

Remote Eye Exams

As Remote Eyecare Gains Traction, Patients and Practitioners See Many Advantages



Image Credit: Getty Images/Rudzhnan Nagiev

BY EVRA TAYLOR / CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

Telehealth for eyecare is advancing at lightning speed through technology-enabled processes that allow the transition from in-person to remote scenarios. Over the past few years, this process has had a transformative effect on both practitioners and patients at both private practices and optical retail chains.

The eyecare model is somewhat unique. In the standard remote health care model, patients are remote while health care professionals conduct consultations in their offices. In the optical sector, this traditional model is turned on its head whereby ECPs are remote and patients are afforded comprehensive, in-clinic exams with rapid turnaround results.

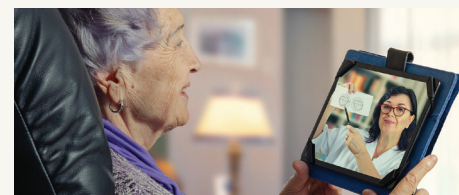
For a growing number of optometrists and ophthalmologists, being untethered from their offices, for at least part of the time, means greater flexibility in scheduling appointments, less commuting and the potential for additional revenue. For patients, being able to connect remotely with their eye doctor offers the convenience of reduced wait time for an appointment and more choices in location. And for those who live in underserved areas of the country, remote eyecare grants unprecedented access to much-needed eye exams that, in many cases, had

This is the first part of a two-part article that looks at how, in just over a decade, ocular telehealth, has become an essential component in the eyecare ecosystem. It is proliferating in the United States in three main forms:

1. Comprehensive eye exams performed by a technician in a clinical or in-office setting, followed immediately by a video consultation with an optometrist or ophthalmologist.
2. Online vision testing, primarily but not limited to an eyeglass or contact lens prescription renewal, that is self-administered by a consumer or patient, followed by an asynchronous evaluation by an ophthalmologist or optometrist.
3. Online synchronous video consultations that connect patients directly with an ophthalmologist or optometrist via an app.

previously been unavailable for years at a time.

“Our goal was to break down all the barriers to ocular exams, including lack of accessibility in areas where the wait times to see an ECP can be one year or more. In addition, we wanted to reduce the cost associated with these exams,” stated Dr. Bill Mallon, an ophthalmologist and the co-founder



In this first part, we explore the growth of remote, comprehensive eye exams as seen through the eyes of eyecare technology executives, eyecare practitioners and optical retailers. Also included is a look at the regulatory environment for ocular telehealth.

The second part of the article, available online only at [VisionMonday.com](https://www.visionmonday.com), examines the direct-to-consumer side of remote eyecare. Parts 1 and 2 are both posted on the *Vision Monday* website.

— Andrew Karp, *Lens & Technology Editor*

and CEO of Florida-based GlobeChek Enterprises <https://globechek.com/>, which packages comprehensive, contact-free tele-ophthalmology eye exams performed by a technician in a hospital or public space. Exam equipment is housed in an eye-catching, futuristic globe-shaped container on wheels. Exam results are reviewed by an ophthal-

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The GlobeChek screening exam detects glaucoma, diabetic retinopathy, macular degeneration and cataracts.

mologist in synchronous or asynchronous fashion, depending on the setting.

“Our system provides 11 tests in about seven minutes, at a more affordable price. Eighty percent of blindness in the United States is curable if caught at the right time. GlobeChek is designed to help people understand the importance of eyecare and increase their ability to access it sooner. Exam results are sent to a reading center and patients can have their reports emailed to them within 24 hours. A follow-up video chat can take place and patients can be directed to referral ECPs if needed.”

