



DOCTORS OF OPTOMETRY

The Changing View of Eye Health

October 2026



Executive Message

British Columbians clearly value their eye health, but our latest research shows a gap between recognizing its importance and acting on that. Awareness and access to eye health care are listed as the primary factors as to why British Columbians don't turn to optometrists when they need care.

It is concerning to note that fewer British Columbians are getting eye exams. I know that the factors shaping access to eye care are similar to the wider strains on the health care system in BC. The findings from this report will help optometrists across the province address these issues.

There are new challenges facing us when it comes to how the public finds and evaluates relevant health information. AI has become increasingly popular among younger British Columbians; this is something we must recognize.

Our eyes provide important information about our overall health, and one should not ignore changes in

vision or new symptoms. Knowing that optometrists are primary health providers that can assess these concerns is vital.

I hope that our report will bring more awareness to the public on the importance of optometrists when it comes to your eye health. If you have any concerns about your eye health or if you have not visited an optometrist for an eye exam recently, visit your local clinic. We are here to help you.

Dr. Brent Allen,
President, BCDO



Eye health matters to British Columbians, but concern doesn't always translate into action.

British Columbians care deeply about their eye health, but a growing combination of delayed care, access barriers, uncertainty about urgent symptoms, and reliance on digital tools is reshaping how people manage their vision.

The 2026 survey reveals a widening gap between concern and action – and a growing need for trusted guidance and timely access to professional eye care.

Methodology: Quantitative online survey of British Columbians (n=2,002), representative of the population across the province, administered through Leger Opinion, capturing Asking Canadians and Leger Opinion Panel. The survey fielding took place from May 4th – May 19th, 2026. A margin of error cannot be calculated on a non-probability sample. For comparison purposes only, a probability sample of 2,002 respondents would carry a margin of error of +/- 2.19% percentage points, 19 times out of 20.

94%



of British Columbians say maintaining their eye health is important.

72%



say they would consider the emergency room before an optometrist for an urgent eye issue.

53%



of British Columbians report having had a comprehensive eye exam in the past year.

42%



believe comprehensive eye exams are only necessary when their eyes bother them or begin to hurt.

A changing eye health landscape

The way British Columbians navigate eye health is changing. New sources of information, evolving environmental pressures and persistent barriers to care are influencing when people seek help – and where they turn when they do.

Artificial intelligence is emerging as a new front door to eye health information, particularly among younger adults. Digital eye strain has become a normal part of everyday life, while wildfire smoke, air pollution, allergens, UV exposure, and dry air are increasingly affecting eye comfort across British Columbia.



Together, these shifts are creating a more complex eye health landscape and reinforcing the importance of trusted and accessible care.



British Columbians care about their eye health, but fewer are getting eye exams.

Nearly all British Columbians (94%) say maintaining their eye health is important, while 90% believe regular eye exams matter even when they have good vision.

87%

say they understand the long-term consequences of ignoring their eye health.

And yet,

only 53%

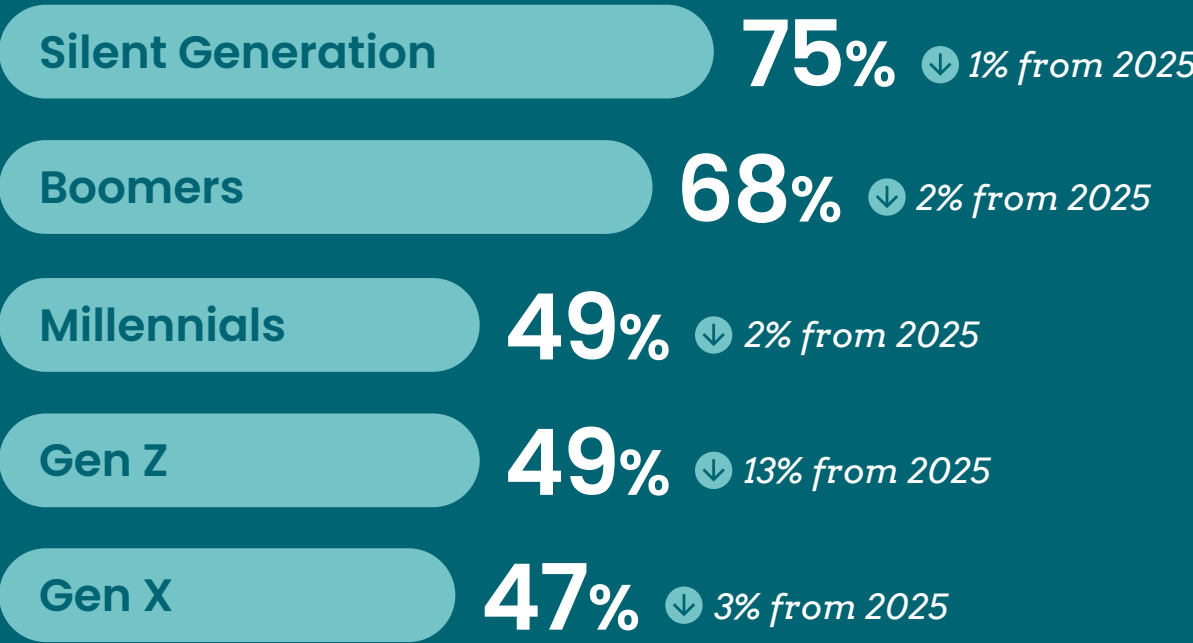
have had a comprehensive eye exam in the past year, a decline from 57% in 2025.



