

Opticians & Optometrist Assistants

A guide for newcomers to British Columbia



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Opticians [NOC 2021: 32100/ NOC 2016: 3231] & Optometrist Assistants [NOC 2021: 32109/ NOC 2016: 3414]

Opticians may also be called:

- Contact lens fitter
- Eyeglasses/frame fitter

Optometrist Assistants may also be called:

- Optical laboratory technician

1. What Would I Do?

Opticians

Fit clients with prescription eyeglasses or contact lenses, help clients select eyeglass frames, arrange for the production of eyeglasses or contact lenses and mount lenses in eyeglass frames. Duties may include:

- do automated refractions (sight tests)
- get specifications for eyeglasses or contact lenses from a prescription prepared by an ophthalmologist or optometrist or by analyzing clients' eyeglasses or contact lenses and measuring clients' eye curvature, pupillary distance and bridge width, using optical measuring devices
- help clients to select eyeglasses by advising on lens materials, frames, tints and anti-reflection coating

- advise on use and care of contact lenses
- arrange for grinding and polishing of lenses or grind and polish lenses
- cut and edge lenses and fit lenses into frames
- adjust finished eyeglasses to fit clients

More information:

- **WorkBC Career Profile for Opticians**

<https://www.workbc.ca/plan-career/explore-careers> [search Opticians]

Optometrist Assistants

An optometric assistant (OA) is specially trained in vision care and assists optometrists in the provision of full scope optometric services to patients. They provide services and assistance to optometrists, opticians or other health care professionals. Duties may include:

- patient reception, scheduling appointments and referrals
- make minor repairs for customers such as replacing frame screws or straightening frames
- operate laboratory equipment to grind, cut, polish and edge lenses for eyeglasses according to prescriptions received and fit lenses into frames
- maintain and repair optical laboratory equipment or machinery

More Information:

- **WorkBC Career Profile for Assisting Occupations in Support of Health Services (including Optometrist Assistants)**

<https://www.workbc.ca/plan-career/explore-careers> [search Optical]

- **Canadian Association of Optometrists – Optometric Assistant OA**

<https://opto.ca/ccoa>

2. Am I Suited For This Job?

Opticians and Optometrist Assistants should be:

- *able to work well with your hands*

They should have:

- *good communication and interpersonal skills*

Opticians work indoors in well-lit, comfortable surroundings. You may work in physicians' offices, health-care practices, medical laboratories, small stores or large optical chain stores with several other opticians.

Sources:

- **WorkBC Career Profile for Opticians**
<https://www.workbc.ca/plan-career/explore-careers> [search Opticians]
- **Career Cruising** database (Profile for 'Optician')
Available from the VPL Digital Library
<https://www.vpl.ca/digital-library/career-cruising/>

3. What Are The Wages And Benefits?

Opticians:

WorkBC reports that in British Columbia the **median** annual salary for Opticians is approximately \$41,712.

JobBank Canada lists hourly wages for BC’s regions where **opticians** can expect to make:

| Community/Area | Wages (\$/hour) | | |
|---|-----------------|--------|-------|
| | Low | Median | High |
| British Columbia | 16.50 | 20.00 | 30.57 |
| Cariboo Region | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| Kootenay Region | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| Lower Mainland–Southwest Region | 18.00 | 21.00 | 30.57 |
| Nechako Region | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| North Coast Region | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| Northeast Region | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| Thompson–Okanagan Region | 16.50 | 20.00 | 30.57 |
| Vancouver Island and Coast Region | 16.50 | 20.00 | 30.57 |

Table from Job Bank Canada Wage Report

<https://www.jobbank.gc.ca/trend-analysis/search-wages>

Full-time opticians often receive benefits, such as dental coverage and sick days. Those who run their own businesses must provide their own benefits. Opticians working in retail stores may earn (in addition to their regular salaries) commissions based on the number of glasses each optician sells.

Sources:

- **WorkBC**
- **Career Cruising** database (Profile for 'Optician')

Optometrist Assistants:

WorkBC reports that in British Columbia the **median** annual salary for all 'Assisting Occupations** in support of Health Services', including optometrist assistants, is approximately \$46,405.

- ****Assisting Occupations include:** Optical and ophthalmic laboratory technicians and assistants (optometrist assistant) **AND** orthopedic technologists, rehabilitation assistants, pharmacy aides, etc.

