



THIS EDITION'S TOPICS

1. INTRODUCTION
2. THE THEME
3. OPENING CEREMONY
4. SPEAKERS
5. ACADEMIC PROGRAMME
6. THE STUDENT TRACK
7. CAMPSIDE STORIES
8. THE EXHIBITION
9. THE COCKTAIL EVENING
10. GALA EVENING
11. THE AWARDS: 2026
12. CLOSING CEREMONY
13. EXHIBITOR AWARDS
14. DRAWS AND PRIZES
15. TRIBUTE TO THE EDUCATION AND CLINICAL STANDARDS COMMITTEE
16. THE ORGANISING COMMITTEE
17. TEAM SAOA
18. CONCLUDING REMARKS
19. ANNOUNCEMENTS

INTRODUCTION

After 18 months of intensive planning, dedication, and preparation, the SAOA Conference and Exhibition 2026 was transformed from a vision and aspiration into a remarkable reality. Bringing together 670 delegates from across South Africa, the event provided a unique platform for learning, collaboration, networking, and celebration of the optometric profession.

This edition of **News Flash** seeks to capture the spirit, energy, and memorable moments of what can undoubtedly be regarded as a highly successful conference and exhibition. While no publication can fully convey the enthusiasm, camaraderie, and sense of purpose that characterised the event, the following pages offer a glimpse into a gathering that reflected the profession's commitment to embracing "A Whole New World - With 2030 in Sight."

THE THEME

“A Whole New World – With 2030 In Sight” reflects a vision of embracing change, innovation, and opportunity while remaining focused on the future of the profession and the healthcare landscape as we approach the year 2030.

The theme acknowledges that we are operating in an era of rapid transformation driven by advances in technology, evolving patient expectations, changing healthcare systems, and emerging ethical and professional challenges. It encourages practitioners not merely to react to change, but to actively shape the future.

At the same time, **“With 2030 In Sight”** serves as a reminder that our decisions today will influence the profession we hand to the next generation. It calls for strategic thinking, foresight, leadership, collaboration, and a commitment to excellence in patient care.

In essence, the theme is an invitation to:

- Embrace innovation while upholding professional values.
- Anticipate future healthcare trends and challenges.
- Strengthen collaboration across the profession.
- Prepare for a rapidly changing practice environment.
- Ensure that patient-centred, ethical care remains at the heart of everything we do.
- Build a sustainable and thriving future for optometry and eye care by 2030 and beyond.

“A Whole New World – With 2030 In Sight is both a celebration of possibility and a call to action: to imagine the future, prepare for it, and help create it.”

OPENING CEREMONY



The Opening Ceremony, skilfully facilitated by SAOA CEO, Harry Rosen, set an inspiring and memorable tone for the conference. Highlights included:

- The South African National Anthem, beautifully performed by the talented **Lesley Jay**, whose stirring rendition united delegates in a moment of pride and reflection.
- An inspiring **Welcome Address** by **SAOA President, Nivien Subramany**, who warmly welcomed delegates and outlined the vision for the days ahead.
- A powerful **Keynote Address** by **Professor Lawrence Sithole**, Chairperson of the Professional Board for Optometry and Dispensing Opticians, who challenged delegates to embrace innovation, leadership, and excellence in eye care.

The Opening Ceremony concluded on a high note with an outstanding performance of the classic song *500 Miles*, specially adapted to reflect the journey, achievements, and enduring commitment of the SAOA. The creative rendition brought both enthusiasm and a sense of unity to the audience, providing a fitting and uplifting start to the conference.

SPEAKERS

We extend our deepest appreciation to all our distinguished speakers, both local and international, whose expertise, insights, and generosity enriched this conference immeasurably. Your thought-provoking presentations, engaging discussions, and willingness to share knowledge inspired meaningful dialogue and fostered valuable learning opportunities for all participants. We are especially grateful for the time, effort, and commitment you invested in contributing to the success of this event. Your diverse perspectives and experiences have broadened our understanding, strengthened professional connections, and helped make this conference a truly memorable and impactful occasion. Thank you for your outstanding contributions and for helping us advance our shared goals and aspirations.

