

**OPTOMETRIST**  
**QUALIFICATION STANDARD**  
**Veterans Health Administration**

**1. COVERAGE.** Following are the overall requirements for appointment as an optometrist in VHA.

**2. SECTION A. BASIC REQUIREMENTS**

a. **Citizenship.** Citizen of the United States. (Noncitizens may be appointed when it is not possible to recruit qualified citizens in accordance with chapter 3, section A, paragraph 3g, this part.)

b. **Education.** Degree of doctor of optometry resulting from a course of education in optometry. The degree must have been obtained from one of the schools or colleges approved by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs for the year in which the course of study was completed. Approved schools are:

(1) United States and Canadian schools or colleges of optometry listed as accredited by the Council on Optometric Education of the American Optometric Association, in the list published for the year in which the course of study was completed.

(2) Schools (including foreign schools) accepted by the licensing body of a State, Territory, or Commonwealth of the United States, or in the District of Columbia as qualifying for full or unrestricted licensure.

c. **Licensure or Registration**

(1) **Optometrist (Except Residents).** Licensed to practice optometry in a State, Territory, or Commonwealth of the United States, or in the District of Columbia. Optometrists are required to possess full and unrestricted licensure and to maintain a current registration in their State of licensure if this is a requirement of the particular State. The facility Director may waive this requirement if the optometrist is to serve in a country other than the United States and the optometrist has licensure in that country.

(2) **Residents.** Licensure in a State, Territory, or Commonwealth of the United States, or in the District of Columbia before completion of the first year of VA residency. Unlicensed residents must meet any registration or other equivalent requirements established for optometric residents of non-VA facilities or optometry clinics with which the VA facility is affiliated for training purposes during the first year of VA residency.

(3) **Impaired Licensure.** An optometrist who has, or has ever had, any license(s) revoked, suspended, denied, restricted, limited, or issued/placed on a probationary status may be appointed only in accordance with the provisions of chapter 3, section B, paragraph 14, this part.

NOTE: Licensure may be waived by the Under Secretary for Health or designee in Central Office, for individuals in research or academic assignments involving no direct patient care in accordance with current regulations.

d. **Physical Standards.** See VA Directive and Handbook 5019.

e. **English Language Proficiency.** Optometrists appointed to direct patient-care positions must be proficient in spoken and written English as required by 38 U.S.C. 7402(d), and 7407(d).

**3. SECTION B. GRADE REQUIREMENTS.** In addition to the basic requirements stated above, the following qualifications criteria must be met in determining the appropriate grade assignment of candidates.

a. **Associate Grade.** None beyond the basic requirements.

b. **Full Grade.** Two years of optometric practice or its equivalent. One year of approved residency training or its creditable equivalent acceptable to the Council on Optometric Education of the American Optometric Association is acceptable in lieu of the 2 years of practice. Candidate must have demonstrated the professional competence and performance necessary to provide independently the full range of clinical optometric diagnosis and treatment for all the most prevalent types of vision dysfunctions and the detection and referral of patients with ocular disease or ocular manifestations of systemic disease.

c. **Intermediate Grade.** Meets the requirements in paragraphs (1), (2), and (3) below:

(1) Four years of optometric practice or its equivalent. One year of approved residency training or its creditable equivalent acceptable to the Council on Optometric Education of the American Optometric Association is acceptable in lieu of 2 years of practice.

(2) The optometrist at this level has successfully passed the examinations of the National Board of Examiners in Optometry and has attained either of the following:

(a) The stature that would warrant appointment at the clinical instructor or higher level at a school or college of optometry.

(b) The professional ability and personal attributes which have merited significant recognition by a recognized professional organization, such as election to a Fellowship in the American Academy of Optometry.

(3) Has achieved a high level of professional attainment as illustrated by one or more of the following examples:

(a) Is a recognized expert in the diagnosis and treatment of unusual and complicated visual dysfunctions. Typically, in this capacity serves as a consultant to optometrist and other professionals in other health facilities or provides expert clinical services in such areas as the partially sighted or contact lenses for aphasics.

(b) Has assumed responsibility for a multi-faceted optometric program including clinical

research and/or training requiring a high degree of competence and skill in developing innovative and new and advanced instrumentation and treatment techniques. Typically, the program is in an educationally affiliated health care facility having an optometric training program of moderate scope involving liaison with other medical services and affiliated schools.

