

Young Advocate Program

Membership Talking Points

Invitation to Join

How to Start the Conversation

AOA membership speaks for itself, as it is beneficial to each member as well as the community of optometrists as a whole. In an effort to increase membership, we are having representatives reach out to potential new members. This document provides some tips and talking points to get the conversation started. The one thing that this document does not provide is personal experiences. It is one thing to list the benefits, but sharing examples of how the AOA has personally helped you is also important. There is space provided below to fill in why you joined AOA, how it has specifically helped you, and what part of their programming you take the most interest in. It is also important to reinforce the idea that the AOA is both a national and state organization.

Overall, the tone of your conversation should not be salesy-but rather the tone of a friend or colleague offering an invitation to join a community that has a tangible impact on one's success.

AOA Facts

- The AOA represents approximately 44,000 doctors of optometry, optometry students and paraoptometric assistants and technicians.
- Doctors of optometry provide two-thirds of all primary eye care in the United States.
- The AOA was founded in 1898 as a federation of state, student and armed forces optometric associations. The AOA has a long history of communities of optometrists coming together to advance the profession.

- Since inception, the American Optometric Association (AOA) and your state affiliate association have successfully advocated and fought to protect you, your profession and the patients you treat every day.
- AOA continues to advocate for reduced regulatory burden and relief for small practices under the Medicare program. The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) projects savings of nearly \$5.2 billion and a reduction of 53 million hours through 2021 for healthcare providers based on program changes made in the last two years.
- Payments to doctors of optometry now exceed \$1.3 billion per year. Without the AOA, doctors of optometry would never have been eligible to participate in Medicare, and the AOA continues to vigilantly defend optometry parity with medicine.
- Together, the AOA and its affiliates work to provide the public with quality vision and eye care. The AOA:
 - Sets professional standards, helping its members conduct patient care efficiently and effectively
 - Lobbies government and other organizations on behalf of the optometric profession
 - Provides research and education leadership

AOA Membership – General Talking Points

- **Members Make More:** There are so many benefits of joining the AOA, and some are difficult to quantify until you experience them. However, members of the AOA on average earn 15 percent more. By offering you a thriving community of optometrists to tap into for advice, leading edge continuing education, and superior clinical resources, joining the AOA has a direct benefit on your financial success.
- **Access to Resources:** The AOA's goal is to empower doctors of optometry by giving them what they want most from a membership. This includes helpful products and services for your practice through AOA Marketplace and AOAEExcel. The AOA gives you access to things you either would not have on your own or would have to pay top dollar for.
 - **AOA Marketplace:** An online store offering resources for your practice. Items for purchase include codebooks, HIPAA materials, educational resources for paraoptometrics, public education materials and more. Members save on average 30 percent on all products.

- **AOAExcel:** AOAExcel offers endorsed products and services to help members manage the business of optometry with confidence. These include malpractice insurance, retirement planning, HIPAA compliance software, and more.
- **A Network of Support:** After school, you start to realize that you really are on your own. It can be scary! While this may be true in some parts of your life, the AOA never wants you to feel that way as a doctor of optometry. By getting involved on the local, state, or national level, or simply contacting your fellow members for guidance, you always have friends in the profession you can trust. We are truly better together.
- **A Way to Get Involved:** The AOA isn't just some organization that you join to say you are a part of. We want to be part of your optometry career, and we want you to be part of the larger optometry community. From professional publications to volunteer opportunities to networking, AOA members enjoy access to benefits no other organization can deliver.
- **Evidence-Based Guidelines:** The newly released National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine report on vision health emphasized the imperative need for evidence-based guidelines to provide an improved, more concrete standard of patient care. The AOA is leading the charge in bringing these guidelines to life and keeping optometry on par with medicine in quality measures.

Advocacy Talking Points

- **Defending the Profession:** Advocacy at both the state and national level is one of the AOA's top concerns. We had to fight incredibly hard to win physician status for ODs and we would not have been able to do it if the AOA weren't a united front from optometrists. Now optometrists have the recognition they deserve, but it is continuously at risk. The AOA is here to represent us at all legislative levels.
- **Online Vision Tests:** Did you know that the AOA is advocating for optometrists by pressing Federal agencies to take action against companies that offer online vision tests? We both know how unsafe they are and how they need to be stopped. The AOA is focused on advocating for issues that protect patient health first and foremost, but that also protect the reputation of our profession.