[CLICK HERE TO VIEW OUR CONFERENCE SPEAKERS](#)

ACADEMIC PROGRAMME



The Academic Programme formed the cornerstone of the conference, delivering a rich and diverse educational experience designed to challenge thinking, expand knowledge, and inspire future-focused practice. Renowned local and international speakers shared their expertise across a broad spectrum of clinical, professional, technological, and ethical topics, ensuring content of relevance to practitioners at every stage of their careers.

Aligned with the conference theme, **"A Whole New World - With 2030 In Sight,"** presentations explored emerging trends, advances in eye care, innovations in technology, changing healthcare landscapes, and the ethical considerations that will shape the profession in the years ahead. Delegates actively engaged in stimulating discussions, insightful question-and-answer sessions, and thought-

provoking debates, creating an environment of both learning and collaboration.

Beyond the acquisition of knowledge, the programme encouraged attendees to reflect on their role in shaping the future of eye care, equipping them with practical insights and renewed inspiration to navigate an evolving professional landscape.

THE STUDENT TRACK



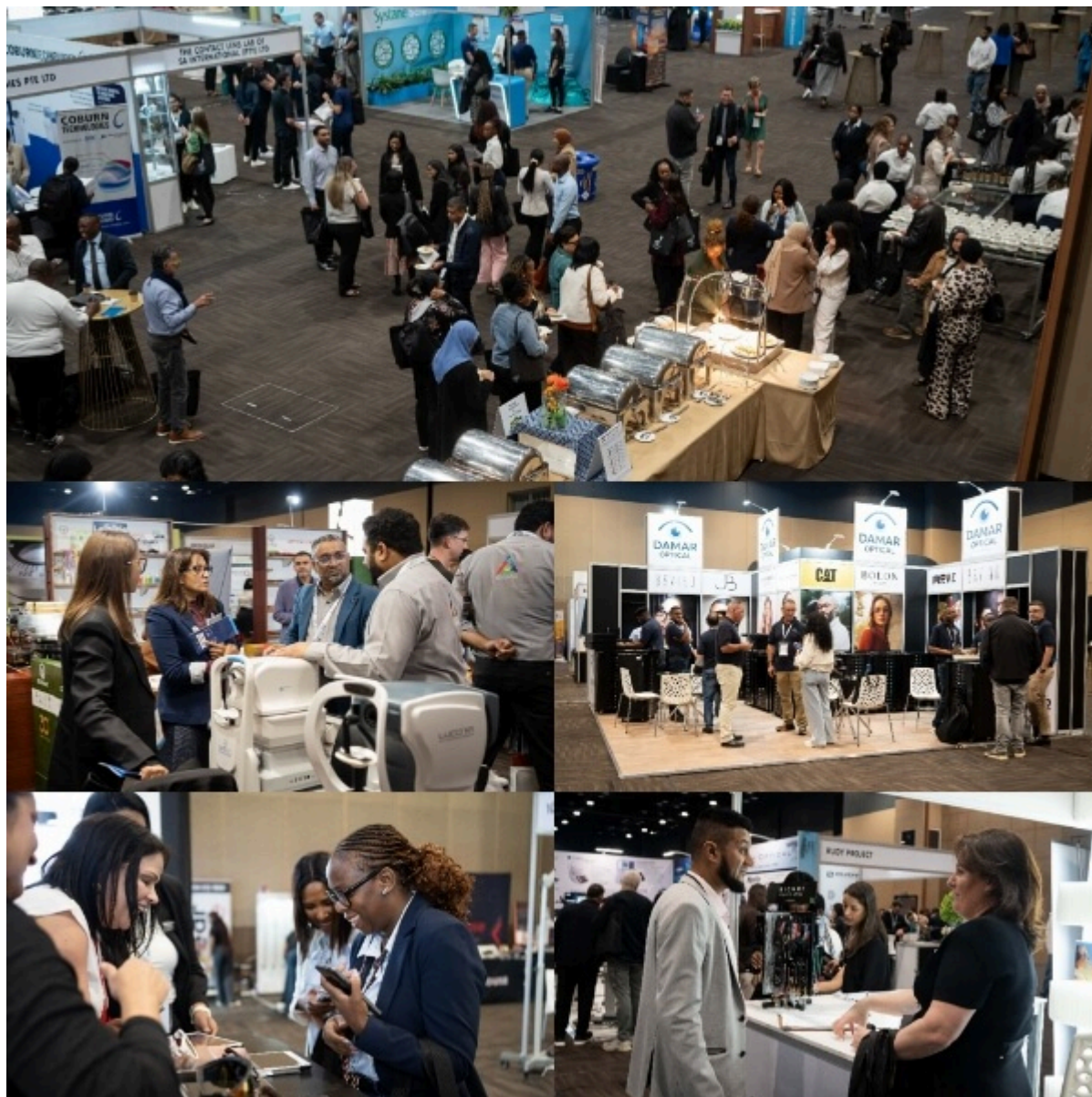
A particularly encouraging feature of the conference was the introduction of the South African Optometric Students Association (SAOSA), which represents the future of the profession. SAOSA is envisaged to play a vital role in fostering leadership, professional development, advocacy, and collaboration among optometry students across South Africa's institutions of higher learning. By creating opportunities for engagement with practitioners, educators, industry partners, and professional bodies, the Association will help bridge the gap between academic training and professional practice. The presence and contributions of students at the conference served as a powerful reminder that the sustainability, growth, and continued relevance of optometry depend on investing in and empowering the next generation of eye care professionals who will shape the future of the profession in the years leading to 2030 and beyond.