According to Dr. Mallon, extensive government and insurance payor restrictions have inhibited the adoption of telehealth in optometry. “When they do begin to relax a lot of these restrictions, such as allowing doctors to work across state lines, which is permitted by the Veteran’s Administration, they’ll see an explosion in eyecare solutions,” he said. [See sidebars, *Ocular Telemedicine Flourishes Amid a Patchwork of State Regulations* on page 50 and *Managed Care Lends Support to Ocular Telemedicine* on page 45]

Dr. Mallon’s greatest concern is the diabetes epidemic occurring across the United States. A 2022 pilot study conducted by GlobeChek in their Vero Beach hospital district revealed that only 20 percent of Americans were getting eye exams, whereas

after six months’ use of GlobeChek, this had risen to 80 percent. The next frontier will most likely be stroke care in the ER whereby a neurologist can communicate via video chat, allowing treatment to be delivered faster. The average GlobeChek exam takes roughly seven minutes, enabling a large volume of patients to be seen daily. In remote areas, roughly 40-50 people use the system each day.

“Working with GlobeChek has done wonders not only for our business but also for reaching patients in rural areas,” commented Keegan Meyer, optician and president of Eye Love Care <https://www.eyelovecare.com/>, an organization that helps people on fixed incomes get free eyeglasses, and Veterans Optometry Partners of America <https://vopa.org/>, a Colorado Springs, Colo.-based optometry practice dedicated to serving veterans and their families. “I found GlobeChek several years back when I was trying to improve my mobile optometry business. I couldn’t find doctors who could venture into rural areas where there is the greatest need for eyecare.

“GlobeChek allows you to set up an office anywhere. You can go mobile, or you can be stationary in any rural area and the best part is, you don’t need a doctor on-site. The globe allows us to perform a full eye exam with technicians, then it’s analyzed by an optometrist off-site. The doctor subsequently



Dr. Bill Mallon

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- Dr. Bill Mallon, co-founder and CEO, GlobeChek Enterprises

face times with the patient to review the results. What I really like about the globe is that we can pay one doctor to review multiple sites throughout Colorado which reduces our payroll cost. This is really

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Improving Patient Access and Allowing Greater Flexibility for Scheduling Appointments

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the future of preventing eye disease and blindness around the world,” Meyer said.

EssilorLuxottica also sees remote eyecare as a way to reach patients in underserved areas. Dr. Carl Spear, head of eyecare for EssilorLuxottica North America, said, “We place a high value on the doctor-patient relationship and always strive to have in-person doctor coverage. We’re keenly aware that, unfortunately, in many areas there aren’t enough doctors, especially in rural markets and in many locations that are socioeconomically depressed. We see remote access care as a way to bridge this gap and still preserve the doctor-patient relationship. The implementation of remote access care also provides some flexibility of scheduling for doctors and allows them a way to provide patient care without the geographic restrictions imposed by traditional in-person care.”



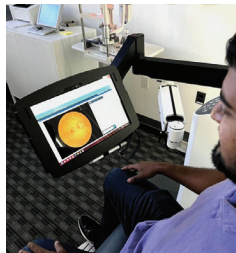
Dr. Carl Spear

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Facing the Challenge of Optometrist Shortages

“There aren’t enough optometrists to serve the U.S. population. The core part of comprehensive exams involves very high-tech diagnostic work that can’t be done on cell phones, as you can’t obtain high-quality cornea and retina views that



DigitalOptometrics allows optometrists to remotely perform comprehensive eye exams and issue prescriptions in less than 30 minutes.

way,” noted Alex D. Louw, chief operating officer of DigitalOptometrics <https://digitaloptometrics.com/>. The six-year-old company provides comprehensive, in-office eye exams performed by a technician, including a synchronous consultation with an optometrist immediately following the exam. The company recently integrated Heru’s <https://www.seeheru.com/> diagnostic devices into its exam protocol. Heru’s devices utilize a virtual reality headset to perform visual field testing, motor coordination, pupillary response to light, and a cover test for binocularity.

“Our clients range from independent optometrists to large retail firms including VisionWorks <https://www.visionworks.com/>, Shopko [https://](https://www.shopko.com/)



Alex D. Louw

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www.shopko.com/, MyEyeDr. <https://www.my-eyedr.com/> and National Vision <https://www.nationalvision.com/>. Ophthalmology is starting to use our system as well. We’ve just begun servicing the Veteran’s Administration which represents a significant growth area for us.” Louw reported that DigitalOptometrics’ growth has been fueled in part by the COVID-19 pandemic which changed the acceptance of remote care.