- **The ONLY Advocate:** The AOA unites doctors of optometry, so that they have a greater possibility of protecting your interests. Whether there is a state or federal legislative issue, the AOA is the only organization advocating for the optometric profession.
- **Advocating Fairness:** The AOA is working to ensure fairness in contracts between doctors and insurers, eliminate anti-competitive practices in health care, and improve overall quality of patient care. The AOA is also working directly with federal agencies to ensure that contact lenses continue to be recognized as regulated medical devices and are not considered just a commodity as some retailers would like to do.
- **Protect Your Rights:** Your school has prepared you to properly practice optometry. However, there are a lot of outside factors that could influence your success. From Internet contact lens sellers to congress members trying to pass abusive vision plans, the AOA is your advocate fighting for your interests on all legislative levels. You can rest easy knowing your rights are continuously being protected.
- And while there are other groups you can belong to, the AOA and your state affiliate are the ONLY associations advocating for YOUR profession.
 - Real-life Example #1: 13,706 doctors of optometry received more than \$357 million in Medicare EHR incentives because the AOA convinced Congress to make doctors of optometry eligible. Additionally, over \$8 million of Medicaid EHR incentives have been issued to doctors of optometry.
 - Real-life Example #2: Medicare payments to doctors of optometry now exceed \$1.3 billion per year. Without the AOA, doctors of optometry would never have been eligible to participate in Medicare, and the AOA continues to vigilantly defend optometry parity with medicine.

Clinical Resources Talking Points

- **AOA MORE:** The AOA offers clinical tools you can't find anywhere else. One way is through AOA Measures and Outcomes Registry for Eyecare (MORE). AOA MORE lets doctors of optometry share in, and contribute to, clinical wisdom of all members. It's an \$1,800 value and members get access to it for FREE!
 - AOA MORE is a Qualified Clinical Data Registry (QCDR). Access to a registry like AOA MORE will be essential to receive the maximum reimbursements in the future. AOA MORE integrates data from doctors'

EHR systems to provide a systematic way of collecting and reporting on patient data.

- AOA membership includes access to the Measures and Outcomes Registry for Eyecare (AOA MORE). Congress explicitly directed the CMS to “encourage the use of qualified clinical data registries under MIPS.” Qualified Clinical Data Registries, such as AOA MORE, are going to be a key component of health care and Medicare reimbursement in the coming years as the Merit-Based Incentive Payment System (MIPS) begins.
- **Access to Information:** It's hard to believe that getting through school may be the easy part of being a doctor of optometry. There is no need to feel overwhelmed after graduation because the AOA has various clinical resources that allow you to feel confident, including best practices and research and a website with industry information published daily.
- **Mentorship:** Just because patient optometrist interactions are one-on-one doesn't mean that you are alone. Through the AOA, you can meet optometrist mentors with decades of experience in all types of practice settings.

Continuing Education Talking Points

- **Many CE Options:** Optometry is a continuously changing field and there's always more to learn. The AOA wants you to be prepared and skilled in all the changes that may occur. That's why they offer expansive continuing education for its members, both locally and through national conferences.
- **Confidence While Practicing:** With new practices and procedures constantly being introduced, it is difficult to keep up. The AOA offers leading-edge continuing education, so its members can be confident while practicing.
- **Optometry's Meeting:** One of the best opportunities to get CE credit is at Optometry's Meeting. Next year's meeting is in Washington D.C. and will have a wide variety of CE opportunities - as well as renowned key note speakers, hundreds of exhibitors, and networking events.
- **Paraoptometric Resource Center:** All paraoptometrics/optometric staff of AOA member ODs may become AOA associate members and have access to all current Paraoptometric Resource Center (PRC) member benefits and services, at no membership cost to the paraoptometric and no added membership cost to the AOA-member optometrist.

- **Included for the paraoptometrics:** six (6) free CE credits; access to the Paroptometric Skills Building[®] Beginner Level 1; access to WebinarRewind featuring free online billing and coding training and more.