JobBank Canada lists hourly wages for BC's regions where 'Assisting Occupations' including optometrist assistants can expect to make:

| Community/Area | Wages (\$/hour) | | |
|---|-----------------|--------|-------|
| | Low | Median | High |
| British Columbia | 15.65 | 22.25 | 26.00 |
| Cariboo Region | 15.65 | 21.00 | 24.85 |
| Kootenay Region | 15.65 | 22.25 | 26.00 |
| Lower Mainland–Southwest Region | 15.65 | 22.40 | 26.00 |
| Nechako Region | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| North Coast Region | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| Northeast Region | N/A | N/A | N/A |
| Thompson–Okanagan Region | 16.00 | 23.00 | 31.29 |
| Vancouver Island and Coast Region | 15.65 | 18.00 | 24.00 |

Table from Job Bank Canada Wage Report

<https://www.jobbank.gc.ca/trend-analysis/search-wages>

Source: WorkBC

4. What Is The Job Outlook In BC?

Opticians: Job openings will come from retirements and new job creation.

The demand for optical services is rising due to provincial population growth and aging. British Columbia's growing population will require more optical products, such as glasses and contact lenses. In addition, as B.C.'s population ages, a larger portion of the population will need enhanced vision aids such as corrective lenses and bifocal contact lenses. Also, with the large number of people using computers in their jobs, special "task-specific" lenses help reduce eye fatigue, further maintaining the need for opticians.

Employment Outlook for Opticians:

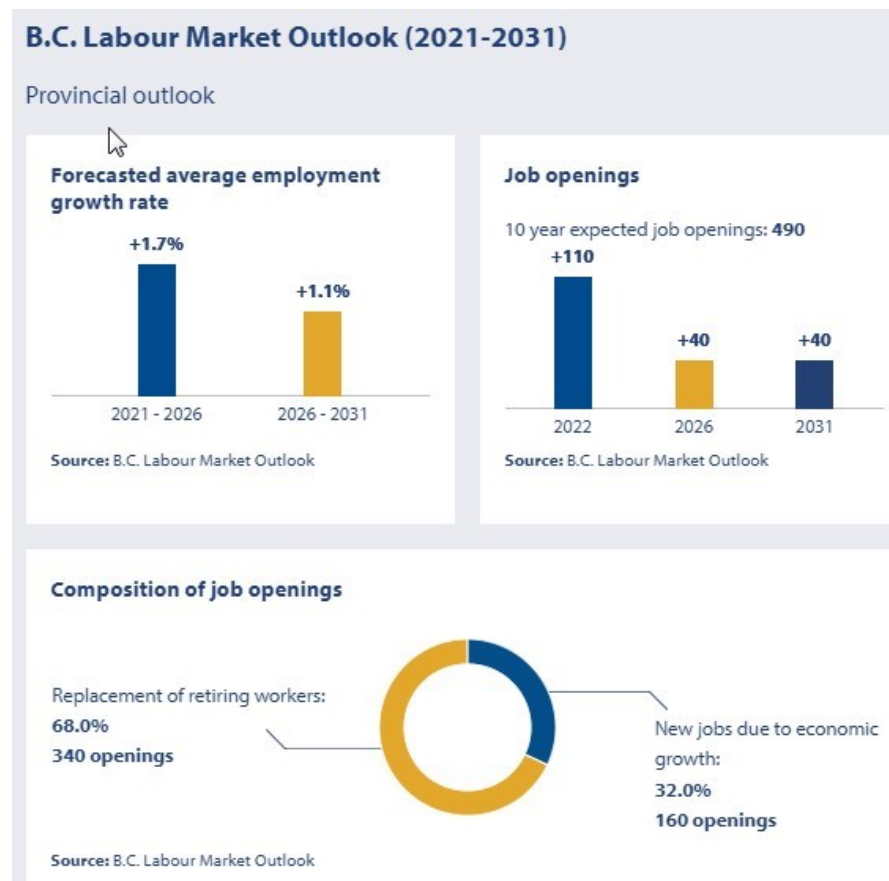


Chart from WorkBC

WorkBC provides regional employment outlooks for these regions:

- Vancouver/Lower Mainland: projecting 1.4% average annual employment growth for 2021-2031 with 330 job openings
- Thompson Okanagan: projecting 1.5% average annual employment growth for 2021-2031 with 90 job openings
- Vancouver Island/Coast: projecting 1.3% average annual employment growth for 2021-2031 with 70 job openings

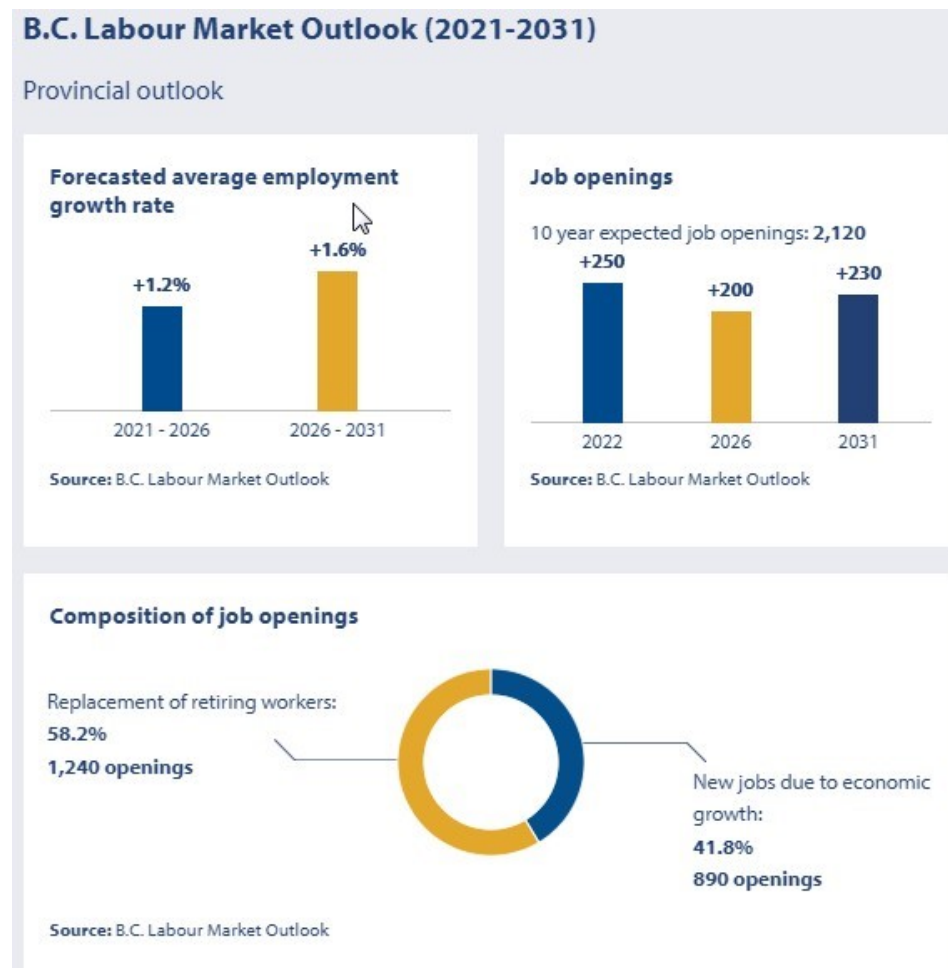
JobBank Canada reports that for the 2021-2023 period, the employment outlook is expected to be good for Opticians (NOC 3231) in British Columbia. Employment growth is expected to be strong and a large number of people are expected to retire.

Sources:

- **WorkBC**
- **JobBank Canada: Job Market Report**
<https://www.jobbank.gc.ca/marketreport/outlook-occupation/4345/BC>

Optometrist Assistants:

Employment Outlook for Other assisting occupations in support of health services, including Optometrist Assistants



Source: WorkBC

5. How do I become an Optician or Optometrist Assistant

Optician:

Education:

Successful completion of an accredited optician program at an institution recognized by the College of Opticians of British Columbia (COBC), see:

- <https://cobc.ca/>
- https://cobc.ca/opticians/becoming_an_optician/training_and_education/

Licensing Exam:

Opticians who have completed their education must then write and pass the National Optical Sciences Examination administered by the National Association of Canadian Optician Regulators NACOR. NACOR currently offers two licensing exams: Optical Sciences 1 – Eyeglasses Examination