“Telehealth exams enable physicians to be extremely efficient, servicing the needs of patients wherever they have a state license. Currently there are 6,000 openings for optometrists in the U.S. and this number is expected to increase to 8,000 in the

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Advances in Technology and Integrated Systems Enable Comprehensive Care

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next 10 years. Remote access to care reflects our company's slogan "The eye doctor is always in."

The cost of introducing tele-optometry depends on how digitized an ECP's current patient journey is, explained Louw. "The entry point for our remote system is \$18,900 all in, plus the cost of any additional diagnostic equipment you need. There's never a time when it doesn't pay out. These are patients who wouldn't have been seen. Given the average dispense value, most of our clients achieve a complete ROI in under six months."

Established in 2014, 20/20NOW <https://for-2020now.com/> was the first company to introduce an in-office, comprehensive tele-optometry platform for eye exams performed by a technician, featuring a synchronous consultation with an optometrist immediately following the exam. Tele-optometry eye exams provide a thorough and accurate eye exam in 30 minutes or less. In 2023, 20/20NOW formed a strategic partnership with Visionix USA to make comprehensive eye exams technology accessible to any evolving practice looking to see more patients.

20/20NOW currently serves eyecare practices and optical retailers in over 30 states and over three million eye exams have been performed using 20/20NOW's proprietary software platform. This alliance merges the 20/20NOW's telehealth ecosystem with Visionix's integrated and advanced devices to offer a remotely based, doctor-led in-depth refraction as well as screening data and visual tools for effective one-on-one patient consults.

Visionix will remain the direct access to all Visionix products for its customers. In addition to a way forward to ease staffing challenges, ECPs will be able to implement scalable, high-quality eye exam experiences in modern, multi-location opticals and practices that utilize tele-optometry.

Carolyn Letellier, optician and co-owner of Mount Washington Valley Vision <https://mwvv.net/> in Conway, N.H., uses the 20/20NOW tele-optometry platform and emphasizes the shortened patient



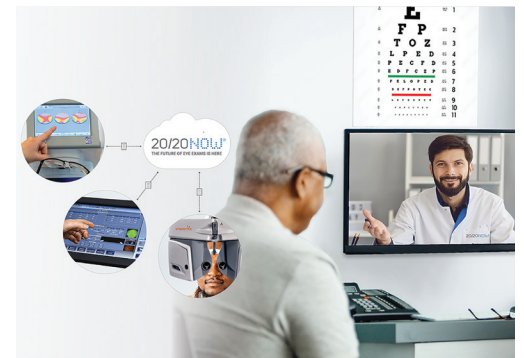
Carolyn Letellier

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- Carolyn Letellier, optician and co-owner, Mount Washington Valley Vision

wait-list that telehealth facilitates. She said, "We had six doctors in our area retire. People were traveling for one to two hours to receive eyecare. One practice in town had a two-year wait-list prior to our opening. Ocular telehealth has allowed us to provide much needed services to our area.

"We have several specialty practices and in-person optometrist offices that we work with for more complicated patients. In the year-and-a half since we opened, we've seen seven patients who were truly emergency cases and were able to be treated within a day because we were able to get them into ophthalmology. We've had patients with cataracts, glaucoma, diabetic retinopathy, retinitis pigmentosa, epiretinal membranes covering their retinas, and macular degeneration come in for care.



20/20Now's platform includes fundus photography to analyze the retina and optic nerve.

"When I first started as an optician, remote exams were basically a tablet or camera held up to the eye to get an autorefraction measurement which was used to finalize a prescription for glasses," said Letellier. "I felt this was not a valid way to give patients exams, nor should that be considered an eye exam. Tele-optometry has now grown to incorporate a full pretest of keratometry/autorefractor, non-contact tonometer, visual field and fundus photography. We currently have a Centervue DRS Plus, but are planning to invest in ultra-widefield retinal imaging which will give our doctors a better view of the back of the eye, and another that has more range in order to complete DOT (Department of Transportation) exams."