The proportion who typically visit an optometrist once a year or more often also felt a notable year-over-year decline:

38% → 33%

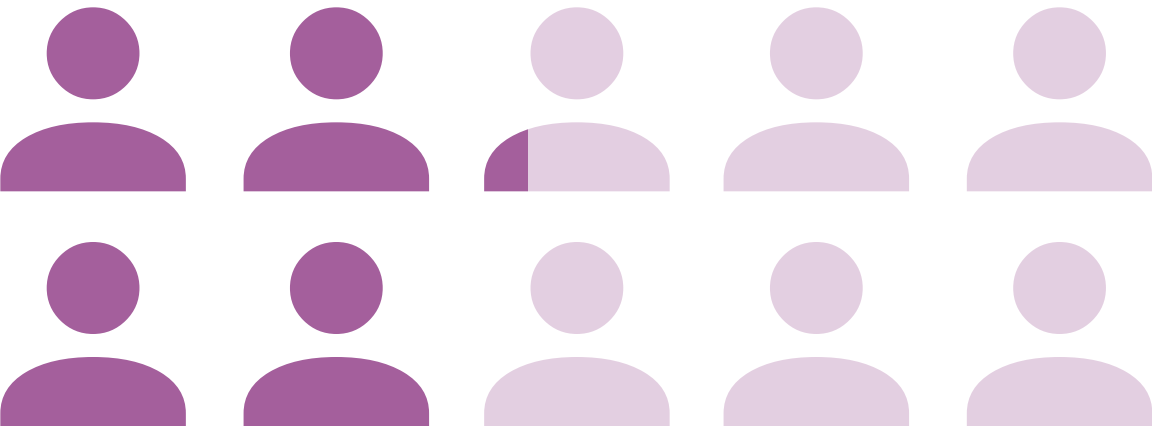
Among those who have had a comprehensive eye exam in the last year, the Silent Generation and Boomers are most likely to have had a recent eye exam.



Despite widespread understanding of the importance of eye health, preventive care is not keeping pace.

Many continue to wait until symptoms appear before seeking care.

More than four in ten British Columbians (42%) believe comprehensive eye exams are only necessary when their eyes bother them or begin to hurt.



This belief is especially common among Gen Z (60%) and Millennials (50%).



Among those who experienced an eye symptom or condition, fewer are taking steps to address it than last year.

A growing share are choosing not to act at all.

Took action:



Among those who did not contact an optometrist or family doctor after experiencing symptoms:



52% believed their issue did not require medical attention.



24% preferred to monitor it before seeking care.

For many British Columbians, discomfort, rather than preventive care, remains the trigger to act. And increasingly, symptoms do not necessarily lead to action.

Access challenges are making it harder for British Columbians to get the eye care they need.

More than half (51%) of British Columbians say getting eye care is harder than it should be.

Access challenges are taking several forms, from difficulty finding a timely appointment to concerns about cost. At the same time, British Columbians place a high value on flexible, convenient care.



Access challenges appear to be shaping not only whether British Columbians seek eye care, but where they turn instead when timely professional care appears unavailable.

