

Optometrist

■ Job Description

The American Optometric Association defines the Doctor of Optometry (OD) as a primary eye care professional. Optometry is an independent primary health care profession. It encompasses the prevention and remediation of disorders of the vision system through the examination, diagnosis, treatment, and management of visual efficiency and eye health. Optometrists are specifically educated, clinically trained, and state licensed to examine the eyes for the presence or absence of vision problems, eye diseases, or ocular manifestations of systemic diseases such as diabetes, hypertension, and hyperthyroidism.

■ Job Settings

Private practice, group practice, clinics, government, industry, education, and research

■ Projected Need

In Illinois, faster than average growth is expected for optometrists through 2010. Average growth is expected nationwide.

As the population grows and ages, the demand for vision care will increase. As the baby boomers reach middle age, many of them will experience vision difficulties. In addition, as adults live longer they experience more eye problems, such as cataracts. Many employees now also have vision care as part of their benefits packages. More people will go to optometrists if they do not have to pay for the visit with their own money.

While the demand for optometrists will be strong, growth will be limited. First, only a few optometrists leave this field each year. In addition, optometrists are able to see more patients each day because of advances in equipment and procedures.

In Illinois, there were about 2,260 people employed in this small occupation in 2000.

■ Salaries

Incomes vary depending upon location, specialization, and other factors. According to the American

Optometric Association, median net income for all optometrists in private practice ranged from \$115,000 to \$120,000 per year in 2000. Those working in a group practice or partnership generally earn substantially higher incomes than optometrists practicing alone.

■ Related Careers

The following careers require the same undergraduate preparation: physician, veterinarian, podiatrist, dentist, and osteopath.

■ Differences in Training

The Doctor of Optometry degree requires seven to eight years of college education, consisting of a four year professional degree program preceded by at least three years of pre-optometric work (most optometry students hold a bachelor's degree). Competition for admission to optometry programs is keen. Applicants need above average grades to improve their chances for acceptance. Professional training is available in Illinois at the Illinois College of Optometry in Chicago.

■ Related Educational Programs

The programs of study listed below are the recommended areas of study to pursue for this occupation. Clicking on these will lead to files that show in-state and national schools that offer these programs.

The following link(s) will take you to CIS for more information. CIS requires an ID and password that can be obtained at <http://cis.ilworkinfo.com/loginhelp/>. You must log into CIS prior to clicking on the links below.

[Optometry](#)

■ Credentials

Licensing is done by individual states. In Illinois, optometrists must be licensed by the Illinois Department of Professional Regulation. Licensing requirements include graduation from an approved four-year optometry graduate level program and passage of the exam administered by the National Board of Examiners in Optometry (NBEO). The NBEO exams are taken during the junior or senior year of the professional program. The license must be renewed every two years and requires the

completion of 24 hours of related continuing education and the payment of a renewal fee.

■ **Advanced Training**

MS and PhD degrees are available in physiological optics, neurophysiology, and public health. There is also specialized training available in primary eye care, geriatrics and low vision, contact lenses, children's vision, and vision therapy. Residency programs are available to graduates of optometry schools.

■ **Resources**

American Optometric Association
243 N. Lindbergh Boulevard
St. Louis, MO 63141
Phone: 314.991.4100
<http://www.aoanet.org>
Select "Students and Education" from the top menu bar. Click on "Career Guidance."

Association of Schools and Colleges
of Optometry
6110 Executive Boulevard, Suite 510
Rockville, MD 20852
Phone: 301.231.5944
<http://www.opted.org>