The Eyeball Summit 2025: A Landmark Event in Nigeria's Eye Health Sector

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The Eyeball Summit 2025, organized by the **Optometrists and Dispensing Opticians Registration Board of Nigeria (ODORBN)**, marked a pivotal moment for the future of Optometry and eye care in Nigeria.

ODORBN, a statutory regulatory body established in **1989,** operates under the **Federal Ministry of Health**. It is tasked with regulating the Optometrists and Dispensing Opticians' education and professional practice across the country.

ODORBN plays a vital role in safeguarding public health and maintaining the profession's integrity by ensuring that only certified professionals deliver eye care services. OPTOGLOBE was invited to attend ODORBN's 2025 Eyeball Summit held **in Abuja** from **May 15–16, 2025.** The summit, which was targeted at high-level stakeholders and decision-makers in Nigeria's eye care ecosystem, recognized the importance of youth inclusion in policy-making spaces. As an increasingly recognized global voice for Optometry students, OPTOGLOBE's participation in the Summit set the tone for deeper student engagement in shaping the future of eye health advocacy and education in Nigeria and beyond.

The Eyeball Summit

With the theme **"Shaping the Future of Eye Care in Nigeria: Strengthening Systems Through Strategic Alliances,"** the Summit focused on fostering collaboration, refining referral pathways, promoting professional development, and exploring key investment opportunities in the eye care industry.



With a population exceeding 200 million, Nigeria faces a critical shortage in its eye care workforce. As of 2025, Nigeria has approximately 6,000 licensed Optometrists, with over 80% working in the private sector and only around 20% in public healthcare facilities. The number of Ophthalmologists ranges around 700, and estimates suggest there may be around 2,000 ophthalmic nurses currently in practice. There are approximately 462 registered Optician establishments;

however, this number represents businesses rather than individual practitioners. The existing Nigerian eye care workforce falls below the World Health Organization's recommendations.

The Summit helped underscore the urgent need for strategic investment in training and retaining eye care professionals to strengthen Nigeria's capacity to deliver accessible, high-quality, and affordable vision care services.

Key Discussions and Insights

An enabling policy environment

A major highlight of the Summit was the **keynote address by Dr. Iziaq Salako**, Honorable Minister of State for Health and Social Welfare, who unveiled a suite of transformative initiatives to strengthen eye care delivery in Nigeria. At the core of his announcement was the **launch of a nationwide, fully subsidized eye care program** under the **Renewed Hope Health Connect** initiative.



Honorable Dr. Iziaq Salako
Minister of State for Health and Social Welfare of Nigeria announcing the Jigi Bola 2.0 Program

This landmark program, to be implemented through a revitalized **Jigi Bola 2.0**[1], aims to provide **free vision screenings, treatment of eye conditions, cataract surgeries, and prescription glasses** to vulnerable Nigerians—particularly those in underserved and remote communities. The **2025 national budget includes full funding** for the program, underscoring the federal government's commitment to reducing avoidable blindness and improving access to quality eye care.

[1] The **Jigi Bola 2.0** initiative was inspired by the original **Lagos-based Jigi Bola programme**, which provided free eye screenings and prescription glasses, and significantly improved vision health outcomes in Lagos State since the early 2000s. Its **expansion to a national scale** is expected to deliver similar success across the country—bridging care gaps, especially for the rural and urban poor, and supporting the fight against preventable vision impairment.

Dr Salako further announced the official rollout of the **National Eye and Ear Health Program**, a strategic policy intervention to **integrate Optometry and broader eye care services into Nigeria's primary healthcare system**. Through this program **community health workers and nurses will be trained** to detect and refer eye-related conditions, significantly expanding access to timely and professional eye care at the grassroots level.

These initiatives complement the objectives of the **National Eye Health Policy**, which advocates for equitable, comprehensive, and accessible eye care services for all Nigerians. Dr. Salako emphasized the importance of **multi-sectoral collaboration**, calling on professional associations, NGOs, community leaders, and the private sector to work together in closing gaps in **training, infrastructure, and service delivery.** He expressed hope that the Summit would help lay the foundation for a **resilient, inclusive, and sustainable national eye care system**.

These policy announcements are expected to consolidate **Optometry's role in public health**, paving the way for new roles and opportunities for optometrists within primary care settings.

The Summit also featured discussions about referral pathways -mono or bi-directional when appropriate- and the influence of inter-professional rivalry in referral pathways.

Concerns were raised regarding the limited visibility and recognition of the optometric profession in Nigeria. This was illustrated by the exclusion of Optometry faculties and students from the Nigerian Federal Government's **TETFund** (Tertiary Education Trust Fund) initiative, which recently allocated ₦110 billion (about US$ 69 million) to train students from medicine, dentistry, pharmacy, and nursing across 18 universities, leaving out optometry entirely. With fewer than 50 institutions offering Optometry programs and an estimated 1.3 million blind people in Nigeria, the Summit discussed the need for increased institutional support, stronger collaboration with other health professions and policymakers, and an urgent review of the national Optometry curriculum.

Another important discussion focused on mental health and stress, emphasizing the emotional toll of clinical work and the importance of mental health awareness in the eye care profession.