Factors shaping access to eye care



Barriers related to appointment availability

- 17% Long wait times
- 13% Limited appointment options



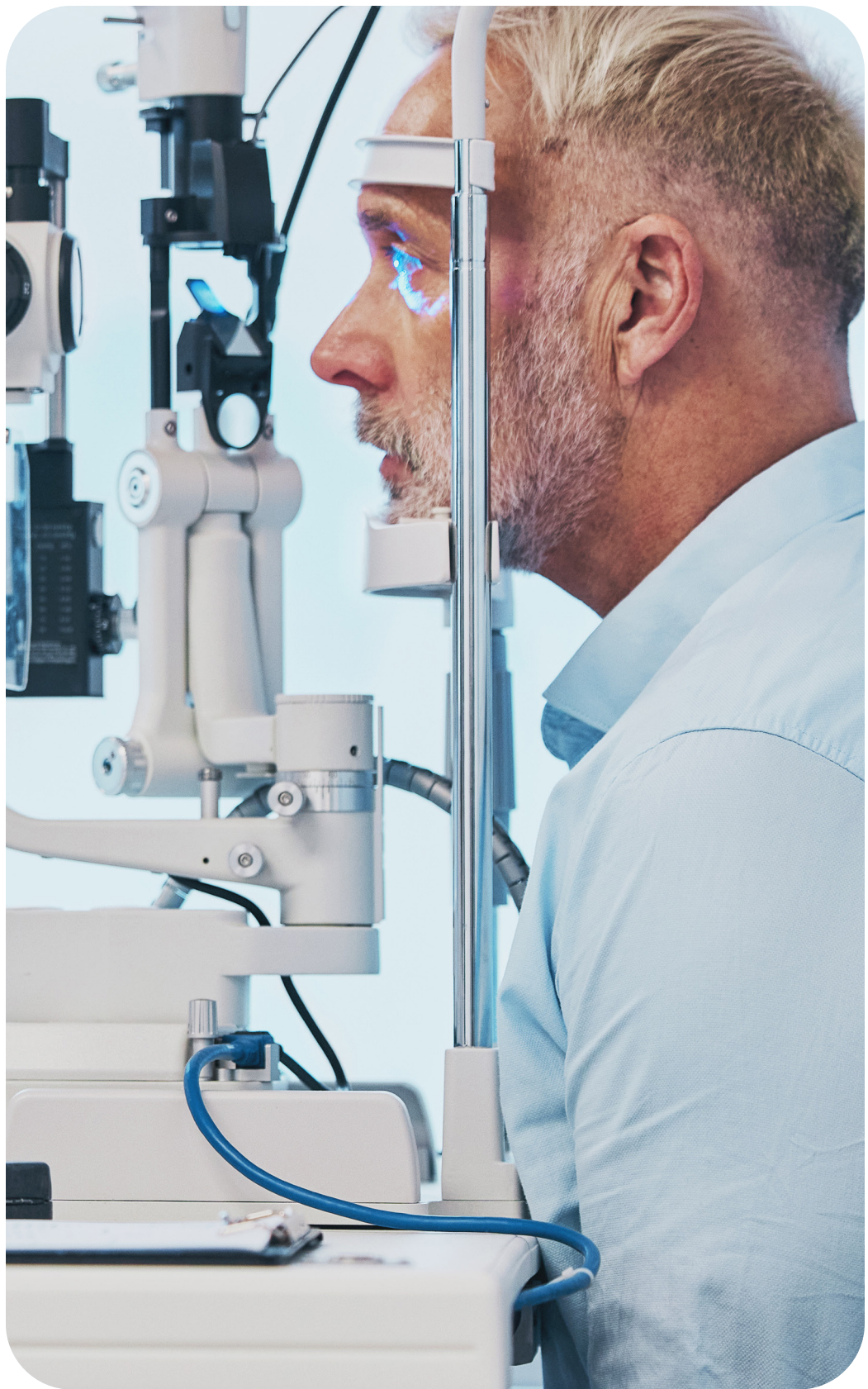
Barriers related to cost

- 28% Out-of-pocket costs
- 19% Uncertainty around pricing
- 18% Lack of insurance coverage



What could make care more accessible

- 84% Say same- or next-day appointments are important
- 76% Would be more likely to visit an optometrist if evening or weekend appointments were available.



Many British Columbians turn to emergency rooms before optometrists for urgent eye care.

Uncertainty about urgent symptoms and the role of optometrists appears to be shaping where British Columbians seek help.

Where British Columbians turn for urgent care:



72%

would consider the emergency room before an optometrist for an urgent eye issue.



58%

would rather visit a walk-in clinic or urgent care centre than wait for an optometrist appointment.

Who do British Columbians associate emergency eye issues with?