Developing a Patient-Centric Model of Care

“Ocular telehealth has played a key role in reshaping ECPs’ relationship with their patients,” observed Alex Martin, OD, FAAO, medical director at Boston Vision in Massachusetts, and a member of the development team at Eyebot, a startup that is currently beta-testing a consumer-facing kiosk that performs eye tests. “The Eyebot Rx platform <https://eyebot.co/> creates an entirely new way for patients to be screened accurately and remotely. It allows me to be able to communicate with patients when they find it convenient.

“Patients respect that I’m more available than other doctors and this creates more satisfaction,

trust and patient confidence. Remote exams are always evolving. Examples of improvements are breadth of exam information gathered and transmitted, the skills of the people performing the testing, and doctors’ skill in understanding when information is incomplete or unreliable.

“We want to be able to further decrease barriers to care,” Dr. Martin explained. “Patients will be able to have their eyes screened any time and at any place that is convenient for them and as many times as they want. Imagine patients coming in for an exam with refractive data gathered many times per year instead of one autorefractive measurement.

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Managed Care Lends Support to Ocular Telemedicine

Vision care health insurance company VSP Vision <https://www.vspdirect.com/> (VSP) is one of the nation’s largest providers of eyecare coverage. Its services encompass five key pillars of eyecare: insurance, eyewear, lens and lens enhancements and ophthalmic technology, and connected experiences to strengthen the relationship between patients and their eye doctors.

As part of their managed eyecare program, VSP continues to evaluate how telehealth fits into their business model and coverage plans, stated Valerie Sheety-Pilon, OD, VSP Vision’s vice president of clinical and medical affairs. “There is opportunity for telehealth to increase access for remote or underserved communities, and extend the patient-doctor relationship, but there needs to be appropriate standards of care and regulatory oversight in place to protect a patient’s health, safety and privacy.”

While remote refractive eye exams aren’t covered as a standard offering, VSP has an ongoing pilot program that enables interested VSP network doctors to perform and bill for remote refractive eye exams, known as WellVision eExams, explained Dr.



Valerie Sheety-Pilon, OD

Sheety-Pilon. “In this care model, the patient is in the practice assisted by a technician, while the doctor is in a separate remote location conducting the exam through real-time two-way communication technology and equipment. Through this pilot, network doctors are reimbursed the same for a comprehensive exam based on the member’s plan. VSP doesn’t reimburse for online visual acuity tests,” Dr. Sheety-Pilon said.

In order for a retailer or practice to qualify for reimbursement for remote exams or tests, VSP network doctors, which includes private practices,

Visionworks and other retail partners who have the capability to offer remote refractive eye exams, including wide field retinal imaging and video capabilities, must enroll in the WellVision eExam pilot to submit their claims in-network. Those who are interested can contact providernetworkdevelopment@vsp.com to learn more about this pilot program. Dr. Sheety-Pilon noted that there have been no changes to their telehealth reimbursement policies in recent years.

EyeMed Vision Care <https://member.eyemedvisioncare.com/>, an EssilorLuxottica company that specializes in vision care benefits, continues to see remote vision care exams growing, according to Matt MacDonald, president. “The appropriate use of remote exams has the potential to improve access to care, enhance doctor-patient relationships and improve health outcomes,” MacDonald told *VM*. “As remote vision care exam technologies evolve, EyeMed has developed a remote exam policy to balance the benefits of those technologies and ensure that patients receive the same standard of care.” ■

—Evra Taylor, Contributing Editor



After a Clinical Visit, Remote Follow-Ups Are Often a Practical Solution

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“Imagine being able to track ocular disease without making a patient drive and take a day off work to come see you. Imagine getting a notification in your office that a patient with a painful red eye has been worsening all day. Having the option to monitor and provide basic, standardized screenings more often will produce a higher quality relationship between patient and doctor,” added Dr. Martin.

There is contention within the optometry sector that state and federal regulations haven’t kept pace with the growth of the market. “Many gains have been made in telehealth since the pandemic and they’re hard to keep track of. I think the pace is so fast and the demand is so high that state and federal regulators can’t be expected to keep up. One way we could try to speed up and standardize change would be to hold meetings with multiple state boards at a time,” stated Dr. Martin.