CAMPSIDE STORIES



Campside Stories was a standout innovation of the SAOA Conference and Exhibition 2026, providing a refreshing and highly engaging platform for practitioners to share real-life experiences, challenges, insights, and memorable moments from the world of eye care. Through authentic storytelling, delegates gained practical wisdom that often extends beyond textbooks and lecture halls, illustrating the human side of clinical practice and patient care. This interactive track fostered connection, learning, reflection, and inspiration, reminding delegates that some of the profession's most valuable lessons are learned through shared experiences and the journeys of colleagues.

THE EXHIBITION



The Exhibition provided a vibrant and dynamic hub of innovation, networking, and industry engagement. Bringing together leading organisations, suppliers, manufacturers, and service providers, the exhibition showcased the latest products, technologies, equipment, and professional solutions available to the optometric community.

Throughout the event, delegates had the opportunity to engage directly with exhibitors, explore emerging technologies, experience product demonstrations, and gain valuable insights into developments that are transforming patient care and practice management. The exhibition floor buzzed with energy as meaningful conversations fostered new partnerships, strengthened existing relationships, and created opportunities for future collaboration.

The Exhibition not only complemented the academic content of the conference but also highlighted the important partnership between the profession and industry. Together, they demonstrated a shared commitment to advancing eye care and embracing the opportunities presented by a rapidly changing world.

Collectively, the Academic Programme and Exhibition exemplified the conference theme, providing delegates with both the knowledge and the tools required to approach 2030 with confidence, optimism, and a renewed sense of purpose.

THE COCKTAIL EVENING



The Cocktail Evening marked the beginning of many meaningful conversations, bringing together colleagues, industry partners, and friends in a relaxed and engaging atmosphere. It provided the perfect opportunity for networking, collaboration, and the exchange of ideas, while celebrating the sense of unity that defines the profession.

GALA EVENING



The Gala Evening served as the social highlight of the conference, bringing delegates together for a memorable celebration of excellence, friendship, and professional achievement. Filled with warmth, laughter, entertainment, and reflection, the evening showcased the strength of the optometric community and reinforced the relationships that continue to shape the future of eye care in South Africa and beyond.

THE AWARDS: 2026

Recognition of excellence through awards serves an important purpose within any profession, organisation, or community. Awards celebrate achievement, acknowledge dedication, and shine a

spotlight on individuals whose commitment, innovation, leadership, or service has made a meaningful difference. They not only honour recipients but also inspire others to strive for higher standards, embrace excellence, and contribute positively to the advancement of their profession. In this way, awards become more than symbols of achievement; they reinforce values, encourage aspiration, and help build a culture of excellence.