Emergency-room physicians 60%

Ophthalmologists 37%

Family doctors/GPs 28%

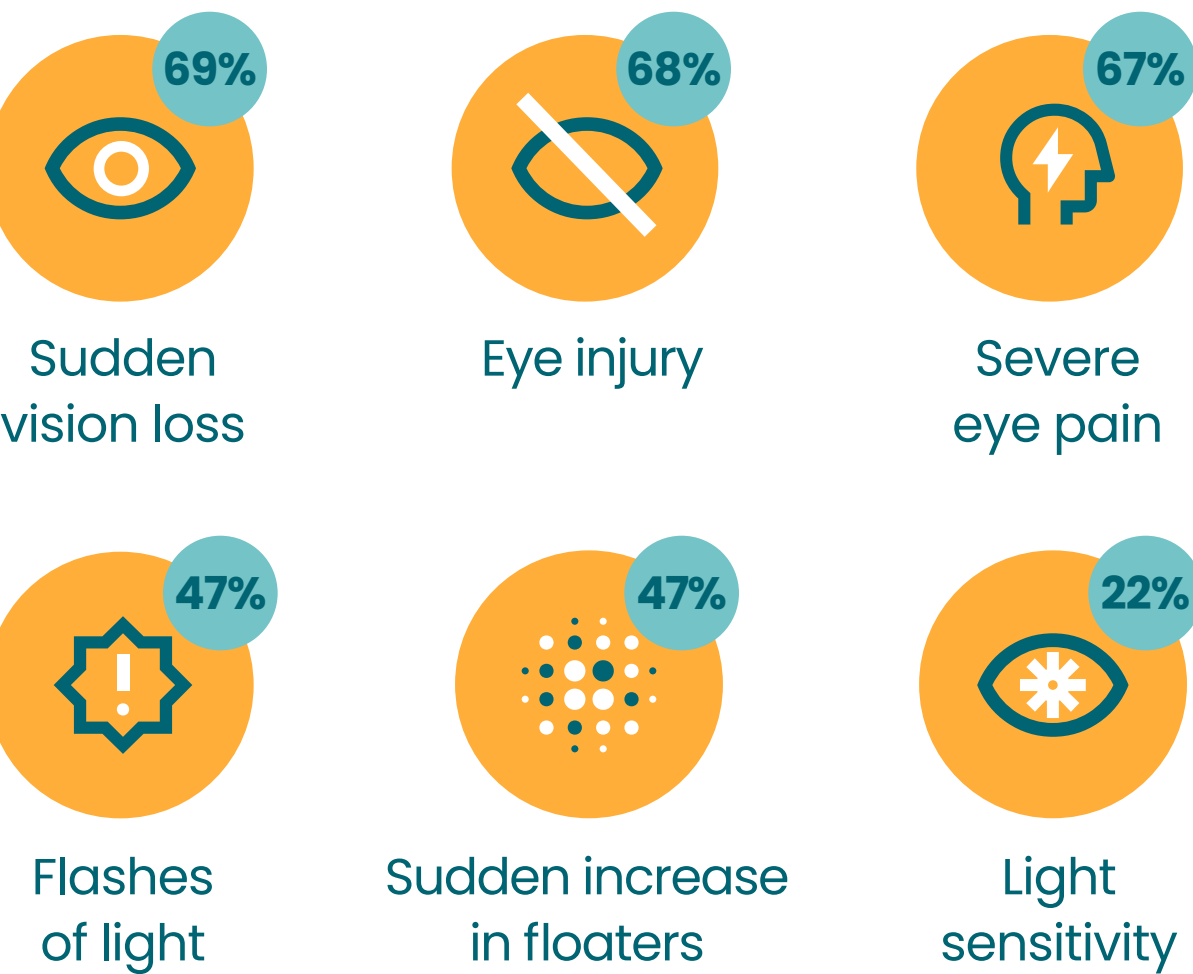
Optometrists 22%



What do British Columbians associate optometrists with?

- 77%** Prescribing eyeglasses and contact lenses
- 76%** Conducting routine eye exams for vision correction
- 55%** Filling eyeglass prescriptions and fitting glasses
- 44%** Diagnosing and treating eye diseases
- 40%** Providing vision therapy and rehabilitation
- 37%** Treating eye infections and inflammation
- 22%** Managing emergency eye issues

Which symptoms are recognized as requiring urgent attention?



AI is becoming a new front door to eye health information.

Nearly four in ten British Columbians (39%) report using AI tools in relation to eye health in some way. Use is highest among Gen Z (61%) and Millennials (52%).

When it comes to providing accurate eye health information, trust in AI remains mixed.

38%

say they trust it.

47%

say they distrust it.



Professional advice nevertheless remains important: nearly half (49%) would still consult an optometrist or another eye doctor if AI suggested their symptoms were not serious. Younger generations are significantly less likely to seek that follow-up.

As its influence grows, artificial intelligence is shaping how people understand symptoms, evaluate risk, and decide whether to seek care.