(c) Has played a significant part in the conduct of vision research in a problem area of considerable scope and complexity which required novel approaches and which resulted in answers to important questions or important changes in existing methods and techniques. Publications authored by the optometrist are of considerable value to others in the individual's field. Typically, overall contributions are recognized by serving on important committees or other bodies in the profession.

(d) Has had full responsibility for carrying out an optometric training program of significant size in which the optometrist has been responsible for maintaining liaison with the affiliated school and other educational institutions and professional or scientific organizations. Innovative approaches in development of curriculum and course content and in expanding and improving the educational program have been displayed by the individual.

d. **Senior Grade.** Meets the requirements for Intermediate grade and the requirements in paragraphs (1) and (2) below:

(1) The optometrist at this level possesses such academic stature as would warrant a faculty appointment of a professional level in an approved school or college of optometry.

(2) Has demonstrated recognized superior professional attainment as evidenced by one or more of the following examples:

(a) Has served as a team leader in attacking major optometric problems affecting the continued provision of quality care health services at a VISN, statewide, or national level. There is such confidence in the optometrist at this level that there is unusual support of the individual's recommendations and conclusions.

(b) Has had responsibility for carrying out a major optometric program segment on a national level.

(c) Has conducted high level studies in a difficult area of vision research which has contributed to a substantial advance in the health field, with important professional publications.

e. **Chief Grade.** Meets the requirements for Senior grade and must demonstrate a sustained very high level of professional performance with evidence of exceptional professional and/or administrative development by the following:

(1) Has assumed substantial professional and/or administrative responsibilities in which the individual is expected to fully advise and make professional clinical and educational recommendations as to courses of action on problems and considerations of national scope in all areas of optometry. Typically, the optometrist at this level has had responsibility for a

major optometric program segment on a nationwide basis and has been consistently called upon to represent the organization in an authoritative manner in matters dealing with development of new and/or revised concepts and programs having a major impact upon the academic, medical, and optometric communities.

(2) Outstanding professional attainment. Examples of such attainment are:

(a) Achievement of outstanding results in research which are regarded as having a major impact on advancing the field.

(b) Significant number of noteworthy publications in professional journals.

**f. Optometric House Staff**

(1) **Residents (General Practice).** Meet requirements specified in section A.

(2) **Residents (Specialty).** Meet requirements specified in section A. In addition, must have completed at least 1 year of graduate level training in the health or other clinically related sciences or a suitable equivalent period of training, or (2) a general practice residency approved by the Council on Optometric Education of the American Optometric Association.

**g. Attendings**

(1) Meet all basic requirements specified in section A of this appendix.

(2) Possess a demonstrated satisfactory ability in optometry; be capable of assisting in maintaining accepted standards of professional optometric care in VA facilities; and be capable of accepting full responsibility for such proper care and treatment of their assigned patients.

(3) Be an outstanding member of the local optometry community of the caliber of a faculty member. Where the attending does not hold a faculty appointment at an affiliated optometry or other appropriate affiliated school or college, this would be evidenced by recommendation of the Deans Committee or equivalent body. The attending is capable of giving adequate training to optometric residents or students in facilities conducting residency and/or training programs and be sufficiently qualified so as to be capable to appropriate review committees for the direction of training.

**h. Consultants**

(1) Meet all basic requirements specified in section A of this appendix.

(2) Possess truly outstanding professional clinical ability in optometry; be capable of affording the facility Director and appropriate Chief of Service the benefits of their professional experience and counsel; and be capable of rendering such professional optometric services as may be required in maintaining the highest possible level of medical care in VA facilities.

(3) Be capable, when applicable, to serve as the didactic representatives of optometric or

other appropriate affiliated schools or colleges and to accept responsibility for, and direction of, the educational training of optometric residents or students (if present) in their specialty in which they serve as the consultant at facilities conducting residency and student training programs. Consultants not holding faculty appointments at an affiliated optometry or other appropriate school or college should possess the equivalent professional qualifications as evidenced by an appropriate recommendation for appointment from the Deans Committee or equivalent body responsible for the recommendation of consultant appointments to the facility.

**4. SECTION C. DEVIATION.** The appointing official may, under unusual circumstances, approve reasonable deviations to the grade determination requirements for optometrists whose composite record of accomplishments, performance, and qualifications warrant such action based on demonstrated competence to meet the requirements of the proposed grade.

**Authority: 38 U.S.C. 7304; 7402.**

**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)