

# Diabetes Eye Care Clinical Pathway

## Primary Care Toolkit

### Did you know?

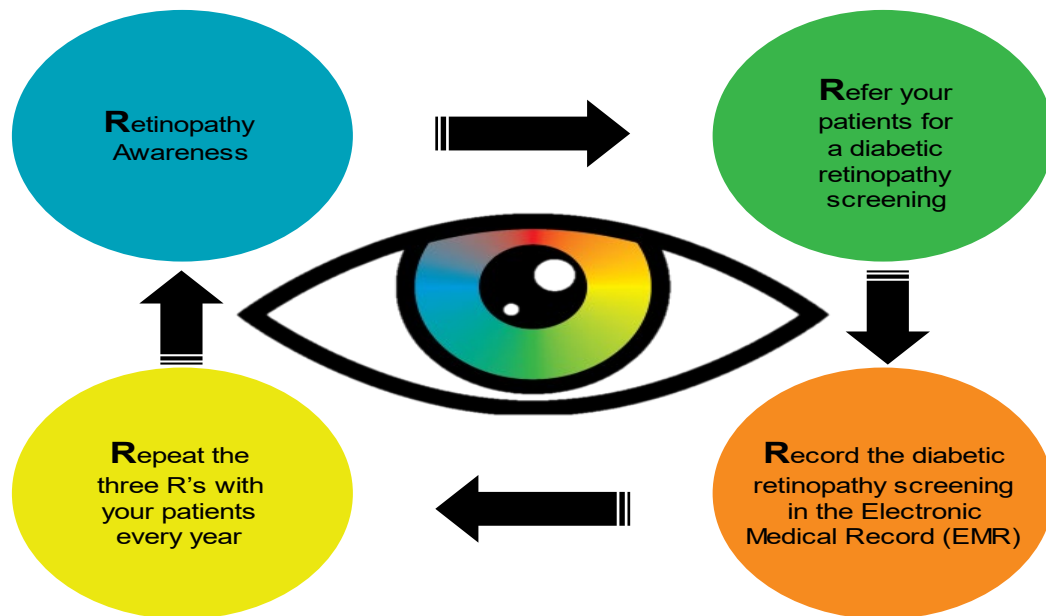
- Diabetic retinopathy is the main cause of blindness in the working age population and is usually asymptomatic until advanced
- 53% of Albertans living with diabetes are not receiving an annual eye exam (1)
- Diabetic retinopathy screening is covered by Alberta Health for all people living with diabetes, and can be performed by an optometrist or an ophthalmologist

### Background:

Literature indicates that primary care provider recommendation about the necessity of a regular eye examination is the most significant predictor of assessment for diabetic retinopathy and once such a recommendation is given, the assessment rate improves. In addition, the lack of awareness that diabetic retinopathy can lead to blindness or that it can be asymptomatic, are some of the reasons that prevent patients from attending a diabetic retinopathy screening (2).

The [AHS Diabetes Eye Care Clinical Pathway](#) has been developed to improve diabetic retinopathy screening rates for early identification and treatment to prevent the progression of diabetic retinopathy and vision loss.

Below is the **four R's approach** to increase diabetic retinopathy screening rates in primary care:



### Retinopathy awareness:

- Prevention is key. Early detection can reduce the risk of blindness.
- Resources to educate people living with diabetes about the importance of diabetic retinopathy screening:
  - Diabetes retinopathy handout [Diabetes and your eyes: Care instructions \(alberta.ca\)](#).

- [Awareness video](#) on the importance of regular eye exams for early detection of diabetic retinopathy. This video can run in your clinic's waiting room.
- [Poster](#): you can put up the poster in your waiting room to increase awareness.

### Refer your patients for a diabetic retinopathy screening:

- The exam is covered by Alberta Health Care (diabetic retinopathy screening portion only, vision testing is not covered for 19–64-year-old patients).
- Can be performed by either an optometrist or an ophthalmologist. Optometrists will refer to an ophthalmologist when treatment is required.
- **How to refer your patients to an optometrist?**
  - [Find an Optometrist - Alberta Association of Optometrists](#)
    - Search by city, postal code, language.
    - Some Optometrists offer mobile services (eye health exams and vision testing), for more information email [don.scn@ahs.ca](mailto:don.scn@ahs.ca).
    - [Eye Health Referral Form](#): Use this form to refer your patient for diabetic retinopathy screening. This form can be faxed or given to the patient to take with them to their appointment.
  - Instruct patients to indicate they have diabetes when they book an appointment for their eye exam and to check if there are any additional fees or instructions prior to the appointment (i.e. dilation of the eyes).
- Address barriers to attending an eye exam (mobility issues, lack of awareness, language, transportation, etc.).

### Record the diabetic retinopathy screening in the Electronic Medical Record (EMR):

- Incorporate diabetic retinopathy screenings into your workflows:
  - Utilize the EMR to generate reminders and reports on which of your patients with diabetes have had a diabetic retinopathy screen each year and who is due.

### Repeat the above three R's with your patients every year:

- Retinopathy awareness education
- Refer for diabetic retinopathy screening
- Record that the screening has been completed

### Additional resources:

- [Diabetes Canada | Clinical Practice Guidelines - Chapter 30: Retinopathy](#)
- [Diabetes Canada - Sight Loss Prevention and Diabetes: A Position Statement](#)
- [Open Your Eyes to an Eye Exam \(diabetes.ca\)](#)
- [What is Diabetic Retinopathy - opto.ca](#)

**Have a question?** Email: [don.scn@ahs.ca](mailto:don.scn@ahs.ca)

### References:

- (1) Alberta Health Services, Data and Analytics
- (2) Guidelines for the Collaborative Management of Persons with Diabetes Mellitus by Eye Care Professionals; Eye Health Council of Ontario; September 23rd, 2011