“I want to make sure that patient safety is the highest priority. I think whatever regulation we abide by should be the same for both ophthalmology and optometry. If regulations are not the same, and are more advantageous for one group than another, patients will ultimately lose out on quality of care. All patients should be able to choose telehealth options and all doctors should be able to provide care for them,” Dr. Martin said.

On the retail front, MyEyeDr., headquartered in Virginia, implements video-assisted eye health (VEH) exams using the DigitalOptometrics platform and operates at more than 800 locations across the country. In 2020, MyEyeDr. had one remote office which has now expanded to roughly 100. Their EMR is linked to a remote platform. Exam data is transmitted to the EMR and the patient receives their prescription while they’re on-site. Referrals are transmitted electronically with a letter from their referring optometrist and the patient has access to their record by the time of their visit.

“Optometry has been involved with tele-optometry for exams for a long time in the reverse



Artis Beatty, OD

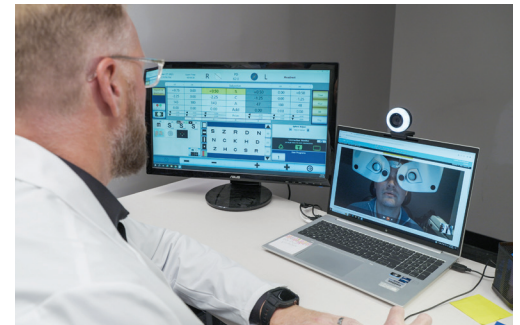
“You’re still building relationships with patients, trying to provide answers and feedback as an extension of an in-person office visit. Because you’re remote, you have to dig a little deeper.”

- Artis Beatty, OD, chief medical officer, MyEyeDr.

space of remote ECPs,” noted Artis Beatty, OD, chief medical officer for MyEyeDr. “It has to be this way. For a routine exam, tele-optometry provides patients access to vision care where live doctor coverage in a given office may be limited. Optometry often serves as the entry point into the health care system. It reduces patient wait times and offers a way to supplement in-person coverage with the benefit of patient convenience.”

Dr. Beatty noted that the COVID-19 pandemic made patients more receptive to the idea of trying a different care model. It also prompted the development of new technology platforms. The combination of these two factors brought tele-optometry to the forefront and allowed it to become part of optometry’s everyday business construct.

According to Dr. Beatty, the rising incidence of critical eye diseases, such as myopia, glaucoma,

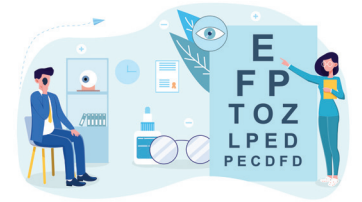


MyEyeDr. video-assisted eye health exams in use.

diabetic retinopathy and dry eye disease, is indirectly responsible for the increasing use of ocular telehealth as symptomatic eye disease drives patients into the clinic. “The number of patients seeking care is increasing because of our aging demographic. The remote eyecare model allows the synchronous diagnosis of some of these diseases with subsequent in-person follow-up.

“You’re still building relationships with patients, trying to provide answers and feedback as an extension of an in-person office visit. Because you’re remote, you have to dig a little deeper.” Dr. Beatty summarized the value proposition of telehealth in optometry in four statements: It builds goodwill, it’s patient-centric, in many cases patients have no other choice, and the return on investment is seen over time.

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Key Benefits Include Reduced Wait Times, Early Detection and Treatment of Disease

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Advancing Health Care Through Technological Innovation

“The two most significant benefits of ocular telehealth are reduced wait times and the early detection and treatment of eye conditions,” stated Michael Joyce, OD, a Pennsylvania-based remote VEH doctor. “Other notable benefits include support from optometrist colleagues, with the ability to discuss cases and consult with other doctors resulting in better patient care. There is also more freedom to educate and converse with patients due to a flexible schedule for doctors.”

He cited data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) indicating that the incidence of diabetic retinopathy, glaucoma, age-related macular degeneration and cataracts is pro-

jected to nearly double between the years 2010 to 2050. Notably, diabetes has become the primary cause of vision loss among individuals aged 18 to 65 in the United States, escalating at a concerning rate.