Optical Sciences 2 – Advanced Contact Lens Examination

To become licensed as an optician and contact lens fitter, an applicant must pass both exams. To become licensed as an optician only, the applicant only needs to pass Optical Sciences 1. See:

- <https://nacor.ca/>
- <https://nacor.ca/national-examinations/>
- <https://cobc.ca/opticians/>

Registration:

College of Opticians of BC (COBC) (<https://cobc.ca/>) registers/certifies opticians in BC who have completed an accredited education program, passed the NACOR exam, have a clear criminal record check and met other COBC registration requirements. Only Licensed Opticians can use the protected title “Optician” and perform restricted activities, like automated refraction and contact lens fitting. The College licenses opticians in the following registration classes:

- Registered Optician – Eyeglass Dispensing

- Registered Optician – Contact Lens and Eyeglass Dispensing
- Registered Optician – Contact Lens Student
- Registered Optician – Non Practicing

See: <https://cobc.ca/opticians/>

Additional Source: WorkBC

Internationally Educated Opticians

International applicants who did not graduate from a recognized Canadian program may apply through the College of Opticians of BC 'Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR)' process. PLAR assesses the candidate's eligibility to become a licensed optician in BC. This assessment entails an initial document assessment, a Competency Gap Analysis, and in-person interview. These results are then considered by the Registration Committee to ascertain if the candidate is eligible to challenge the national examination (NACOR) or must complete bridging courses to meet the entry-to-practice standards for opticianry in Canada. See:

- https://cobc.ca/opticians/becoming_an_optician/international_students/
- <https://nacor.ca/>

Optometrist Assistant

In BC, no certification is required to work as an optometrist assistant. Most employers look for successful completion of secondary education and some experience in a retail or health clinic environment. Most assistants receive on the job training at a retail optometry store or clinic.

Certified Optometric Assistant CCOA program [voluntary certification]

Optometrist assistants interested in advancing their skills may apply to the Canadian Certified Optometric Assistant CCOA program (<https://opto.ca/ccoa>) an online distance education program. The CCOA program includes nine course modules, a practicum, one workshop and a final examination. *Application requirements include current employment with a CAO – Canadian Association of Optometrists member optometrist for the duration of the CCOA program.* For more information, see:

<https://opto.ca/ccoa>

<https://opto.ca/ccoa/program-overview/about-the-program>

https://opto.ca/sites/default/files/resources/documents/ccoa_program_guide.pdf

<https://opto.ca/ccoa/program-overview/program-requirements>

6. How Do I Find A Job?

Where would I work?

- *optical retail stores and laboratories*
- *physicians' offices,*
- *medical laboratories*
- *large chain stores*
- *other establishments with optical dispensing departments*

Finding Advertised Jobs

Jobs are advertised in a variety of sources including newspapers, magazines and online job sites.

Local Newspapers

You can look at the *Vancouver Sun* & *The Province* at Vancouver Public Library for free. Check the job postings daily, the careers section in the *Vancouver Sun* on Wednesdays and Saturdays and, in *The Province* on Sundays.

Online Job Postings

- **Jobs4ECPs**
<https://www.jobs4ecps.ca/>
- **BC (chapter) Doctors of Optometry Canada**
<https://members.optometrists.bc.ca/bcao/BCAOMember/optomart/BCAOMember/Optomart/optomart.aspx> (*scroll down and click on link for 'Opportunities for Optometric Assistants/Opticians'*)
- **Indeed.ca**
https://ca.indeed.com/advanced_search

<https://ca.indeed.com/Eye-Optometry-jobs-in-British-Columbia>

<https://ca.indeed.com/Optician-jobs-in-British-Columbia>

<https://ca.indeed.com/Optometric-Assistant-jobs-in-Vancouver,-BC>

- **Talent.com**

<https://ca.talent.com/>

- **WorkBC**

<https://www.workbc.ca/search-and-prepare-job/find-jobs#/job-search>

- **BC Jobs.ca**

<https://www.bcjobs.ca/>

Finding “Hidden Jobs”

Many job vacancies are not advertised. The resources below will help you *with finding jobs in this “hidden” job market.*

Using Directories to Create a List of Potential Employers

You can use directories to produce lists of employers who are in this industry. Contact them directly to find out if they’re hiring.