Public Awareness Talking Points

- **Patient Care:** You became an optometrist because you care about your patients' vision health. The AOA stands by and advances your mission to assist the public. In fact, the AOA uses public relations, marketing, and educational initiatives to stay involved with the community and promote healthy vision.
- **Think About Your Eyes:** As both a doctor and a businessperson, you want to serve as many patients as you can. The AOA's public awareness campaign "Think About Your Eyes" runs TV, radio, and online advertisements nationwide, encouraging the public to visit an optometrist for an annual comprehensive eye exam. Your membership makes sure optometry is top of mind for everyone!
 - Did you know? Think About Your Eyes generated more than 3.95 million additional eye exams in 2018.
 - Did you know? More than 81 million people have seen the Think About Your Eyes messaging through the initiative.
 - Did you know? 440,591 additional cases of eye diseases diagnosed in 2018.
- **ODs as Primary Care:** The AOA is determined to have people view optometry as a valued position. This means helping the public realize that doctors of optometry have a primary care role. The AOA is committed to serving as many patients as possible.
 - During the last year, the AOA has pivoted away from participating in beauty-focused media to driving media discussions and coverage grounded in primary eye and health care. Through strategic media outreach, we are positioning ODs as powerful voices and leaders in primary care, as well as furthering the message about the importance of a comprehensive, in-person eye examination with a doctor of optometry.
- **Find-A-Doctor:** As a doctor of optometry it is important to be visible to potential patients. The AOA has Find-a-Doctor online resource that exclusively lists members of the AOA. This drives more patients into your office without you having to do any extra work.
- **O.D. vs M.D.:** The general public is usually confused about the difference between optometrists and ophthalmologists. The AOA is dedicated to ensuring the public is educated about the general care optometrists can provide. This way people will be more likely to seek out optometrists.

Buzz Words - "The AOA is."

- Visionary
- Optimistic
- Leader
- Driven
- Thriving
- Confident
- Strong
- Intelligent
- Mentoring
- Inclusive
- Leading-Edge
- United

Personal Impact

I joined the AOA because.

The most important thing the AOA does for me is.

The AOA has helped advance my career by.

My favorite part about the AOA is.

If it weren't for the AOA/Because of the AOA I.

Just last year [State Affiliate] did.

INVITATION TO JOIN

In the second half of our campaign, our Young Advocate Committees will be tasked with making a personal invitation to join to all of our prospects in their respective states. This invitation could be via telephone, email, social media message, etc. It's important that, one way or another, all prospects are extended a personal and sincere invitation to join.

We've written out scripts for both telephone and online correspondence, but only as a general guide. As always, it is important for conversation to be natural and sincere, and not scripted. The below is meant to serve as an example of how this conversation may flow.

Telephone Script

Hi! Is there?

Hey _____ ! This is _____ I am a fellow
optometrist here in _____ and a member of the American
Optometric Association. How's it going today?

Great! Now, _____, you've probably heard of the AOA. We are a
federation of state, student and armed forces optometric associations and it is the
only organization advocating for the optometric profession.

I'm calling today just to introduce myself as a fellow colleague, and also to
personally invite you to be a part of our community. I really think that being a part of
AOA and (my state affiliate) is one of the best things any optometrist can do. First
and foremost it provides a
community of optometrists for you to connect with both state and nationwide. I have
so many friends in the AOA and that community is just one of the benefits of joining
the AOA. The AOA also focuses on the principles of raising consumer awareness of
profession,
advocacy on the state and local level, clinical resources, and continuing education.

To me, the best part about being an AOA member is And that's
not all, as a member of (my state affiliate) I also enjoy .

The bottom line is this, being a part of AOA can make you a better optometrist. It provides you with resources, support, and confidence to help you be successful in your career.

Have you thought of joining the AOA before, or do you have any questions?

I think AOA would be a great fit for you and I know you would be a great asset to the AOA community. And so, I would once again like to extend a personal invitation to you, _____, to join AOA. If you are interested all I need is your email address and I can send you the links to join and even just get more information, or on your own time you can go to AOA.org/United.

Thanks! And if you have any further questions don't hesitate to call me or email me at _____

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Email/Facebook Script

Hello _____,

My name is _____ I am a fellow optometrist here in _____ and a member of the American Optometric Association. I hope you are having a good day today!

You've probably heard of the AOA. We are a federation of state, student and armed forces optometric associations and it is the only organization advocating for the optometric profession.

