



## Annual Report 2020

The American Optometric Association (AOA) introduced the Health Policy Institute (HPI) in 2018. HPI has grown in stature since its inception and in 2020 solidified and expanded its role as a thought leader in public policy research. The art of informing patients, policymakers, health care professionals and the public on eye health and vision care demands critical research and analysis, together with consistent insight and foresight, as expressed by HPI. Utilizing the talents of AOA senior staff, key leaders, specific experts, and public health interns, HPI has proven itself and is now considered a valuable and trusted resource for the profession and the public. While outputs of the HPI have been consistently high throughout 2020, unlike any other year, the year started with a sprint.

**Early in 2020 HPI asserted its lead on COVID-19 for the optometry profession, publishing 27 policy briefs (and updates), six news articles, three national provider surveys and responding to more than 500 inquiries from doctors of optometry serving patients throughout the U.S.**

On Jan. 30, 2020, HPI published *Doctors of Optometry and 2019 nCoV Novel Coronavirus*. On that same day, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared COVID-19 (then known as 2019 nCoV) a global health emergency. From that day forward, HPI has meticulously provided accurate, updated COVID-19 information and responded to questions from the eye health and vision care community and the public. This action by HPI has promoted an understanding of the risks associated with the pandemic and helped ensure a continued ability for doctors and staff to care for patients during the COVID-19 pandemic. HPI, through its inaugural brief, predicted the likely spread of the novel coronavirus across the U.S., interruptions for schools and workforce, and disruptions in supply chains that could affect optometry offices. By the following day on Jan. 31, 2020, the U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services declared a public health emergency, under section 319 of the Public Health Service Act.

### **Domain COVID-19: Additional HPI Policy Briefs include:**

*Doctors of Optometry and COVID-19 (3/2) (3/9); HPI Q&A-COVID-19 (3/13) (3/19); Doctors of Optometry and COVID-19 (3/19) (3/24); New FDA Face Mask Guidance to Support Response Efforts to the COVID-19 Pandemic (3/26); Doctors of Optometry in COVID-19 Preparedness, Response and Recovery (3/25); Doctors of Optometry Essential Care Guidelines for COVID-19 Pandemic (3/26); Doctors of Optometry and COVID-19 (3/30); COVID-19 guidance for optometric practices providing essential care—urgent and emergency care (3/27); Corporate Adherence to AOA Health Policy Institute (HPI) COVID-19 Guidelines (4/10); Doctors of Optometry and COVID-19 (4/15); HPI COVID-19 for doctors of optometry: Part I public health background (4/27); HPI COVID-19 for doctors of optometry: Part II care of patients (4/21); Nationwide Impact and Response Survey of Optometry Practices During the COVID-19 Pandemic (5/14); HPI COVID-19 for doctors of optometry: Part I public health background (6/3); HPI COVID-19 for doctors of optometry: Part II care of patients (6/3); Urgent and Emergency Care by Optometrists Significantly Reduces Risks, Workloads in Emergency Departments During COVID-19 Pandemic (6/26); New FDA Face Mask Guidance*

*to Support Response Efforts to the COVID-19 Pandemic (6/29); AOA HPI COVID-19 for Doctors of Optometry—Part I: Public Health and Epidemiology of COVID-19 for Doctors of Optometry (7/28); Second Nationwide Impact and Response Survey of Optometry Practices during the COVID-19 Pandemic (7/30); HPI COVID-19 Filtering Facepiece Respirator (9/1), AOA HPI COVID-19 for Doctors of Optometry—Part I: Public Health and Epidemiology of COVID-19 for Doctors of Optometry (10/5) (11/5) (12/15); Third Nationwide Impact and Response Survey of Optometry Practices during the COVID-19 Pandemic (11/20).*

### **HPI Original COVID-19 Research**

A retrospective review of nationwide emergency department (ED) encounters by diagnosis, utilizing the reported optometry ICD-10-CM codes, backed by HPI 2020 COVID-19 survey of doctors providing urgent and emergent care, provided a much-needed snapshot of care delivered at the height of, and during, the March (2020) COVID-19 pandemic lockdowns. Data revealed optometry's significant patient care contributions in providing urgent and emergent eye care for more than 206,000 patients early in the pandemic, diverting vulnerable populations away from emergency departments coping with surging coronavirus caseloads. This research was useful to AOA public comments, solicited from U.S. agencies and was picked up by numerous national news outlets.

One might conclude that the requisite focus on COVID-19 by HPI during 2020 may have prevented progress in other HPI domains; however, that was far from the case as HPI delivered within all its research categories and domains.

### **HPI Directed External Research**

Through the Request for Application (RFA) and funding process, HPI helped direct research comparing “Comprehensive In-Person Eye Examination to Online Vision Testing Devices.” This research was finalized in 2020 by Gregory Wolfe, O.D., MPH, co-director, Center for Eye and Health Outcomes, associate professor, Southern College of Optometry. Research results have been shared at Optometry’s Meeting® 2020 and the APHA 2020 Annual meeting with a peer-reviewed publication now in process.

Additionally, in 2020 the HPI was awarded Master’s in Public Health (MPH) Preceptor Status from the Milken Institute School of Public Health at The George Washington University and solicited and accepted an accredited HPI/MPH-student intern through the *AOA’s Health Promotion Practicum*. The practicum was designed by the HPI to provide the MPH student a facilitated experience in literature review, systematic review, meta-analysis, secondary analysis using a publicly available dataset, and work involving surveys. Work undertaken by HPI Public Health Intern Marietta Richman updated and extended our HPI briefs and the understanding of how federally qualified health centers have used increased funding to expand primary services to include on-site primary eye care.

### **HPI Epidemiology Studies, Policy Development and Translation**

**Domain: Health Care Reform and Access to Care:** *Timing of Comprehensive Eye Examination is Crucial to Reducing Diabetes Complications (2/2020); In Pursuit of Access to Quality Eye Health and Vision Care (8/2020); Stagnation in Vision Plan Fee Schedules (8/2020).*

**Domain: Medicare, Medicaid & Veterans Health:** *More Medicare Patients Turn to Optometry for Medical Eye Care with Fewer Seeing Ophthalmologists (6/2020); Trends in Procedures Provided to Medicare Beneficiaries by Doctors of Optometry (9/2020).*

**Domain: Public Health Promotion & Disease Prevention:** *Distracted Driving and the Need for Comprehensive Optometric Eye Exams* (5/2020); *Doctors of Optometry Efforts to Minimize and Prevent Traumatic Brain Injury* (9/2020).

**Domain: Controlling Costs & Improving Effectiveness:** *Vision and Eye Health Assurance and Protection in the Workplace* (2/28/2020).

**Domain: Serving Communities & Workforce Development:** *Eye Examinations Surpass 1 Million Annually at Federally Qualified Health Centers - But Rate of Increase in Doctors of Optometry Not Meeting Need* (12/2020).

## **AOA HPI**

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