How AI is used:



26%

Understanding symptoms



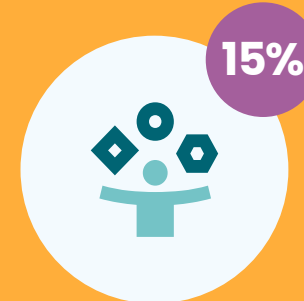
17%

Deciding if care is needed



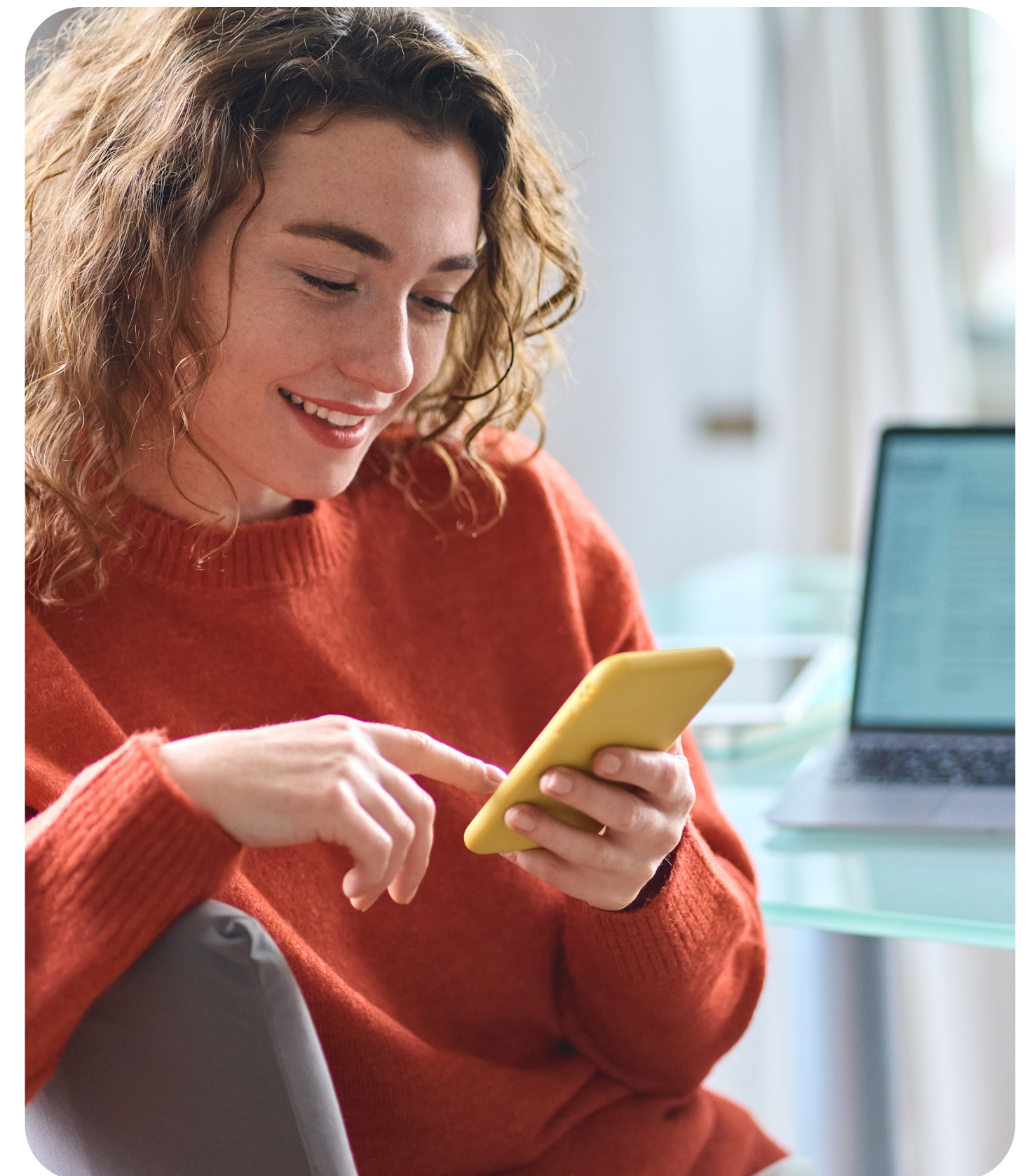
16%

Self-diagnosis

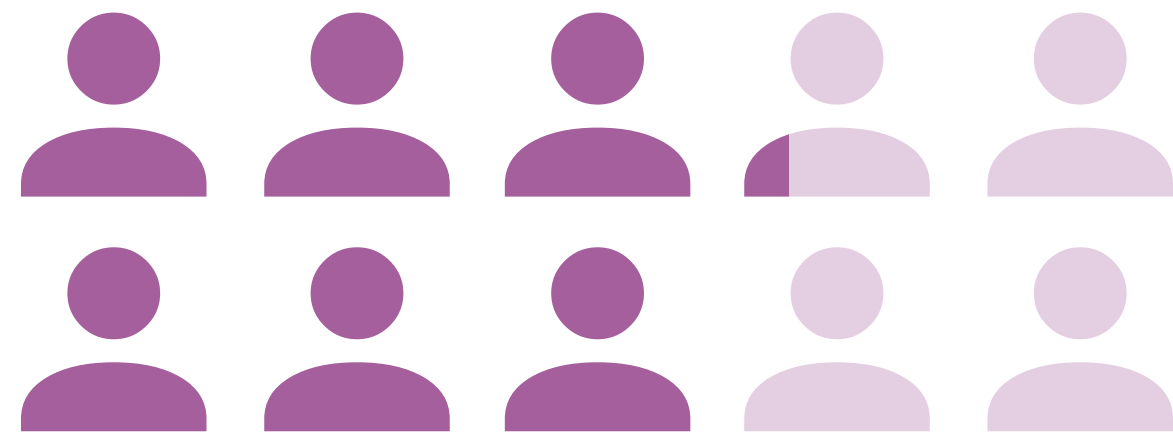


15%

Exploration of treatment options



Digital eye strain has become a normal part of everyday life.



Sixty-two percent of British Columbians spend at least five hours a day on screens, while 28% spend eight hours or more.

Nearly three-quarters (74%) believe they spend more time on screens than is healthy, and the same proportion worry about the long-term effects that screen use might have on their vision.



