



LOW VISION OPTOMETRIST

Low vision refers to impaired vision that cannot be fully corrected with glasses, surgery, or medication. It can manifest with various symptoms and stem from a range of causes, including eye diseases, injuries, or congenital defects. Common causes of low vision include age-related macular degeneration, glaucoma, cataracts, stroke, brain tumors, traumatic brain injury and diabetic retinopathy.

Most eye doctors define low vision as moderate to severe visual impairment, which can significantly hinder everyday activities such as driving and reading. Low vision can encompass various types of visual impairment, including not only nearsightedness or farsightedness, but also peripheral and central vision loss, blind spots, and blurred vision. It is possible to have adequate sight vision but still have difficulty using the vision to do daily activities of living.

Some optometrists specialize in low-vision rehabilitation. Low vision rehabilitation is a comprehensive approach designed to assist individuals with reduced vision in maintaining their independence and quality of life.

Optometrists focusing on low vision collaborate with patients to identify the impact of vision loss on daily activities and create personalized rehabilitation plans based on individual needs and visual abilities. Their goal

is to enhance the ability to read, cook, drive, navigate their environment and participate in other activities. Additionally, optometrists offer counseling and support to help individuals cope with the emotional and psychological impact of vision loss and connect them with relevant resources such as a certified vision rehabilitation therapist, an occupational therapist, a social worker or therapist, and support groups.

Training

Low vision training for optometrists can involve specialized education and training programs designed to equip them with the knowledge and skills to provide comprehensive low vision care. These programs often include educational instruction, hands-on clinical experience, and post-training support to help optometrists integrate low vision services into their practice.

Why choose this path?

Having been a private optometrist for 45 years, I have seen tremendous changes in the field. Optometry has really blossomed in ways that one would never have imagined. The opportunities are available to help improve the lives of many patients that are struggling not only to see to do their daily living skills, but also to interact with the world.

There are some very specialized areas within optometry including low vision and neuro vision that delve into complex conditions, such as vision impairments from brain injury and ocular disease. I have the opportunity to see these patients early on in the hospital setting and then continue to follow their progress in private practice.

The bottom line is that there is a major shortage of optometrists that are involved in these specialized fields. The aging person and the general declining health of our population has set up a playing field that is screaming for optometrists to become involved in low vision care and vision rehabilitation. It is time to reach out and learn what optometry has to offer.

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Resources

- **Association of Schools and Colleges of Optometry (ASCO)**
<https://optometriceducation.org/>
ASCO provides information on low vision education and training. ASCO-affiliated schools offer residency programs that include comprehensive training in low vision rehabilitation, covering clinical rotations, didactic learning, and community outreach.
- **American Optometric Association (AOA)**
<https://www.aoa.org/healthy-eyes/caring-for-your-eyes/low-vision-and-vision-rehab>
- **American Academy of Optometry (AAOpt)**
<https://aaopt.org/membership/sections-special-interest-groups-alt/low-vision-section/>
The AAOpt's Low Vision Section is dedicated to promoting excellence in patient care and providing valuable resources for low vision rehabilitation.
- **International Academy of Low Vision Specialists (IALVS)**
<https://ialvs.com/>
IALVS is focused on advancing low vision care through education and collaboration.