I'm writing you today just to introduce myself as a fellow colleague, and also to personally invite you to be a part of our community. I really think that being a part of AOA is one of the best things any optometrist can do. First and foremost it provides a community of optometrists for you to connect with both state and nationwide. I have so many friends in _____

the AOA and that community is just one of the benefits of joining the AOA. The AOA also focuses on the principles of raising consumer awareness of profession, advocacy on the state and local level, clinical resources, and continuing education.

To me, the best part about being an AOA member is .

If you have any questions or concerns about joining I would be more than happy to discuss them. I wouldn't be reaching out to you if I did not think this organization was beneficial.

The bottom line is this, being a part of AOA can make you a better optometrist. It provides you with resources, support, and confidence to help you be successful in your career.

I think AOA would be a great fit for you and I know you would be a great asset to the AOA community. And so, I would once again like to extend a personal invitation to you, _____, to join AOA. If you are interested in joining click here ([link to AOA.org/United](http://AOA.org/United)) to fill out the form or even just get more information.

Thank you!

P.S. If you have any questions feel free to reach out to me. I'd be happy to help!

Potential Questions/Concerns and Suggested Responses:

- **How much are the dues?**
 - Annual membership dues include both (state affiliate) and AOA dues and the exact amount you pay varies on a few factors-for example, if you've been in practice for less than five years your dues are discounted. The best way to find out exactly how much your annual dues will be is to begin an application on AOA.org/United. After entering your information, the website will tell you your exact dues amount and you can even join right away online.
- **Is it really worth the cost?**
 - Absolutely. Membership offers a number of quantifiable benefits, like AOA MORE, a clinical outcomes registry that AOA members get for FREE but which non-members have to pay \$1,800 for, access to discounted CE courses, malpractice insurance, and other programs, and more. Beyond that, your dues help pay for the AOA's ongoing advocacy and public awareness efforts, and without those we'd all be far less successful.
- **I think the AOA is a great organization; I am just pretty tight on my finances right now. So, I don't think I can join.**
 - I definitely understand, but there are ways to make membership more affordable for you. If you're a practice owner, your dues can be counted as a business expense. If you're employed, it's worth asking your employer if they would cover all or part of your professional association dues. The AOA can also help you space out payments over time to make paying more manageable. Also, if you've been practicing for less than five years, your dues are heavily discounted.
- **Do I have to pay it all upfront or can I space out payments?**
 - You can put your dues on a payment plan if that's easier for you!
- **I just don't have a lot of free time.**
 - Oh that's OK - while there are SO many opportunities to get involved, the AOA doesn't have any time commitments. You should definitely try to attend AOA events and meetings when you can, but nothing is required, and just being a member helps support us all.

- **How simple are the services to use?**
 - Everything is easy to access on AOA.org's members-only area. The AOA knows how busy you are, so every benefit they offer is designed to be super easy to take advantage of.
- **How is this different from the Academy?**
 - The Academy is a great organization with different goals. For example, the AOA is the ONLY advocate for the profession. With threats like online eye exams, abusive vision plans, and online contact lens sellers, the AOA's advocacy efforts are more important now than ever.
- **I just think it's hard to feel connected to a national organization.**
 - The AOA is a federation of connected state associations, which makes it easy to get connected locally. For example, through (your state affiliate) you can be a part of .
- **I've heard that the AOA has done some things in the past that I don't agree with.**
 - I understand, as such a large organization it's very hard for the AOA to please all of its members, and there have been times where opinions have differed. However, the ONLY way to make sure your voice is heard is to be a member and get involved! The AOA regularly surveys and listens to its members for feedback.
- **I'm just not sure this is the right time for me to join the AOA.**
 - I definitely know what it's like to be busy! But being a member of the AOA is important for all of us. Can I at least send you some membership information to look over and consider? Maybe we can chat again in a couple of months?

Close:

Whether the conversation and invitation to join are completed via telephone, email, or social media, wrap up the conversation with the following sentiment:

- Thanks again for taking the time to talk to me today! It's always great to get to know a fellow young optometrist. Whether you choose to join the AOA or not, let's stay in contact! My contact information is and I'm always happy to chat.

And again, I do hope you consider joining the AOA, as membership has already done so much for me and I know you'd find value in it as well. If you want to know more or get started with the application, just visit AOA.org/United. Best of luck!

