

Introduction

The National Association of Canadian Optician Regulators (NACOR) has developed its third edition of *National Competencies for Canadian Opticians*. It replaces the second edition, which was published in April 2007.

NACOR is a federation of the optician regulatory bodies of nine Canadian provinces, excluding Quebec. Its goals are to develop quality benchmarks for accreditation standards and processes for opticianry; and to monitor and investigate common issues related to the accreditation and mobility of opticians, both nationally and internationally. Coordinating the development, validation and revision of national competencies is one of NACOR's primary projects. NACOR undertook a third edition of *National Competencies for Canadian Opticians* to ensure that the competencies are relevant and reflect current Canadian opticianry practice.

To meet the increased public demand for competence and accountability, national competencies are required to measure and evaluate safe and ethical professional practice. NACOR and the provincial optician regulatory bodies recognize the importance of establishing national competencies to define the minimum expectations for opticianry practice in Canada and support the evaluation of opticianry knowledge, skill, judgment and attributes. National competencies are the foundation for entry requirements, registration with the provincial regulatory bodies, continuing competence programs and the determination of professional misconduct or incompetence.

Background

Competence is more than knowledge and skills. It involves the ability to meet complex demands by drawing on and mobilizing psychosocial resources (including skills and attitudes) in a particular context. In addition, competence is the ability to perform a job properly by demonstrating the required knowledge, skill, judgment and attitude.

"Competency-based approaches to training, assessment, and professional development are increasingly viewed as a central strategy for improving the effectiveness of those who provide care." (Anne F. Marrlli, 2005) . A competency is a "measurable human capability that is required for effective performance. A competency may be comprised of knowledge, a single skill or ability, a personal characteristic, or a cluster of two or more of these attributes. Competencies are building blocks of work performance. The performance of most tasks requires the simulation or sequenced demonstration of multiple competencies." (Anne F. Marrlli, 2005).

The national competencies set out the practice expectations for when an optician is functioning in a particular role, performing a skill or managing a situation, and when working with colleagues, other health professionals, patients/clients or the public. Opticians are expected to demonstrate the competencies to ensure safe and professional practice. It is expected that those applying for registration or licensing as an optician will demonstrate the core competencies, and that practising opticians will assume responsibility for maintaining the competencies specific to their practice and role.

Competencies:

- provide guidance and direction to the professional and practice setting;
- establish the essential competencies and minimum expectations of the profession; and
- provide the **overarching foundation** for the:
 - education benchmark/curriculum,
 - licensing exam,
 - standards of practice, and
 - ongoing competency and competency assessment tools.

Competency Development

To develop the third edition of *National Competencies for Canadian Opticians*, NACOR held a series of focus groups across Canada. The 32 practising opticians who participated in the focus groups identified competencies in the second edition that are not relevant, no longer current, redundant, or required clarification and revision. They also identified opticianry knowledge, skill, judgment and attributes that are absent in the second edition.

The data from the focus groups informed the development of the outline and item-writing process of the third edition. A steering committee of practising opticians, regulators and opticianry educators from across Canada then established the competency framework and competency outline based on national and international source materials, including provincial standards, guidelines, regulations and legislation; opticianry competencies from the United Kingdom, as well as competencies from other Canadian health professions.

To validate the national competencies, NACOR conducted an online national survey. One thousand, one hundred and eight-five (n=1185) opticians responded to the survey. A total of six hundred and twelve (612) opticians responded to all survey questions. The national survey data identified competencies requiring clarification and confirmed competencies were highly representative of opticianry practice. The analysis also identified competencies that are not found to be essential to practice.

The national validation report provided the following key recommendations based on the survey data and comments:

1. Some competency statements and performance indicators require clarification.
2. Highly related competencies should be reexamined to determine if they should be combined.
3. Identify why some performance indicators were ranked as low priority and/or as performed infrequently.

The steering committee reviewed the recommendations and data to make modifications to the competencies. Specifically wording was clarified and low ranking performance indicators were examined for exclusion as a "core" competency. Highly related competencies were combined.

National Competency Framework

There are several approaches to competency frameworks, including those based on tasks, function analysis and a description of roles. NACOR applied a functional analysis approach to the development of the national competencies.

"A common approach is to identify several 'core' or 'key' competencies that are essential for all, and then identify several additional categories of competencies that apply specific to a subgroup." (Anne F Marrlli, 2005) The national competencies describe these two sets of competencies as "core" and "focus areas." *The National Competencies for Canadian Opticians, 3rd edition* framework recognizes eight core competencies and four focus areas. The core competencies describe the ethical, professional and effective functions of opticianry practice that all opticians must demonstrate. The focus areas recognize that opticians concentrate their learning, skill and knowledge to particular practice areas.

The competencies and performance indicators in the third edition must be applied and interpreted in light of the requirements of the optician's unique practice context and particular situation. Not all competencies in the third edition apply to all opticians in all practice environments. Nor do all performance indicators need to be demonstrated by all opticians. The framework also takes into consideration the slight difference in licensing an optician as a contact lens fitter across Canada and the focus areas of refracting and low vision.

