



TRAIL VISION CARE CLINIC  
OPTOMETRISTS \*

The privacy of your personal information is important to us. We are committed to collecting, using and disclosing personal information responsibly and only to the extent necessary for the optometric services and products that we provide. We also try to be open and transparent as to how we handle personal information. This page describes our privacy policies.

### **EFFECTIVE DATE AND CHANGES**

We are required to follow the terms of this privacy policy while it is in effect. We reserve the right to modify this policy at any time, and the revised privacy policy will apply to all protected health information that we already have as well as to such information that we may generate in the future. This policy came into effect on January 1, 2022. If we change the privacy policy, we will post the amendments in our office and have copies available.

### **WHAT IS PERSONAL INFORMATION?**

Personal information is information about an identifiable individual. This includes information that relates to an individual's personal characteristics (e.g., gender, age, income, home address, phone number, ethnic background, family status), their health (e.g., health history, health conditions, health services received by them) or their activities and views (e.g., religion, politics, opinions expressed by an individual, an opinion or an evaluation of an individual).

Personal information is not the same as business information (e.g., an individual's business address and telephone number), which is not protected by privacy legislation.

### **WHO WE ARE**

**Trail Vision Care Clinic** includes any optometrist or health care professional, employee or other staff or student trainee authorized to collect, use or disclose personal information. We use a number of consultants and agencies that may, in the course of their duties, have limited access to personal information we hold. These include, but are not limited to, computer consultants, office security and maintenance providers, bookkeepers and accountants, temporary workers to cover holidays, credit card companies, collection agencies, website managers, cleaners and lawyers. We restrict their access to any personal information we hold as much as is reasonably possible. We also have their assurance that they follow appropriate privacy principles.

### **PRIMARY PURPOSES FOR COLLECTING PERSONAL INFORMATION ABOUT PATIENTS**

**Trail Vision Care Clinic** collects, uses and discloses personal information in order to serve our patients. For our patients, the primary purpose for collecting personal information is to provide optometric services. For example, we collect information about a patient's health history, including their family history, physical condition and function in



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social situations in order to help us assess what their eye care needs are, to advise them of their options and then to provide the eye care they choose to have.

We may communicate this information to other regulated health practitioners, technicians, or individuals authorized to work in our practice as part of a patient's continuing care.

We also collect this information to obtain a baseline of health and social information so that, in providing ongoing health services, we can identify changes that are occurring over time. It would be rare for us to collect information without the patient's implied consent, but this might occur in an emergency (e.g., the patient cannot communicate) or where we believe the patient would consent if asked and it is impractical to obtain consent (e.g., a family member passing a message on from our patient and we have no reason to believe the message is not genuine).

### **INFORMATION ABOUT MEMBERS OF THE GENERAL PUBLIC**

For the members of the general public, our primary purposes for collecting personal information are to make them aware of optometry services in general or our practice in particular, or to provide notice of special events (e.g., a seminar or vision screening). For example, while we try to use work contact information where possible, we might collect home addresses, fax numbers and email addresses, but not without consent. On our website we collect, with the exception of cookies, only the personal information you provide and use that information only for the purpose for which you gave it to us (e.g., to respond to your email message, to order contact lenses, to request an eye examination appointment). Cookies are used only to help you navigate our website and are not used to monitor you.

### **INFORMATION ABOUT CONTRACT STAFF, VOLUNTEERS AND STUDENTS**

For people who are contracted to do work for us (e.g., temporary workers), our primary purpose for collecting personal information is to ensure we can contact them in the future (e.g., for new assignments) and for necessary work-related communication (e.g., sending out pay cheques and year-end tax receipts). Examples of the type of personal information we collect for these purposes include home addresses and telephone numbers. It is rare for us to collect such information without prior consent, but it might happen in the case of a health emergency or to investigate a possible breach of law (e.g., if a theft were to occur in the office). If contract staff, volunteers or students wish a letter of reference or an evaluation, we will collect information about their work-related performance and provide a report as authorized by them.

### **SECONDARY PURPOSES FOR COLLECTING PERSONAL INFORMATION**

Like most organizations, we also collect, use and disclose information for purposes related to or secondary to our primary purposes.

The most common examples of our related and secondary purposes are as follows:

- To invoice patients for optometric services, products or treatments that were not paid for at the time the services were provided, to process credit card payments or to



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collect unpaid accounts, either directly by us or through a collection agency or attorney. The cost of some optometric services, products or treatments provided by us to patients is paid for by third parties (e.g., MSP, private insurance, various social assistance programs). These third-party players often have your consent or legislative authority to direct us to collect and disclose to them certain information in order to demonstrate a patient's entitlement to this funding.