- **BC Doctors of Optometry (BC Association of Optometrists)**

<https://bc.doctorsofoptometry.ca/find-a-doctor>

- **College of Optometrists of British Columbia**

<https://cdobcv6.alinityapp.com/Client/PublicDirectory>

- **College of Opticians of British Columbia**

<https://www.opticianry.ca/memberroster/memberroster.aspx?orgid=COBC&FirstGivenName=&surname=>

- **Reference Canada**

<https://www.vpl.ca/digital-library/reference-canada>

Click on “Start Search” beside Canadian Businesses, then select the “Advanced Search” button. Select both “Keyword/SIC/NAICS” under Business Type and “City” under Geography. In the top search box enter “opticians” OR “optometrists” and click SEARCH. Select the appropriate headings, e.g. “optometrists OD”. Lower down, select the Province, choose the cities, and click the “View Results” button.

Available from the VPL Digital Library

NOTE: You can access this database from a Library computer. If you are using a computer from outside the Library, you will need a Vancouver Public Library card to login to this database. After clicking on the database name, you will be asked to enter your library card number and PIN (usually last four digits of your telephone number).

Networking, Volunteering and Temporary Agencies

Many positions are filled by people who have been recommended by someone they know. Networking, working as a volunteer or registering with a temporary employment agency are good ways of helping you find jobs and meet people in your industry.

Networking and the Hidden Job Market:

When looking for work, be sure to talk to friends, relatives and neighbours. They may know someone who is hiring! Working as a volunteer, attending events, and joining clubs and associations are good ways to gain "Canadian experience." They are also good ways to meet people to learn about the local job market.

Volunteer opportunities

- **Volunteer BC**
<https://volunteerbc.bc.ca/>
- **GoVolunteer.ca**
<https://govolunteer.ca/>
- **Third World Eye Society Canada – TWECS**
a local BC chapter of VOSH - Volunteer Optometric Services to Humanity
<https://www.twecs.ca/posts-grid/> [primarily sponsors eye health care projects outside Canada]
<https://www.twecs.ca/eyeglass-recycling/> [local individuals needed to recycle eyeglasses]
- **Canadian Vision Care**
<https://www.canadianvisioncare.com/> [From web updates to going on a mission, to packing boxes or organizing projects]
- **Canadian Red Cross**
<https://www.redcross.ca/volunteer>

Volunteering in Health Care Facilities

The following organizations accept volunteers in hospitals, residential care facilities, adult day centres, and other community settings.

- **Vancouver Coastal Health**

<https://www.vch.ca/en/about-us/get-involved/volunteer>

- **Fraser Health Authority**

<https://www.fraserhealth.ca/about-us/volunteer-opportunities>

- **Providence Health Care**

<https://www.providencehealthcare.org/volunteers>

For additional tips see:

- **Networking for Employment**

<https://www.vpl.ca/siic/guide/job-search-resources/networking-for-employment>

- **Getting Canadian Work Experience**

<https://www.vpl.ca/siic/guide/job-search-resources/getting-canadian-work-experience>

7. Applying for a Job

In Canada, employers usually expect to receive a resume and a cover letter that identifies the position you are applying for and summarizes your experience. Use the library catalogue, <https://vpl.bibliocommons.com/> to find books on writing resumes and cover letters specific to your industry.

For more information see:

- **Writing Resumes and Cover Letters**

<https://www.vpl.ca/siic/guide/job-search-resources/writing-resumes-and-cover-letters>

8. Where Can This Job Lead?

With experience, opticians may progress to Senior Optician, and eventually to a position as supervisor or manager of an eyecare retail store and possibly own.

Source:

- **Career Cruising** database (Profile for 'Optician')
<https://www.vpl.ca/digital-library/career-cruising>

9. Where Can I Find More Information?

- **Opticians Association of Canada**
<https://www.opticians.ca/index.html> [see 'Becoming an Optician']
- **Opticians Association of Canada, BC Chapter**
<http://opticians.bc.ca/>
- **Canadian Certified Optometric Assistant CCOA**
<https://opto.ca/ccoa>
- **College of Opticians of British Columbia**
<https://cobc.ca/>
- **Canadian Association of Optometrists: Canadian Certified Optometric Assistant (CCOA) program**
<https://opto.ca/ccoa>

Questions? Please ask the Information Staff at the Central Library or telephone 604-331-3603.

Please note that the information in this guide is also available online through the Skilled Immigrant InfoCentre website at <https://www.vpl.ca/siic>.