Concern about digital eye strain is widespread, but understanding of its seriousness, prevention, and management remains limited.

Despite this concern,



69%

say digital eye strain has become a normal part of everyday life.

And yet,



52%

believe it is serious enough to prompt seeking professional advice.

The contrast is particularly clear among Gen Z.



80%

say they spend more time on screens than is healthy.



Only 38%

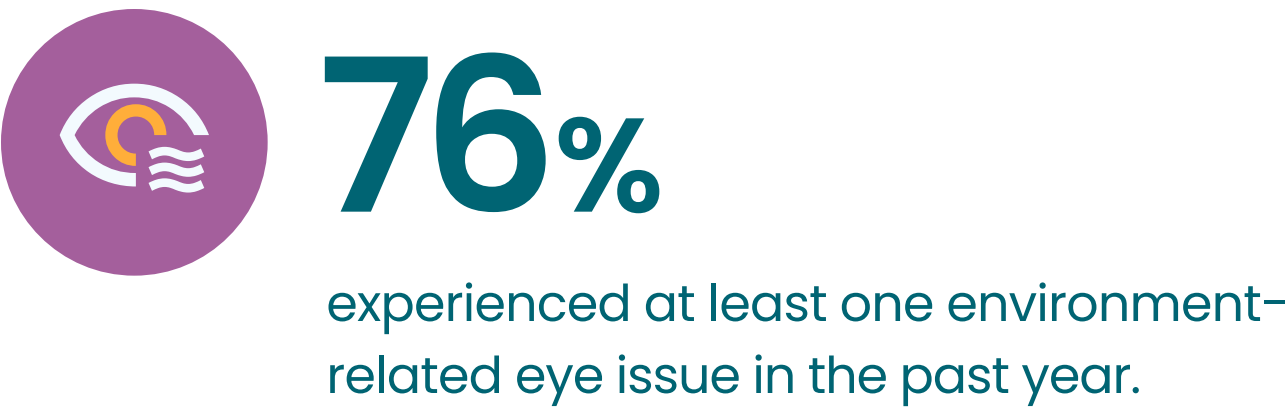
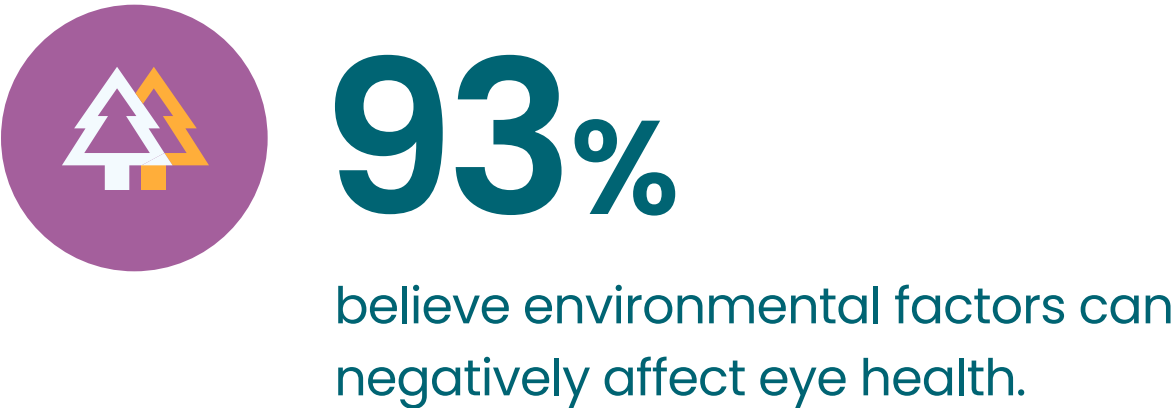
think digital eye strain is serious enough to seek professional advice.

