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GUIDE ON VISION EXAMS AND EYEGLASSES SUPPORT

Vision is the primary sense for acquisition of information with 80% of what we learn processed through good vision. One in four children will have a visual challenge, and many of those correctable challenges go undetected. Some undetected vision challenges can result in far-reaching and irreversible lifelong conditions. Outlined below are the recommended timelines for vision testing, the process for obtaining an appointment, what is available within our school district for vision screening, and resources for qualifying financial support for vision exams and eyeglasses.

(Sources for financial support – see p. 3)

TIMELINE RECOMMENDATIONS FOR COMPREHENSIVE EYE EXAMS:

For school-age children, it is recommended that children have a vision exam by a qualified eye health professional, (optometrist or ophthalmologist), by at least the time they enter Kindergarten. The preferred recommendation by eye doctors is that children have their first eye exam between the ages of six and nine months, (it is possible to test non-verbal children at any age), with follow-up exams at least once between the ages of two and five years, and thereafter as recommended by the eye doctor.

VISION PROFESSIONALS/EYE EXAMS/ASSESSMENTS:

Optometrist/Ophthalmologist:

The BC Medical Services Plan (MSP) covers the basic cost of a comprehensive eye exam carried out by an optometrist or ophthalmologist. (There are limits on the frequency of eye exams.) Families can contact an optometry office of choice directly to make an appointment and should inquire about any added charges above the covered limits.

Referral to an ophthalmologist, (medical doctor specialized in eye health), is through an optometrist, family doctor or pediatrician. Children are typically seen by an optometrist who will refer to an ophthalmologist, if indicated, following a comprehensive eye exam. A visit to an optometrist first can expedite a referral appointment to an ophthalmologist. After referral, the ophthalmologist's office will contact the child's family to arrange an appointment.

Vision Therapy:

Vision therapy treatment plans are managed by an optometrist who offers this service, and with a cost to the family. A bursary for financial support may be available through the vision therapy provider. Teachers of Students with Visual Impairments (TSVIs) are not trained to support students who are referred for vision therapy. If the student is receiving vision therapy, a TSVI can review a doctor's eye report to determine whether the student's visual performance meets BC Ministry of Education qualifying criteria for E-Designation. If designated, the TSVI can then provide suitable educational support services. TSVI support does not substitute for ongoing vision services provided by an eye doctor.

Teachers of Students with Visual Impairments (TSVI) - Functional Vision Assessment (FVA):

A Functional Vision Assessment (FVA) considers the impact of a child's vision on his access to visual information throughout the school day. Teachers of Students with Visual Impairments (TSVIs) are trained to conduct FVAs, and work with children who meet Designation E - Visual Impairment criteria. FVAs are not clinical vision exams, and do not substitute for ongoing eye health care by an eye doctor.

Many learning and behaviour challenges can, at least in part, be attributed to vision issues. If a student is demonstrating atypical visual behaviours and/or is struggling with learning and/or is presenting with challenging behaviour, it is important to ensure that the child has had a recent eye exam, and for the learning team to have information about the child's vision. If the child meets BC Ministry

of Education criteria for E-Designation and is designated, the TSVI can then provide suitable educational support services.

VISION SCREENING PROGRAMS:

BC Ministry of Health Kindergarten Vision Screening Program:

The Health Unit's Kindergarten, in-school vision screening program is no longer provided by the Ministry.

Comox Valley Monarch Lions Club:

SD71-registered students in Grades 2, 4 and 7 can participate in the Lions Club vision screening program. Participation requires parent/guardian approval. This sight screening should not replace a comprehensive eye exam provided by an eye health professional. Lions Club screening is helpful in identifying some vision conditions though many other and important aspects of vision are not evaluated.

FINANCIAL SUPPORTS FOR ADDITIONAL COSTS OF EYE EXAMS AND EYEGLASSES:

BC Medical Services Plan (MSP):

The BC Medical Services Plan (MSP) covers the basic cost of a child's comprehensive eye exam carried out by an eye health professional (optometrist and ophthalmologist). Some eye health providers have an additional charge for an eye exam. Families can contact an optometry office of choice directly to make an appointment, and should inquire at that time about any added charges.

First Nations Health – Pacific Blue Cross – Vision Care Benefits:

First Nations Health provides glasses for Indigenous children whose Bands have opted to participate in Pacific Blue Cross benefits. An application may be required, and families should ensure they are covered before making an appointment. When contacting the optometry office of choice, families should ensure that the office can direct bill to Pacific Blue Cross. When attending for the

appointment, the family must provide the Pacific Blue Cross policy number and the child's status card with his number.

Pacific Blue Cross - First Nations Health: 1-855-550-5454

Link to First Nations Health – Vision Care Benefit:

<https://www.fnha.ca/benefits/vision-care>

Parent's Health Benefits Plan(s):

A family's health benefits plan(s) may cover the out-of-pocket costs of an eye exam and/or a child's prescribed eyewear. Families are encouraged to inquire about their eye health benefits with their carrier and to understand the limits of their coverage prior to shopping for their child's eyeglasses.

BC Ministry - Healthy Kids Program

This Government Program provides financially supported child eye care, including exams and eyeglasses for families with an annual adjusted net CRA-reported income of \$42,000 or less per year. Families must make application to the Healthy Kids Program for MSP Supplementary Benefits and be approved for those benefits in advance of an eye appointment. Families should understand the Ministry's coverage, including limits. The Ministry will neither refer nor provide names of participating optometrists.

When calling the optometrist's office to book the eye exam, families should ensure that the optometrist participates in this program and that there will be no additional charges. The optometrist's office directly bills the Ministry for its services. The parent/guardian must present the MSP card when arriving to the appointment. The Program typically covers prescription eyeglasses (restrictions on lenses and basic frames) once in a 12-month period.

Healthy Kids Program: 1-866-866-0800

Link to Healthy Kids Program brochure:

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/british-columbians-our-governments/organizational-structure/ministries-organizations/social-development-poverty-reduction/healthy-kids.pdf>

Link to Healthy Kids Program optical services:

<https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/governments/policies-for-government/bcea-policy-and-procedure-manual/health-supplements-and-programs/optical-services>

The At Home Program:

The At Home Program can help to cover the cost of glasses for children whose vision problems are directly related to a complex health need. Limits are in effect, and coverage is not available if the need is met through another program or insurance plan.

At Home Program: 1-888-613-3232

Link to the At Home Program for optical devices:

https://www2.gov.bc.ca/assets/gov/family-and-social-supports/children-teens-with-support-needs/request_optical_benefits.pdf

Optometry Office Programs for Eyeglasses:

Some optometry offices have programs to help families with the purchase of eyeglasses, including eyewear at no cost. Families can call their optometry office of choice and inquire in advance about any programs or discuss it when meeting with the eye doctor. The optometry office providing the eyewear requires that the MSP covered eye exam be conducted by their office.

The Eye See Eye Learn Program:

This Program no longer operates.

The Loblaws/Superstore Kids See Free Program:

This Program no longer operates.

The Wachiay Friendship Centre – Helping Hand Program:

This Program no longer includes eye health support.