

Another year has come and gone and I'm proud of the strong and progressive professional association I'm part of. We have spent the year pursuing significant projects which will impact both current and future optometrists in South Australia

We now proudly represent 311 practising and student optometrists across South Australia. Although this number is growing overall, we recognise that as a percentage of total optometrists practising in SA, our representation is dropping. We recognise that we still have better member statistics than many other professional bodies, but we hope that with passion, effort, and good member services we can turn this number around and grow our membership still further. Only through strong member support can we successfully lobby government and other stakeholders to advance optometry.

Amalgamation with Optometry Victoria

The biggest project facing us in the upcoming year, and perhaps for all the time I've been on the Board, is the proposed amalgamation with Optometry Victoria. This has been a bold and audacious project, started some four years ago, and coming to a head this year.

We have been tasked for many years to run an efficient division which provides member services equal to other states at a fair price to members. I believe with the resources we have at our disposal we have punched above our weight for some time, but this is only with the assistance of subsidies from the other states through Optometry Australia. I also worry that we are beginning to fall behind the other states in member support and services such as local CPD and networking events.

I believe the benefits of this amalgamation are many.

Joining with Optometry Victoria will create a larger, stronger association better able to support all our members. We will have access to greater resources, a larger secretariat, and more member events (CPD, CPR, networking & social). A larger team will also allow Libby to focus on her advocacy efforts here in SA, expanding our area of influence within SA Health and across other important sectors such as education, children's services and disability. An amalgamated organisation will allow us to extract much more for members from national Optometry Australia initiatives, in addition to growing our relevance to all optometrists and loyal membership as a result. We aim to provide all of this and keep member fees stable, or hopefully reduce the annual fee.

We know there are risks. We must always be mindful not to lose local representation and the collegiality we have built over many years. We must maintain the ability for optometrists on the coal-face to have contact with their association, their CEO, and their Board with issues affecting them and their area. To accomplish this, we have written checks and safeguards into the new constitution and associated committees to ensure there is fair representation for both states and to ensure every voice can and will be heard.

I know we could continue as we are. We are currently running at a small surplus, thanks to very efficient cost-cutting, a good SA Blue Sky Congress, and a reduction in the number of

projects running throughout the year. However, if we choose to carry on in our current under-resourced format, we will continue to miss opportunities to drive our profession forward here in South Australia, to pounce on ideas and to grow membership and activities into a thriving, vibrant optometry community. Also, we will continue to be beholden to the other states (via Optometry Australia subsidies) for a handout every year to keep our doors open, which is a constant drain on national resources. Resources which should be spent on national projects benefiting all 5,000 of us across the country

This is a chance for us to be bold. To take control of our future and ensure that future will never be taken out of our hands.

I encourage every member of Optometry South Australia to vote on this, and I ask you to join me and every member of the OSA Board to VOTE YES!

Highlights for the year

- Thanks to tireless background work, we're about to begin the initial pilot of the shared-care clinic with ophthalmology at the Modbury Hospital. Originally scheduled to be at the Lyall McEwen Hospital, the ophthalmology department was moved to Modbury which needed a quick response and some innovative thinking to keep the project on track. Thanks to Libby and Ben Hamlyn this project continues to move forward.
- Thanks to the above project and our constant lobbying, there has been a lot of interest from government and other hospitals in freeing up ophthalmologists and reducing waiting lists. As such we have been invited to participate in the Pre-Operative Assessment Adult Elective Surgery Steering Committee to help facilitate greater access to optometry and ophthalmology services, often for those segments of the community who would not seek eye care otherwise.
- We continue to work with the Department of Communities and Social Inclusion (DCSI) who consult us regularly for feedback on the Glasses SA scheme, and policy in general. We are currently seeking greater remuneration for optometrists who participate in the scheme, which would in turn help fill the optical needs of struggling South Australians.
- We have achieved change to legislation pertaining to the sale of ready-made readers. We have agreement on the wording of the warning labels which must be attached to each pair of these encouraging the wearer to see an optometrist for a full eye test.
- We continue to lobby our new government and relevant ministers on a variety of issues. A few examples include working towards getting a Healthy Eyes booklet to every school child, promoting vision tests through SA licensing centres, and promoting optometry through hospital and GP referral pathways. I'm proud to say we have some of the best relationships with government of any state in the Federation.
- We have been working more closely with our pharmacist colleagues, with a collaborative CPD event for our Early Career member, and an invitation to their state conference.
- Our Early Career Optometrists (ECOSA) continue to be some of the most engaged members, participating in many of the CPD events for general members, and running many of their own. My thanks to Luke Higgins, Cassandra Haines (Chair ECOSA), Jo Rohrlach, Jessamy Bound, Rebecca Bray, Hannah Stanley and the myriad of other ECOSA members who make this group a reality.

- We have kept close ties with Flinders University and the student body. There has been changes to staff and faculty in recent times, and our goal is to ensure the number and quality of graduates remains appropriate. I'm pleased to say we have good lines of communication with the faculty and we touch base with them regularly. Many thanks to our student observer Stephanie Callisto and her FUOSA Leader colleague Sarah Golfis for their assistance in communicating to our student members, and to all OSA members working at Flinders for keeping us in the loop.
- SA Blue Sky Congress was a success yet again, both financially and with regard to the education provided. Feedback from delegates was overwhelmingly positive and we managed to run the event achieving a healthy profit which will be returned as member services.

Closer to home

Libby and Nic have spent the last 12 months in their new digs on Greenhill Rd. The association would not be what it is today without the tireless efforts of these two extraordinary people. I continue to be grateful and amazed in equal amounts as to what they achieve on part-time hours.

I'd like to thank my other OSA Board members, being Mark O'Connor (Treasurer), Elise Pocknee-Clem, Mitch Walker (Vice-President), Aimee Patten, Loucia Calder, Ashok Bhoola, Ben Hamlyn, Luke Higgins and Cassandra Haines and student observer Stephanie Callisto.

Luke Higgins will be stepping down from the OSA Board later in the year to pursue more rural work interstate. I take this opportunity to thank Luke for his efforts both around the board table and also in being involved in establishing the Early Career Optometrists (ECOSA) group. It's a legacy he should be proud of.

Stephanie Callisto will also be stepping down as our student observer as she reaches the end of her tenure. I'd like to thank her for being such an important link to the student body, and also commend her on her clarity of thought and confidence when challenged around a Board table. I hope she continues this path as I'm sure she will be one of our future leaders.

Many thanks also to our CPD Committee, being Mitch Walker (Chair), Phuong Truong, Jo Thomas, Neil Murray & David Welch.

A huge and sincere thanks also to all our members who help to promote our profession and our organisation on a daily basis, without any formal recognition and thanks.

As always, thank you for allowing us to represent our profession, our organisation, and our future.

Warm regards



Kurt Larsen

Optometry SA President

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