Across the province, 30% of Gen Z report experiencing eye-related effects from increased screen exposure, while 26% do not know what steps to take to reduce digital eye strain.

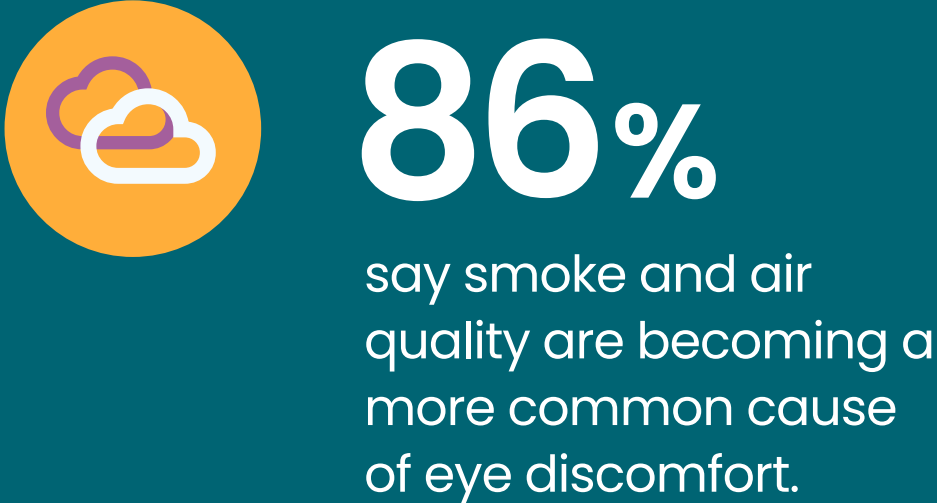
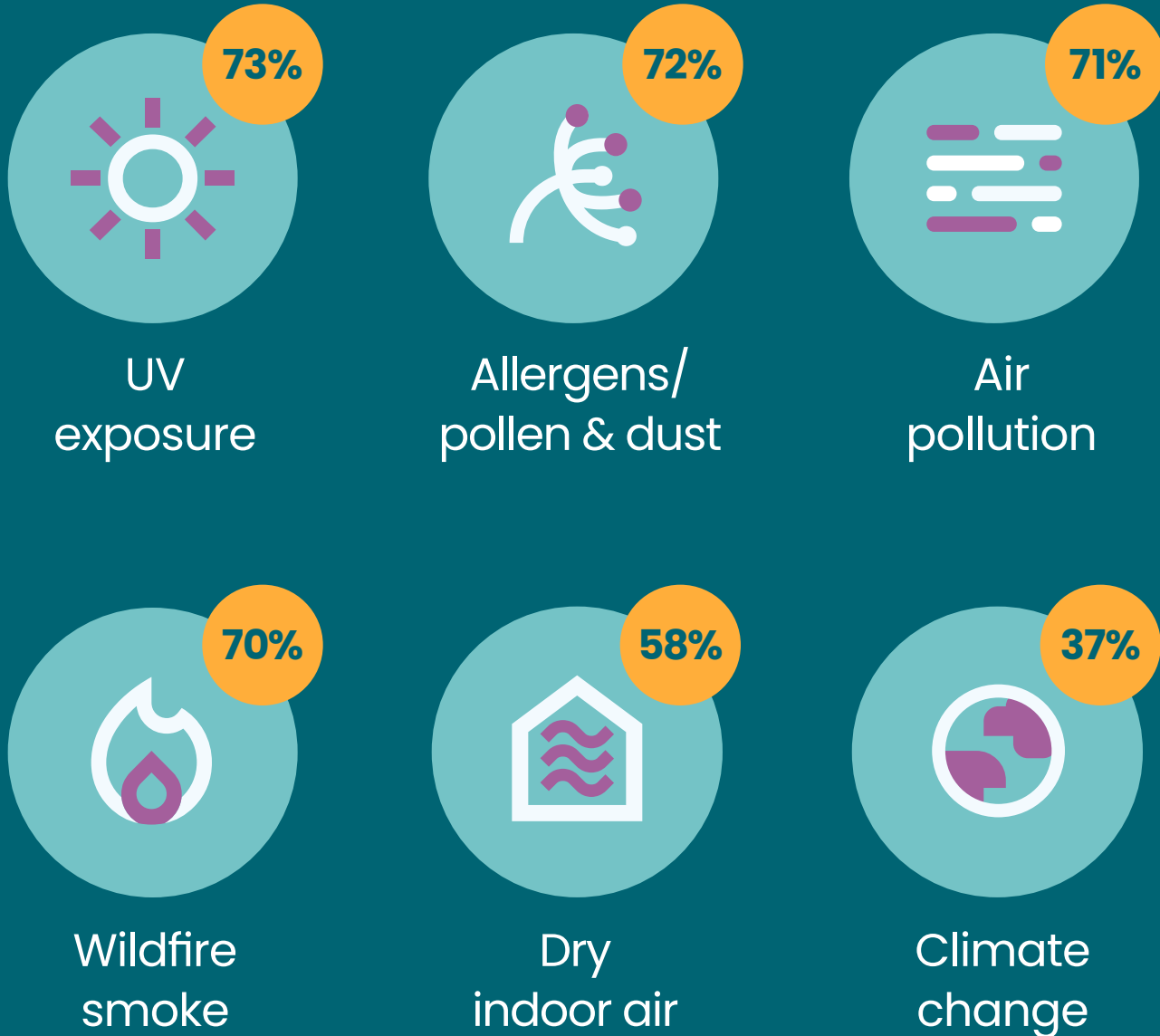
Environmental conditions are a growing eye health concern across British Columbia.

