProVision. ProVision runs autonomously within broad policy guidelines laid down by Optometrists Association. ProVision provides group buying facilities, marketing support and business training for member optometrists and their staff.

ProVision membership has grown to cover almost 400 locations around Australia with commensurate growth in turnover and services offered. ProVision continues to be a wonderful resource for members who are looking to improve the performance of their practice.

ODMA
The association maintains a good working relationship with the Optical Manufacturers and Distributors Association and its members. The two organisations are in regular communication and look for opportunities for co-operative activities.

Optometry Council of Australia and New Zealand
The registration boards, the profession and the schools of optometry established Optometry Council of Australia and New Zealand (OCANZ) as a central authority to examine overseas-trained optometrists for registration, and to accredit schools of optometry in Australia and New Zealand. The governing board of OCANZ has representation from the registration boards, the optometry schools and the association.

OCANZ conducted its first examinations for overseas-trained optometrists in late 1997.

The association nominates three optometrists to sit on the OCANZ board. The association nominees were Ms Helen Robbins, Dr Gavin Bonham and Mr Ian Kent. The association provides office and secretarial support for OCANZ.

Joint Meeting of Registration Boards and Mutual Recognition
The chief executive officer, Mr Joe Chakman, represented the association at the Conference of Optometry Registration Authorities in Australia and New Zealand (CORA), held in Canberra in October 2008. The association is invited to the meetings as an observer.

The association was responsible for the establishment of CORA’s forerunner many years ago and places great importance in the exchange of information and the clarifying of views that take place at the meetings.

National Vision Research Institute
Optometrists Association continued to support the activities of the National Vision Research Institute, retaining governor status.

National Prescribing Service
The association is a member of the National Prescribing Service, a government-sponsored organisation responsible for promoting the quality use of medicines. Association representatives participated in various NPS meetings and planning programs.

Standards Australia
Optometrists Association is represented on several Standards Australia com-