The CDC’s National Diabetes Statistics Report for 2022 highlights that an estimated 37 million Americans, or 11 percent of the population, have diabetes. Of these, approximately 28.5 million are aware of their condition, while approximately 8.5 million remain undiagnosed. Dr. Joyce said, “Remote exams at our clinics are continually advancing. As with any new technological innovation, it’s crucial to identify which companies offer the finest equipment and support services.

“Initially, we faced the challenge of selecting the most effective remote phoropters and slit lamps,

especially since obtaining high-quality views with a slit lamp is a well-known hurdle in ocular telehealth. Our most recent addition is the translation software now available for use in our exam rooms. This development excites me the most, as I’ve long believed that such technology holds immense potential for all sectors of medicine. The development of software to help overcome language barriers, in real time, opens up new possibilities for health care accessibility and inclusivity,” Joyce added.

Georgia-based National Vision, operators of America’s Best <https://www.americasbest.com/> and Eyeglass World <https://www.eyeglassworld.com/>, provides remote eye exams in partnership with Access Eyecare Services (AES), a staffing services agency that employs qualified licensed op-

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Professional Associations Broadly Support Ocular Telehealth

Two of the major professional associations for eye doctors, the American Optometric Association and the American Academy of Ophthalmology, have over the past few years debated and refined their positions on ocular telehealth. Here are their most recent statements.



AOA’s Support of Telemedicine in Optometry

The AOA supports the appropriate use of telemedicine in optometry to access high-value, high-quality eye health and vision care. Telemedicine in optometry can serve to expand patient access to care, improve coordination of care, and enhance communication among all health care practitioners involved in the care of a patient. The AOA supports coverage of, and fair and equitable reimbursement for, telemedicine in optometry. The AOA also affirms that efforts are needed to ensure health equity in tele-

health. All individuals should have the opportunity to receive the standard of eye health and vision care regardless of location, socio-economic status or any other Social Determinants of Health (SDOH).

Source: American Optometric Association website

https://www.aoa.org/AOA/Documents/Advocacy/position%20statements/AOA_Policy_Telehealth.pdf



AMERICAN ACADEMY™
OF OPHTHALMOLOGY
Protecting Sight. Empowering Lives.

American Academy of Ophthalmology’s Position on Telehealth

The Academy wants all patients to have access to care by qualified medical providers. We support delivery of high quality ophthalmological telemedicine as a way to improve the quality, availability and cost of ophthalmological services. The Academy is committed to:

Review: Physicians should determine the appropriateness of a given technology for his/her patients; state legislatures should not make these decisions.

Payment: Health insurers should cover and provide fair payment for telemedicine services provided by ophthalmologists.

Regulation: Federation of State Medical Boards oversight of multi-state physician licensure.

The Academy supports policies aimed at validating these technologies’ value and fostering appropriate implementation. It is a method to expand the physician-patient relationship beyond the exam room.

Source: American Academy of Ophthalmology website

<https://www.aaopt.org/education/clinical-statement/telemedicine> ■

—Andrew Karp, Editor, Lenses & Technology



Ocular Telemedicine Flourishes Amid a Patchwork of State Regulations

In the decade since ocular telehealth first emerged, it has become a well-established part of the eyecare ecosystem in the U.S. Many patients now rely on remote visits for follow-up appointments with their optometrist or ophthalmologist, or for emergencies. For those in underserved communities, remote visits may be their only opportunity to receive eyecare.

One measure of ocular telehealth's spread is the market penetration achieved by the two leading providers of remote eye exams, 2020Now and DigitalOptometrics, which report they now operate in 34 states and 42 states, respectively. Both companies said they expect to further expand their reach. The companies noted that the exams they offer meet the definition of a comprehensive eye exam and are often covered by vision plans. They also stated that not every patient is an appropriate candidate for remote eyecare, and that some patients who do receive a remote comprehensive eye exam will need to follow up with an in-person exam, depending on the results of the remote exam.

