

STAFFING

1. **REASON FOR ISSUE:** To establish a Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) qualification standard for the Health Technician (Optometry), GS-0640, series appointed under 38 U.S.C. § 7401(3), Appointments in Veterans Health Administration and 38 U.S.C. § 7405(a)(1)(B), Administrative Positions for Section 7405 and 7406 Appointments.
2. **SUMMARY OF CONTENTS/MAJOR CHANGES:** This handbook contains mandatory procedures on staffing. This revision establishes the Health Technician (Optometry) occupation under VA's title 38 hybrid excepted service employment system and the authority of P.L. 111-163, "Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act of 2010." Authority is given to the Secretary of VA under 38 U.S.C. § 7402, Qualifications of appointees, to prescribe qualifications for occupations identified in or established under 38 U.S.C. § 7401(3), Appointments in Veterans Health Administration and 38 U.S.C. § 7405(a)(1)(B), Temporary full-time appointments, part-time appointments, and without-compensation appointments. The new standard is effective on the date of this publication. This qualification standard will be incorporated into the electronic version of VA Handbook 5005, Staffing, that is maintained on the [Office of the Chief Human Capital Officer website](#) and the [VA Publications website](#).
3. **RESPONSIBLE OFFICE:** Office of the Chief Human Capital Officer, Recruitment and Placement Policy Service (059).
4. **RELATED DIRECTIVES:** VA Directive 5005, Staffing.
5. **RESCISSIONS:** None.

CERTIFIED BY:

**BY DIRECTION OF THE SECRETARY
OF VETERANS AFFAIRS:**

/s/
John P. Medve
Acting Assistant Secretary
for Enterprise Integration

/s/
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DISTRIBUTION: Electronic only

NOTE: This transmittal page accompanied the former VA Handbook 5005, Staffing publication. It is provided for reference to the establishment of this qualification standard.

FORMER VA HANDBOOK REFERENCE: PART II APPENDIX G68
EFFECTIVE DATE: April 9, 2021

**HEALTH TECHNICIAN (OPTOMETRY)
QUALIFICATION STANDARD
GS-0640
Veterans Health Administration**

1. **COVERAGE.** The following are requirements for appointment as a Health Technician (Optometry) in the Veterans Health Administration (VHA). These requirements apply to all VHA Health Technicians (Optometry) in the General Schedule (GS)-0640 series.
2. **AUTHORITIES.**
 - a. [P.L. 111-163, Caregivers and Veterans Omnibus Health Services Act of 2010;](#)
 - b. [38 U.S.C. § 7401, Appointments in Veterans Health Administration;](#)
 - c. [38 U.S.C. § 7402, Qualifications of appointees;](#)
 - d. [38 U.S.C. § 7403, Period of appointments; promotions;](#)
 - e. [38 U.S.C. § 7405, Temporary full-time appointments, part-time appointments and without-compensation appointments;](#)
 - f. [38 U.S.C. § 7407, Administrative provisions for section 7405 and 7406 appointments.](#)
3. **DEFINITIONS.**
 - a. **Appointing Official.** The Human Resources Officer is delegated appointing authority to process and authenticate notifications of personnel actions and authority to effect management-approved employment actions on behalf of officials, employees and facilities for which service is provided.
 - b. **Approving Official.** The Veterans Integrated Service Network Director or Facility Director is the approving official and will determine whether to approve or disapprove the appointment of employees in the hybrid occupations.
 - c. **Journey Level.** The full performance level for this qualification standard is the GS-07 grade level.
 - d. **Creditable Experience.** To be creditable, the experience must have required the use of knowledge, skills and abilities associated with current health technician/assistant or health technician (optometry)/assistant practice.

Experience satisfying this requirement may be paid or non-paid employment as a health technician/assistant or health technician (optometry)/assistant in the health care field.

- e. **Quality of Experience.** Qualifying experience must be at a level comparable to health technician/assistant or health technician (optometry)/assistant experience at the next lower grade level of the position being filled. For all assignments above the full performance level, the higher level duties must consist of significant scope, administrative independence, complexity (difficulty) and range of variety as described in this standard at the specified grade level and be performed by the incumbent at least 25% of the time.
- f. **Part-Time Experience.** Part-time experience is creditable according to its relationship to a full-time workweek. For example, an individual employed 20 hours per week, or on a half time basis, would receive one full-time work week of credit for each two weeks of service.