National statistics, April 2013

Registered Opticians	Eyeglasses	Contact Lenses	Refracting	CL/Refracting	Total # of Members
British Columbia	384	451	83	231	1149
Alberta	633	216	39		982
Saskatchewan	173	60			265
Manitoba	159	105			299
Ontario	2552	2552	42		2552
New Brunswick	121	45			214
Nova Scotia	241	52			302
PEI	33	8			41
Newfoundland	80	43			123
Total					5927

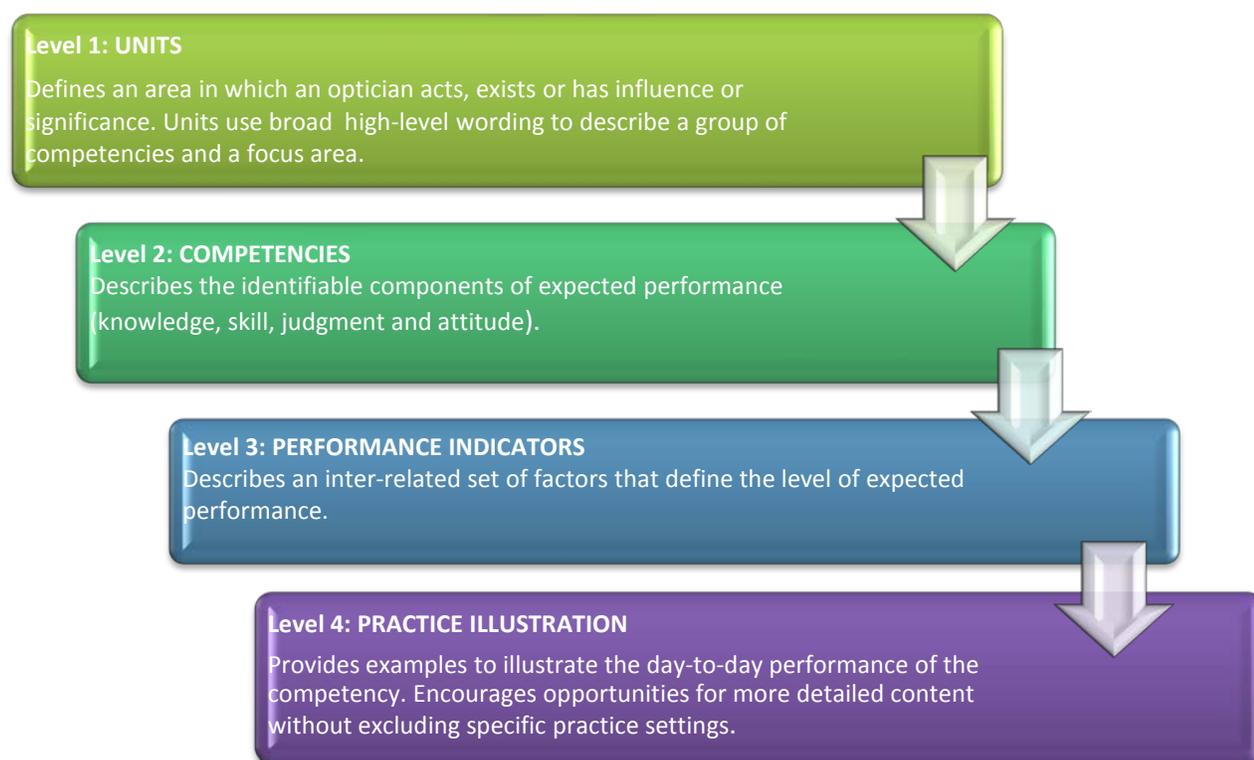
Unit	Core Competencies
1	Assumes professional responsibilities
2	Communicates and collaborates effectively
3	Educates and advocates effectively
4	Applies organizational management principles
5	Ensures patient/client and practice safety
6	Demonstrates clinical knowledge
7	Applies critical thinking and professional judgment
8	Utilizes practice processes

Unit	Focus Areas
9	Eyeglasses
10	Contact lenses
11	Refraction
12	Low vision

Each competency is a defined behaviour that provides a structured guide to identify, evaluate and develop an optician's behaviours. Competencies move expectations beyond demonstrated knowledge and a skill list to demonstrated knowledge, skill, judgment and professional attitudes. Each competency is linked to a set of performance indicators.

Performance indicators are action statements that describe how a competency is applied or demonstrated in practice, and provide a way to measure competence. The national competencies present practice illustrations to provide practice examples for each performance indicator and suggest relevance to practice.

The figure below defines the competency framework's interconnecting levels.



Works Cited

Anne F. Marrlli, J. T. (2005). Strategies for Developing Competency Models. *Administration and Policy in Mental health*, 32 (May/June), 533.

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