Ocular telehealth might grow even faster, though, if not for the confusing array of state laws and regulations that govern its use. Although most states allow the use of telemedicine by optometrists, laws vary from state to state. To add to the confusion, the laws often differ for ophthalmologists and, depending on the state, are unclear for optometrists who work in an ophthalmology practice.

“With respect to specific state laws and regulations related to the use of ocular telemedicine by optometrists, there are existing restrictions, and some states continue to propose and adopt new restrictions on the use of ocular telemedicine by ODs, some in laws, others in board rules,” said Wally Lovejoy, an ocular telehealth expert who is president of Lovejoy Eyecare Consulting and co-chair of the American Telemedicine Association’s Ocular Telemedicine Special Interest Group <https://www.americantelemed.org>. “The environment is in constant flux.”

Lovejoy noted that optometrists may face restrictions in the following areas:

- In-person eye exam requirement, either for initial eye exam or all eye exams leading to a prescription for corrective eyewear.
- Minimum eye exam requirements. These may not restrict platforms and retailers that have an affiliate doctor network using a proprietary system to offer remote eye exams, but may limit prescription renewal by platforms that offer only a visual acuity check or remote refraction.
- Supervision of assistants; a few states require on-site direct supervision of assistants by ODs.
- Anti-kiosk laws that restrict how and when an OD (and sometimes an ophthalmologist) can use eye exam equipment remotely.
- Licensure issues that are more restrictive in some states.
- Residency or in-state office requirements.

For nearly a decade, the National Association of Retail Optical Companies (NAROC) <https://narocvision.org> (formerly known as the National Association of Optometrists and Opticians) has provided its members and affiliate members with twice-monthly tracking of legislation and rules relating to ocular telemedicine, in addition to updates on optometry and optician regulation. The association also comments on proposed laws and rules impacting the use of ocular telemedicine by optometrists. ATA Action <https://ataaction.org>, an affiliate of the ATA, also comments on federal and state regulation of telemedicine, including ocular telemedicine.

NAROC executive director Joe Neville noted that ocular telemedicine has been a significant topic

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- Wally Lovejoy, president, Lovejoy Eyecare Consulting

for the association for years. NAROC established a telehealth committee in 2017. The association first published Ocular Telehealth Principles at that time, and updated them in January 2020. Since then, NAROC has commented on legislative and regulatory proposals in multiple states, including California, Delaware, Oklahoma and Texas.

“NAROC provides its members and affiliate members with twice-monthly tracking of legislation and rules relating to ocular telemedicine, in addition to updates on optometry and optician regulation,” Neville told *VM*. “Our advocacy program has been an important factor in developing reasonable regulation of ocular telemedicine to the benefit of consumers, health care providers and the ophthalmic goods and services industry. We welcome interested parties to contact me through our website <https://narocvision.org/>, where the Ocular Telehealth Principles and examples of the NAROC comments to regulators may be found.”

To help its members sort through the often-confusing patchwork of state regulations that govern tele-optometry, The Vision Council last month introduced PolicyWatch, a regulatory monitoring subscription service that’s tailored to provide easier access and understanding of the optical industry’s evolving legislative landscape. As *VMAIL* reported,

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Ocular Telemedicine Flourishes Amid a Patchwork of State Regulations

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<https://www.visionmonday.com/business/article/the-vision-council-launches-policywatch-an-online-regulatory-monitoring-service-for-the-optical-industry/> PolicyWatch will monitor legislation specific to tele-optometry, a rapidly expanding optical industry sector.

Standing as a centralized resource, PolicyWatch offers real-time updates on tele-optometry laws, regulations and legislation across all 50 states and the District of Columbia. This solution addresses the challenge of sourcing information about remote eyecare regulations from various platforms, providing a single point of reference for optometry service providers, practices and telemedicine solution companies.

“As tele-optometry continues to play an increasingly vital role in health care delivery, it’s imperative for practitioners and stakeholders to stay abreast of the dynamic regulatory environment,” said Michael Vitale, ABOM, and VP of membership, government relations and technical standards at The Vision Council. “Understanding state regulations for remote eye exams is not only crucial for compliance but also for ensuring that patients receive the highest quality of care regardless of their location. PolicyWatch empowers members of industry to navigate this complex landscape with confidence, ultimately benefiting both practitioners and patients alike.”