4. BASIC REQUIREMENTS.

- a. **Citizenship.** Be a citizen of the United States (U.S.). Non-citizens may be appointed when it is not possible to recruit qualified citizens in accordance with 38 U.S.C. § 7407(a).
- b. **Experience and Education.**
 - (1) **Experience.** One year of experience as a health technician or assistant in the health care field demonstrating the applicant's ability to perform the work or by demonstrating a basic understanding of work in the health care field;

OR
 - (2) **Education.** Successful completion of two academic years above high school with a minimum of 12 semester hours related to health technician/assistant or health technician (optometry)/assistant or associate degree, or completion of an independent study course in an optometry related technician or assistant field;

OR
 - (3) **Experience/Education Combination.** Equivalent combinations of experience and education are qualifying. Examples are listed below:
 - (a) Six months of experience comparable to the next lower level which demonstrates the knowledge of optometry assistant theory and practices and general understanding of the health technician/assistant duties and one year above high school with a minimum of six semester hours of health technician/assistant or health technician (optometry)/assistant related courses.

- (b) Successful completion of a course for health care technicians or assistants, hospital corpsmen, medical service specialists, or hospital training in a program given by the U.S. Armed Forces, the U.S. Maritime Service, or the U.S. Public Health Service, may be substituted on a month-for-month basis.
 - c. **Licensure/Certification/Registration.** None.
 - d. **Grandfathering Provision.** All individuals employed in VHA in this occupational series or in another occupational series performing the duties as described in the qualification standard on the effective date of the qualification standard are considered to have met all qualification requirements for the grade held including positive education and licensure/trademark/registration/certification. For employees who do not meet all the basic requirements required in this standard, but who met the qualifications applicable to the position at the time they were appointed to it, the following provisions apply:
 - (1) They may be reassigned, promoted up to and including the full performance (journey) level, or changed to lower grade within the occupation, but may not be promoted beyond the journeyman level or placed in supervisory or managerial positions.
 - (2) Employees who are appointed on a temporary basis prior to the effective date of the qualification standard may not have their temporary appointment extended or be reappointed, on a temporary or permanent basis until they fully meet the basic requirements of the standard.
 - (3) Health Technicians (Optometry) who are converted to title 38 hybrid status under this provision and subsequently leave the occupation lose protected status and must meet the full VA qualification standard requirements in effect at the time of re-entry to the occupation.
 - e. **Foreign Education.** To be creditable, education completed outside the U.S. must have been submitted to a private organization that specializes in the interpretation of foreign educational credentials and such education must have been deemed at least equivalent to that gained in conventional U.S. programs.
 - f. **Physical Requirements.** See VA Directive and Handbook 5019.
 - g. **English Language Proficiency.** Health Technician (Optometry) candidates must be proficient in spoken and written English to be appointed as authorized by 38 U.S.C. § 7403(f).
5. **GRADE DETERMINATIONS.** In addition to the basic requirements for employment, the following criteria must be met when determining the grade of candidates.
- a. **Health Technician (Optometry), GS-04**
 - (1) **Experience.** None beyond the basic requirements.

(2) **Assignment.** Employees at this grade level serve in a health technician (optometry) entry level position. More experienced staff members guide and provide daily direct supervision for the health technicians (optometry).

b. Health Technician (Optometry), GS-05

(1) **Experience.** One year of experience equivalent to the next lower grade.

(2) **Demonstrated Knowledge, Skills and Abilities (KSA).** In addition to the experience above, the candidate must demonstrate the following KSAs:

(a) Knowledge of basic eye anatomy and function.

(b) Ability to obtain, document and record ophthalmic and medical information from patients in order to develop an accurate electronic progress note.

(c) Ability to practice basic hygiene and infection control in a patient care setting.

(d) Ability to follow eye clinic and patient care medical policies and procedures.

(e) Ability to perform minor eyeglasses repairs, such as replacing nose pads and screws.