At the same time, the presentation of awards can occasionally be accompanied by disappointment from those who may have anticipated a different outcome or who had nominated other deserving candidates. Such reactions are understandable, particularly where nominees are held in high regard and have made valuable contributions. However, it is important to recognise that the existence of multiple worthy candidates is itself a reflection of the strength and vibrancy of the profession. Award adjudication processes are seldom easy, and decisions are made after careful consideration of established criteria and the merits of all nominations received. While not every deserving individual can be recognised on a particular occasion, the contributions of all nominees remain valued, respected, and worthy of appreciation. True professionalism lies not only in celebrating success but also in graciously acknowledging the achievements of others.

The Awards Committee, comprising **Enrique Nzula (Chair)**, **Kairav Mahabeer**, and **Nazimah Khan**, carefully considered all nominations received across the award categories listed below.

These awards recognise individuals for the period 2025/2026 whose contributions exemplify the spirit of selfless service, dedication, and commitment to advancing the interests of the Association and/or the professions of optometry and dispensing opticians.

Following a thorough review of the nominations, the Committee was pleased to present the recipients of the following awards, announced by SAOA CEO, Harry Rosen, and presented to each by SAOA President, Nivien Subramany.

The Distinguished Service Award

Dollars Boloka and Martelie Burger



A decoration awarded in recognition of exceptionally meritorious service involving the discharge of duties of significant responsibility and outstanding contribution to the Association and/or the profession.



The Certificate of Tribute

Ntombi Zitha

A formal acknowledgement intended to convey respect, admiration, and recognition for sustained commitment and service.



The Certificate of Appreciation

Michelle Naidoo

A gesture of gratitude and recognition for valuable contributions and support.



The Certificate of Merit

Frederik Jansen

Recognition of exemplary community-orientated initiatives, service, or achievements that merit special commendation.



President's Discretionary Award

Carel Masemola

A special recognition award conferred at the discretion of the SAOA President, in consultation with the Chief Executive Officer and the Board, to acknowledge exceptional contributions that have materially advanced the interests, standing, development, or strategic objectives of the South African Optometric Association and/or the professions of Optometry and Dispensing Opticianry.

Honorary Membership Awards



In accordance with its Constitution, the South African Optometric Association (SAOA) has, for more than four decades, recognised the significant contributions and influence of Heads of Optometry and Dispensing Departments in shaping the future of the profession through the education, mentorship, and development of our students.

To acknowledge this important role, the SAOA bestows Honorary Membership upon the Head of Department at each of the five academic institutions offering optometric education in South Africa. These appointments are reviewed annually.

It is therefore a privilege to present Honorary Membership for 2026 to the respective Heads of Department in recognition of their ongoing dedication and contribution to the advancement of optometry and dispensing opticianry, and the development of future generations of practitioners.

CLOSING CEREMONY



The conference concluded with a well-attended closing ceremony chaired by SAOA Finance Director, **Enrique Nzula**, who reflected on the success of the event and expressed appreciation to all those who contributed to its delivery.

Special tributes were paid to the Organising Committee, the Education and Clinical Standards Committee, the Professional Conference Organiser (PCO), exhibitors, sponsors, speakers, and delegates whose commitment ensured a highly successful meeting. The session also featured prize draws and the announcement of the winners of the Exhibitor Exhibition Competition, bringing the conference to an engaging and celebratory close.

EXHIBITOR AWARDS



To our exhibitors, thank you for the exceptional standard of your exhibits and for the professionalism, innovation, and commitment you brought to the SAOA Conference and Exhibition 2026.

The exhibition floor showcased a world-class display of products, services, technology, and expertise, reflecting the strength, progress, and vision of a high-calibre optometric industry. Your exhibits not only

attracted and engaged delegates but also highlighted the vital role that industry partners play in advancing eye care in South Africa.

The overall standard was so impressively high that it presented the judges with a particularly difficult task in selecting the recipients of the exhibition awards. The closeness of the competition was a testament to the creativity, quality, and effort invested by all exhibitors.