- To advise patients (by telephone, mail or email) that their vision and eye care needs or treatment should be reviewed (e.g., to schedule their next appointment, to ensure their eye glasses and/or contact lenses are still functioning properly and appropriate for their current needs, and to consider modifications or replacement).
- To advise patients, prospective patients, and others of special events or opportunities (e.g., a seminar, development of a new service, arrival of a new product) that we have available.
- **Trail Vision Care Clinic** reviews patient and other files for the purpose of administration, business planning and ensuring that we provide high-quality services, including assessing the performance of our staff. In addition, external consultants (e.g., auditors, lawyers, practice consultants, quality-assurance program specialist) may, on our behalf, do audits and continuing quality-improvement reviews of our practice, including reviewing patient files and interviewing our staff. In rare cases, our practice or our consultants may make inquiries to verify that the information we have about you is accurate.
- Because optometrists are regulated by the College of Optometrists of British Columbia, that organization may inspect our records and interview our staff as part of their regulatory activities in the public interest. In addition, as professionals, we will report serious misconduct, incompetence or incapacity of other practitioner, whether they belong to other organizations or our own. Also, our practice believes that it should report information suggesting serious illegal behaviour to the authorities. Sometimes, these reports include personal information about our patients or other individuals to support the concern (e.g., improper services). Also, various government agencies (e.g., Canada Customs and Revenue Agency, Information and Privacy Commissioner, Human Right Commission) have the authority to review our files and interview our staff as part of their mandates. In those circumstances, we may consult with professionals (e.g., lawyers, accountants) who will investigate the matter and report back to us. External regulators have their own strict privacy obligations.
- Patients or other individuals we deal with may have questions about our products or services after they have been received. We also provide ongoing optometric services for many of our patients over a period of months or years for which previous records are helpful. We retain our patient information for a minimum of 10 years after the last contact to enable us to respond to those questions and provide these services (the College of Optometrists of British Columbia also requires us to retain our patient records).
- If **Trail Vision Care Clinic** or its assets were to be sold, the prospective purchaser would want to conduct a "due diligence" review of the practice records to ensure that



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it is a viable business that has been honestly portrayed to the prospective purchaser. This due diligence may involve some review that may include releasing personal information. The prospective purchaser would not be allowed to remove or record personal information and, before being permitted to review clinical files and records, the prospective purchaser would be required to provide a written promise to keep all personal information confidential. Only reputable purchasers who have already agreed to purchase the practice or its assets would be provided, at closing, complete access to personal information. The purchaser would be required to maintain the same principles of privacy as established under the present privacy legislation.

You can choose not to be part of some of these related or secondary purposes (e.g., by declining to receive notices of special events or opportunities, or by paying for your services in advance). We do not, however, have much choice about some of these related or secondary purposes (e.g., those relating to external regulation).

### **HOW WE PROTECT PERSONAL INFORMATION**

We understand the importance of protecting personal information. For that reason, we have taken the following steps:

- Employees, including temporary staff, are trained to collect, use and disclose personal information only as necessary to fulfill their duties and in accordance with our privacy policy.
- Paper information is used either under supervision or secured in a locked or restricted area.
- Electronic hardware is used either under supervision or secured in a locked or restricted area at all times. In addition, passwords are used on computers.
- Paper information is transmitted through sealed, addressed envelopes, boxed by reputable companies or collected by the patient who asks for the information.
- Electronic information is transmitted either through a direct line or is anonymized or encrypted.
- Personal information that is provided verbally is collected and used in such a manner that the information is not overheard by persons other than the patient or the practice members.
- External consultants and agencies with access to personal information must enter into privacy agreements with us.

### **RETENTION AND DESTRUCTION OF PERSONAL INFORMATION**

We need to retain personal information for some time to ensure that we can answer any questions you might have about the services we provided to you and for our own accountability to external regulatory bodies.

We keep our patient files and records for as long as necessary for you to access the information. We keep any personal information relating to our general correspondence (i.e., with people who are not patients) newsletters, seminars and marketing activities for about six months after the newsletter ceases publication or a seminar or marketing activity is over.



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You can ask us, in writing, to restrict our uses and disclosures of personal information at any time. We will also discontinue to use or to disclose your personal information after a written revocation of your implied or informed consent is received, unless we have already acted upon this consent. Please note that we are required by regulation to retain clinical records of your care for a minimum of 10 years.

We destroy paper files containing personal information by shredding. We destroy electronic information by deleting it and, when the hardware is discarded, we ensure that information on the hard drive is destroyed. Alternatively, we may send some of the entire patient file to the patient.

### **YOU CAN LOOK AT YOUR INFORMATION**

With only a few exceptions, you have the right to see what personal information we hold about you. Often, all you have to do is ask. We can help you identify what records we might have about you, and we will assist you with access to this information, if necessary. We will also try to help you understand any information you do not understand (e.g., short forms, technical language). If we do not know you, we will need to confirm your identity before providing you with access. We reserve the right to charge a nominal fee for such requests. An estimate of the fee will be provided to you in advance.

We may ask you to put your request in writing. If we cannot give you access, we will tell you within 30 days, if at all possible, and tell you the reason, as best we can, why we cannot give you access. If you are not satisfied with our explanation, you have the right to complain to a privacy commissioner appointed under a provincial act, such as the Information and Privacy Commissioner of British Columbia. The process for a complaint is explained below.

If you believe there is a mistake in the information we have about you, you have the right to ask for it to be corrected. You may be required to make the request in writing. This applies to factual information and not to any professional opinions we may have formed. We may ask you to provide documentation that our files are incorrect. Where we made a mistake, we will make the correction and notify anyone to whom we sent this information. If we do not agree that we have made a mistake, we will include in our file a brief statement from you on the point and we will forward that statement to anyone who received the earlier information. If you do not agree with our reasons for refusing to correct your records, you can make a complaint to the provincial privacy commissioner.