(3) **Assignment.** Employees at this grade level serve as developmental level 1 health technicians (optometry). It is expected they receive guidance from more experienced staff members for patient issues and require daily and direct contact with senior optometry personnel at the work site.

c. Health Technician (Optometry), GS-06

(1) **Experience.** One year of experience equivalent to the next lower grade.

(2) **Demonstrated Knowledge, Skills and Abilities.** In addition to the experience above, the candidate must demonstrate the following KSAs:

(a) Ability to provide patient education for eye health and/or vision conditions, to include assisting with patient contact lens insertion, removal and hygiene (cleaning and disinfection) care.

(b) Ability to accurately enter into a phoropter the autorefractometry or habitual refractive prescription (i.e., eyeglasses prescription) or lensometer findings, including sphere, cylinder and axis.

(c) Ability to perform patient spectacle fitting and dispensing, including selection of appropriate frame, ophthalmic lenses, interpupillary measurements (distance and near) and proper segment height determination, as well as the ability to transpose sphere, cylinder and axis.

- (d) Ability to provide basic triage of patient telephone calls or optometry requests.
 - (e) Knowledge of ophthalmic medications and supplies needed in the process of restocking the eye clinic exam rooms.
- (3) **Assignment.** Employees at this grade level serve as developmental level 2 health technicians (optometry). The technicians operate and monitor commonly used equipment performing basic screening procedures. The health technicians (optometry) understand basic hygiene, cleaning and disinfection of reusable medical equipment (RME) instruments and ophthalmic equipment. At this level, the technicians assist optometry staff by obtaining an accurate medical/ophthalmic history, as well as coding and entering eye testing performed on the encounter form. Deviations from regular procedures, unanticipated problems and unfamiliar situations are referred to the supervisor for a decision or assistance. Assignments at this level involve procedures performed under supervision from senior optometry personnel.

d. **Health Technician (Optometry), GS-07**

- (1) **Experience.** One year of experience comparable to the next lower level which demonstrates the knowledge, skills and abilities related to the duties of the position to be filled.
- (2) **Demonstrated Knowledge, Skills and Abilities.** In addition to meeting the experience or educational requirements for this grade level, the candidate must fully demonstrate the following KSAs:
 - (a) Ability to determine preliminary objective estimate and/or refinement of the optical status of the eye, not to include the patient's final subjective refraction.
 - (b) Ability to triage and manage eyeglasses issues (e.g., measurement of vertex distance, base curve, prism correction, center thickness, slab off, Fresnel prism, decentration, etc.).
 - (c) Ability to perform accurate assessment of accommodation, near point of convergence and ocular alignment (far and near).
 - (d) Ability to assist the eye care provider (optometrist or ophthalmologist) with ophthalmic procedures.
 - (e) Ability to assist with obtaining accurate ocular cultures and smears.
 - (f) Knowledge and ability to provide advanced patient education for eye health and/or vision conditions.

(3) **Assignment.** Employee at this grade level serves as a full performance level health technician (optometry). The technicians perform duties such as measuring and recording visual acuity (with use of pinhole testing as indicated), obtaining accurate potential acuity meter, laser interferometry, contrast sensitivity or other specialized visual acuity measurements. The technicians also evaluate pupillary light responses and measure pupil size, determine the presence or absence of fusion and perform stereoacuity measurements. The health technicians (optometry) perform Amsler grid testing, administer eye drops under the supervision of an eye care provider (optometrist or ophthalmologist), perform basic tonometry (e.g., non-contact, Goldmann, Tono-Pen) and estimate the anterior chamber depth with a penlight or slit lamp biomicroscope. The technicians are skilled in properly reading a basic spectacle prescription using an automated or manual lensometer, obtaining accurate autorefractometry and keratometry measurements, performing confrontation and standard automated visual field testing and administering and scoring basic color vision tests (e.g., pseudoisochromatic plates, Farnsworth D-15). The technicians are also adept at measuring and recording corneal thickness by pachymetry as well as performance of advanced corneal measurements, exophthalmometry, tear testing and ocular imaging (e.g., stereo fundus, basic slit lamp biomicroscopy, intraocular lens master measurements, ocular ultrasonography, posterior segment optical coherence tomography, fundus autofluorescence and/or ocular angiography).

e. Health Technician (Optometry), GS-08

(1) **Experience.** One year of experience comparable to the next lower level which demonstrates the knowledge, skills and abilities related to the duties of the position to be filled.