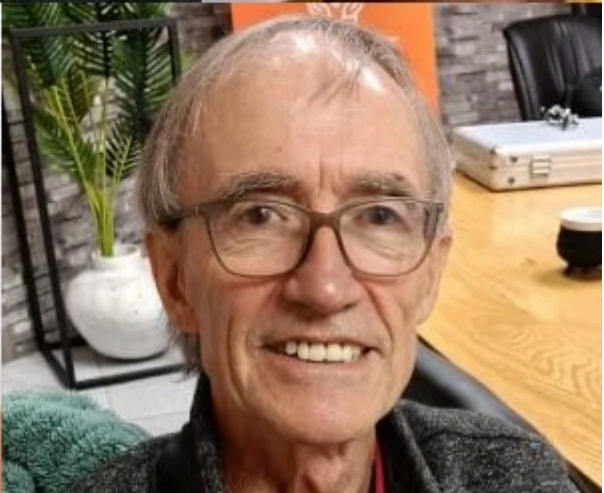
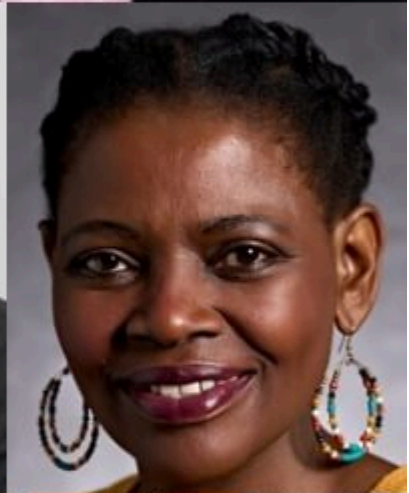
We extend our sincere appreciation to every exhibitor for contributing to an exhibition experience that was informative, inspiring, and truly representative of a proud and progressive optometric profession. Thank you for helping to make this event an outstanding success.

DRAWS AND PRIZES

The inclusion of competitions and prize draws at a conference significantly enhances participant engagement, interaction, and overall event experience. Competitions encourage active involvement, foster healthy networking opportunities, and stimulate the exchange of ideas among attendees. Prize draws, on the other hand, create excitement and anticipation, helping to maintain high levels of participation throughout the event. These activities can also increase attendance at key sessions, encourage visits to exhibition booths, and strengthen relationships between delegates, sponsors, and organizers. By creating a dynamic and interactive environment, competitions and draws contribute to a more memorable conference experience while supporting the conference's objectives of knowledge sharing, collaboration, and stakeholder engagement. We acknowledge and thank the sponsors of various competitions and draws, and congratulate the respective winners.



TRIBUTE TO THE EDUCATION AND CLINICAL STANDARDS COMMITTEE



[Click here](#) to read tribute by the EDCS Chairperson, Prof. Nabeela Hasrod.

THE ORGANISING COMMITTEE



[Click here](#) to read tribute presented by SAOA President, Nivien Subramany.

TEAM SAOA



CONCLUDING REMARKS

As we reflect on the remarkable success of the SAOA Conference and Exhibition 2026, we do so with a deep sense of gratitude, pride, and appreciation. What began as a vision more than 18 months ago evolved into an exceptional gathering of professionals, partners, exhibitors, and stakeholders united by a shared commitment to advancing optometry and embracing *A Whole New World – With 2030 In Sight*.

The outstanding attendance, world-class scientific programme, vibrant exhibition, memorable social events, and countless opportunities for learning, collaboration, and inspiration are a testament to the collective efforts of many dedicated individuals and organisations. We extend our sincere thanks to our delegates, speakers, sponsors, exhibitors, industry partners, service providers, organising committee, Board of Directors, volunteers, and SAOA staff, whose unwavering support, professionalism, expertise, and commitment contributed to an event of the highest calibre. Together, you transformed this conference from an ambitious concept into an unforgettable reality, leaving a lasting legacy for the profession and setting a new benchmark for excellence. We thank each and every one of you for being part of this extraordinary journey.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

REGISTER ON GLUE-UP

REMINDER: Members are urged to please register on the glue-up platform and create their profiles. To register your account, [click here](#).

MEMBER BENEFITS

For a comprehensive list of member benefits [click here](#).

For a comprehensive list of value-added member benefits [click here](#).

QUESTIONS, COMMENTS OR CONCERNS CAN BE DIRECTED TO:

Harry Rosen - ceo@saoa.co.za | 084 482 4517

Please be assured that conversations relating to personal circumstances will be regarded as private and confidential.



Copyright © 2026 South African Optometric Association, All rights reserved.

Want to change how you receive these emails?

You can [update your preferences](#) or [unsubscribe from this list](#).