—Andrew Karp, Group Editor, Lenses & Technology



Michael Vitale, ABOM

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Technology Continues to Drive Advances in Remote Ocular Telehealth

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tometrists nationwide to provide in-person and remote care in states where tele-optometry is permitted. “Our remote care program benefits practices in the National Vision Doctor of Optometry network,” said Priti Patel, OD, National Vision’s senior vice president, health care strategy and development. For patients, it allows us to offer greater access to care, while for optometrists, it offers a more flexible way of providing eyecare.

“This is a huge benefit to retaining and recruiting optometrists, especially given the current shortage of health care providers. With our synchronous model of care, we aim to improve customer service and build our patient base with each visit.”

“Routine screenings for disease were particularly impacted by the pandemic, including eye examinations,” commented Amy Jantz, National Vision’s senior vice president, store optimization and implementation. In the wake of the pandemic, as of the end of 2023, National Vision’s telehealth capabilities extended to 550 locations. National Vision is implementing remote technology where they identify the greatest need.

“We’re pleased with store performance and continue to see patients highly satisfied with their care. The remote eye exam process continues to improve as our stores and doctors become more familiar with the process. As for improvements, remote exam scheduling and demand alignment can be a complicated formula to solve but we are making solid advancements in this space. Productivity remains a primary objective as we also focus on continuing to improve the associate, patient and doctor experiences.”

Jantz reported that 2023 was an extremely positive year in terms of making remote care a way of life for many store teams as they integrated electronic medical records (EMR) and remote care into their America’s Best operating model. Their robust training programs allow for a quick ramp-up time for their associates enabling them to use the remote platform efficiently to support doctors during



Priti Patel, OD

“Our remote care program benefits practices in the National Vision Doctor of Optometry network. For patients, it allows us to offer greater access to care, while for optometrists, it offers a more flexible way of providing eyecare.”

- Priti Patel, OD, senior vice president, health care strategy and development, National Vision



Kirk Lauterback

“From ECPs to large retailers, we’ve seen an increase in true telehealth services where the patient is remote, as well as in-office solutions where the doctor is remote.”

- Kirk Lauterback, chief experience officer, Shopko Optical

exams. “We’ve invested in our network to ensure the platform is stable to provide a seamless experience,” added Jantz.

Shopko Optical has just begun using DigitalOptometrics’ interpretive services as a supplement to in-person care in select centers just prior to the pandemic and is continuing to expand into additional centers. “From ECPs to large retailers, we’ve seen an increase in true telehealth services where the patient is remote, as well as in-office solutions where the doctor is remote,” stated Kirk Lauterback, chief experience officer. “As technology improves, increased functionality with the ability to manage more specialty issues will continue to grow.”

EssilorLuxottica’s Dr. Carl Spear believes that when applied at the highest standards, tele-optometry holds great potential for both patients and doctors. “We’re in a unique position to help practices realize those benefits,” Dr. Spear told *VM*. “We’ve seen the expansion of remote care in nearly every aspect of health care and the expanded access to care that it creates for patients. Wherever we see an

opportunity to support practices or increase patient access through technology and innovation while maintaining quality of care, we’re going to invest.”

Dr. Spear said EssilorLuxottica is developing a proprietary tele-optometry offering through Helix, its intelligent, interconnected ecosystem that serves all of the ECPs’ digital needs, removing administrative burdens and solving challenges. “We will offer an integrated platform that takes the patient journey, office needs and workflow into consideration. As part of this, we are working tirelessly to make the integration of telemedicine into clinical practice seamless for doctors and patients while providing excellent patient care. This isn’t about having the best of one thing, but about having the best of everything at your fingertips in one accessible place.

“As ECPs, equipment manufacturers and optical retailers continue to harness the power of technology to advance the science of ocular exams, telehealth will advance and evolve to provide an essential value-add to patients and eyecare providers alike,” Dr. Spear concluded. ■