(2) **Demonstrated Knowledge, Skills and Abilities.** In addition to meeting the experience or educational requirements for this grade level, the candidate must fully demonstrate the following KSAs:

(a) Ability to provide patient education and training to manage complex eye and vision conditions.

(b) Knowledge of advanced triage of patients depending upon level of urgency or optometry needs.

(c) Knowledge of complex, non-standard treatment and/or complex examinations and techniques.

(d) Knowledge of ocular pharmacology and systemic medications with ocular side effects.

(3) **Assignment.** For all assignments above the full performance level, the higher level duties must be of significant scope, administrative independence, complexity (difficulty) and range of variety as described in this standard at the specified grade level and be performed by the incumbent at least 25% of the

time. At the advanced level, the health technicians (optometry) perform difficult and responsible ophthalmic technology duties with considerable latitude for the exercise of independent judgment. The health technicians (optometry) perform duties such as advanced color vision testing, advanced perimetry including both automated and manual techniques, advanced ophthalmic imaging and diagnostic testing (e.g., anterior segment optical coherence tomography, advanced ultrasonography, confocal microscopy, electro-diagnostic testing, etc.), advanced patient education and training and vision rehabilitation services.

f. Lead Health Technician (Optometry), GS-08

- (1) **Experience.** One year of experience comparable to the next lower level which demonstrates the knowledge, skills and abilities related to the duties of the position to be filled.
- (2) **Demonstrated Knowledge, Skills and Abilities.** In addition to meeting the experience or educational requirements for this grade level, the candidate must fully demonstrate the following KSAs:
 - (a) Ability to assign, coordinate and oversee health technician (optometry) daily duties, tasks and other responsibilities as appropriate.
 - (b) Ability to provide and/or monitor staff education and training activities, including interdisciplinary training as necessary.
 - (c) Ability to manage and oversee eye clinic RME disinfection activities that include researching manufacturers' cleaning and disinfection recommendations, ordering appropriate RME related supplies, as well as ensuring health technician (optometry) clinic staff RME competency.
 - (d) Ability to address and resolve patient complaints and/or concerns and addressing patient health technician (optometry) relationships.
 - (e) Ability to develop and train health technicians (optometry) to ensure competency in performance of eye and vision care duties, activities and tasks.
- (3) **Assignment.** For all assignments above the full performance level, the higher level duties must be of significant scope, administrative independence, complexity (difficulty) and range of variety as described in this standard at the specified grade level and be performed by the incumbent at least 25% of the time. The lead health technician (optometry) carries additional responsibilities that involve the oversight of specific services within the eye clinic. The lead health technician (optometry) leads three or more health technician (optometry), GS-07 positions and assists with technician oversight duties by carrying out a combination of the following, or similar, duties sufficient to ensure work assignments are carried out by team members: making work assignments, monitoring work flow, providing input on performance and

maintaining efficient flow of patient care. The lead health technician (optometry) provides training to optometry staff, students and/or trainees and may provide input into special advancements, promotions and disciplinary actions.

g. Supervisory Health Technician (Optometry), GS-08

- (1) **Experience.** One year of experience comparable to the next lower level which demonstrates the knowledge, skills and abilities related to the duties of the position to be filled.
- (2) **Demonstrated Knowledge, Skills and Abilities.** In addition to meeting the experience or educational requirements for this grade level, the candidate must fully demonstrate the following KSAs:
 - (a) Ability to perform the full range of supervisory duties which would include responsibility for assignment of work to be performed, competency assessments, performance evaluations, selection of staff and recommendation of awards, advancements and when appropriate, disciplinary actions.
 - (b) Ability to analyze clinically appropriate data and make recommendations to optimize quality, efficiency, performance and productivity within the eye clinic.
 - (c) Advanced understanding of interdisciplinary issues and organizational structure to serve as liaison between optometry and other programs that would affect coordination of care, healthcare access, program evaluation, as well as assessment and planning for future need.
 - (d) Demonstrated leadership and managerial skills, including skill in interpersonal relations and conflict resolution, to deal with employees, team leaders and managers.
- (3) **Assignment.** For all assignments above the full performance level, the higher level duties must be of significant scope, administrative independence, complexity (difficulty) and range of variety as described in this standard at the specified grade level and be performed by the incumbent at least 25% of the time. This assignment is established for facilities with a clinical structure that does not include a lead and/or advanced level assignment(s). The supervisory health technicians (optometry) supervise, administratively manage and direct the health technician (optometry) clinical staff. Individuals in this position plan and direct programs at VA medical facility eye clinics and have supervisory responsibility for a staff of health technicians (optometry) up to the full performance level. Typically these duties include assigning and evaluating the work of subordinate staff, resolving problems which may interfere with patient examination or treatment, providing optometry services in more complex and non-standard cases, making recommendations which would improve clinic operations, participating in facility clinical training