Nearly all British Columbians believe environmental factors can negatively affect eye health.

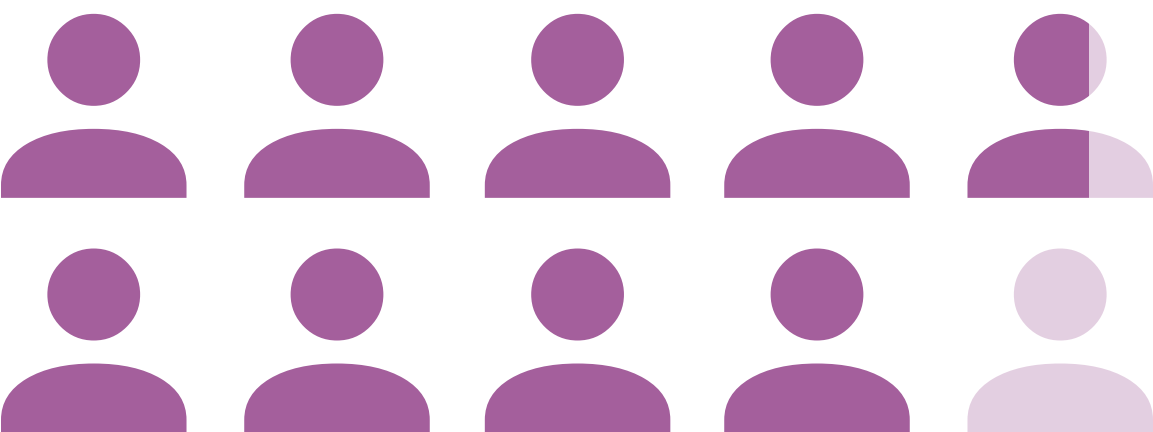
Scale of concern



Most commonly identified concerns



Most British Columbians are taking steps to protect their eyes from environmental conditions, with nearly nine in ten (87%) reporting at least one protective action.



How British Columbians are protecting their eyes

- 67%** Wear UV-protective sunglasses
- 45%** Use eye drops
- 40%** Limit outdoor exposure during poor air-quality events



Environmental conditions are now a significant part of how British Columbians experience and manage their eye health.



British Columbians need care that is easier to reach and guidance that is easier to trust.

The findings reveal a province that values eye health but does not always have the access, confidence, or information needed to act early.

Concern is already widespread. The greater need is to help British Columbians turn these anxieties into timely, informed action.