programs as assigned, participating in selection of eye clinic staff applicants, evaluation of performance, taking disciplinary action when necessary and identifying educational or training needs. At this level, assignments include coordination of care, program evaluation and analysis, as well as budgetary issues and planning. The supervisors assure orientation and competency assessment of assigned health technician (optometry) clinic staff. The supervisors maintain interdepartmental relations with other services to accomplish VA medical facility goals.

h. Supervisory Health Technician (Optometry), GS-09

- (1) **Experience.** One year of experience comparable to the next lower level which demonstrates the knowledge, skills and abilities related to the duties of the position to be filled.
- (2) **Demonstrated Knowledge, Skills and Abilities.** In addition to meeting the experience or educational requirements for this grade level, the candidate must fully demonstrate the following KSAs:
 - (a) Ability to perform the full range of supervisory duties which would include responsibility for assignment of work to be performed, competency assessments, performance evaluations, selection of staff and recommendation of awards, advancements and when appropriate, disciplinary actions.
 - (b) Ability to analyze clinically appropriate data and make recommendations to optimize quality, efficiency, performance and productivity within the eye clinic.
 - (c) Advanced understanding of interdisciplinary issues and organizational structure to serve as liaison between optometry and other programs that would affect coordination of care, healthcare access, program evaluation, as well as assessment and planning for future need.
 - (d) Demonstrated leadership and managerial skills, including skill in interpersonal relations and conflict resolution, to deal with employees, team leaders and managers.
- (3) **Assignment.** For all assignments above the full performance level, the higher level duties must consist of significant scope, administrative independence, complexity (difficulty) and range of variety as described in this standard at the specified grade level and be performed by the incumbent at least 25% of the time. The supervisory health technicians (optometry) supervise, administratively manage and direct the health technician (optometry) clinical staff. Individuals at this level plan and direct programs at affiliated medical centers and their satellite outpatient clinics and have full supervisory responsibility for a large staff of non-supervisory personnel. Individuals in the position have supervisory responsibility for a staff of health technicians (optometry) up to the GS-08 grade level. Typically, these duties include

assigning and evaluating the work of subordinate staff, resolving problems which may interfere with patient examination or treatment, providing optometry services in more complex and non-standard cases, evaluating new products and equipment and making recommendations concerning developments which would improve operations; participating as an instructor in the facility's clinical training program, making selections based on recommendations from subordinates and/or other optometry personnel, evaluating performance, taking disciplinary action when necessary and identifying educational or training needs. At this level, assignments may include interagency coordination of care, program evaluation and analysis and budgetary issues and planning. The supervisors assure orientation and competency assessment of assigned staff. The supervisors maintain interdepartmental relations with other services to accomplish medical center goals.

6. DEVIATIONS.

- a. An approving official may, under unusual circumstances, approve reasonable deviations to the grade determination requirements for an employee whose composite record of accomplishments, performance and qualifications, as well as current assignment, warrants such action based on demonstrated competence to meet the requirements of the proposed grade.
- b. The placement of individuals in grade levels or assignments not described in this standard must be approved by the Under Secretary for Health in VHA Central Office prior to placement in the position.
- c. Under no circumstances will the educational or credential requirement be waived for those occupations with a positive education requirement, or when specific credentials are identified as necessary to meet minimum requirements.

RESPONSIBLE OFFICE: Human Resources and Administration/Operations, Security and Preparedness (HRA/OSP) (006), Office of the Chief Human Capital Officer (OCHCO) (05), Recruitment and Placement Policy Service (059)