Investment and Business Development in Optometry

Recognizing that the high cost of optical products, largely driven by import duties and logistics-related expenses, poses a challenge, the Summit explored strategies such as attracting direct investment and identifying venture capital.

Moses Adetoro, OPTOGLOBE delegate and Founder of MedicPreneur, passionately advocated for business education to be integrated into Optometry academic curricula. Moses emphasized that professionals and students alike must be equipped with entrepreneurial knowledge, ensuring a well-rounded approach to eye care and business sustainability.

Strengthening optometric education

ODORBN appointed a new Accreditation Committee tasked with evaluating and accrediting Optometry schools across the country. The Board Examiners Committee was also constituted to uphold professional standards through rigorous assessments.

Ensuring action after the Summit

ODORBN established a dedicated multistakeholder committee to follow up on the outcomes of the Eyeball Summit 2025 and to provide ongoing feedback.

The Summit was a catalyst for transformative change, where stakeholders pledged to:

- Strengthen interdisciplinary collaboration.
- Deepen investment in eye care infrastructure.
- Enhance policy alignment and strategic alliances.



OPTOGLOBE leaders with Prof. Ebeigbe, Head of the Optometry Program at the University of Benin
From left: Adeboye Adetona, Abasiofon Ita, Prof Ebeigbe, Moses Adetoro, Pemije Gadimoh.

The event concluded with a dinner, and Lifetime Achievement Awards were conferred on distinguished professionals who have practiced for forty years, recognizing their enduring contributions to the advancement of eye care in Nigeria. A solemn moment of silence was observed in honor of the **late Dr. Uduak Udom, past President of the World Council of Optometry**, whose legacy continues to inspire the global optometric community.

The Federal University of Technology, Owerri (FUTO) emerged as the best optometry school in Nigeria.

OPTOGLOBE in the Summit

The **OPTOGLOBE** delegation, led by **Pemije Gadimoh (Founder of OPTOGLOBE),** included **Moses Adetoro (Director of Administrations), Abasiofon Ita Treasure (Director of Membership and Engagement), and Adetona Adeboye (Director of Public Advocacy)**. The team aimed to build meaningful connections across a wide network of

professionals and gain insights into key initiatives and policy processes shaping Nigeria's eye health sector.

Facilitated by ODORBN, **OPTOGLOBE will** initiate a dialogue with the **World Health Organization (WHO)** Nigerian Country Office, to explore opportunities at other WHO levels, including participation in the WHO Youth Council, and World Health Assembly, similar to existing representation by student-led federations such as IFMSA (International Federation of Medical Students' Associations) and IPSF (International Pharmaceutical Students Federation). OPTOGLOBE aims to initiate Optometry student involvement in the WHO's SPECS 2030 network and strengthen advocacy for Optometry and eye health in global health policy forums.



OPTOGLOBE team with Dr. Chimezeri, President of the Nigerian Optometric Association (NOA)



Pemije with Dr. Awiaka, Registrar of ODORBN and organizer of the Summit

The team connected with the program lead of the OneSight EssilorLuxottica Foundation in Nigeria, and shared this with VOSH/International to enhance collaboration in support of outreach initiatives across the country.

The team engaged with department heads and professors of optometry across Nigerian universities, paving the way to increase student engagement and support the establishment of new SVOSH chapters countrywide. A meeting was held with Opticianry student leaders, who shared their experiences and expressed interest in forging local partnerships to support outreach initiatives involving Opticianry students across Nigeria.

Furthermore, OPTOGLOBE has secured an invitation to participate in the upcoming **Nigerian Optometric Association (NOA)** Conference in Abia State this July—one of the largest and more significant national gatherings of Optometrists, educators, and students.

OPTOGLOBE hopes to collaborate with VOSH/International to engage with the **Jigi Bola 2.0** program and explore how Optometry students in Nigeria can both contribute to and benefit from this national eye health initiative.

Our final reflections

We believe that Optometry students in Nigeria, through well-organized groups such as the Nigerian Optometric Students Association (NOSA) and its university chapters, have a crucial role to play in supporting the government's ambitious eye care programs. With the launch of the National Eye Health Program and the revitalized Jigi Bola 2.0 initiative, students can become active participants in expanding access to quality eye care, especially in underserved and remote communities.

Realistically, students can organize and participate in community outreach and mobile clinics, conduct free vision screenings, identify refractive errors, and refer patients to appropriate services. Their academic training and passion for service position them uniquely to mobilize grassroots activities aligned with national goals. Furthermore, they can coordinate the collection and distribution of donated glasses and visual aids by partnering with NGOs and private sector donors, thereby ensuring that vulnerable populations receive much-needed optical supplies.

SVOSH chapters in Nigeria could complement these efforts with their humanitarian focus and community service ethos. They can lead targeted outreach programs, particularly school-based vision screenings, identify visual problems early among pupils, and refer them for treatment under the Jigi Bola 2.0 scheme. SVOSH's experience in organizing sustainable outreach and managing logistics for donated equipment makes them invaluable collaborators in scaling up nationwide eye health efforts.

By establishing dedicated, proactive outreach teams to address local eye care gaps, SVOSH chapters can fill in service delivery voids in rural and hard-to-reach areas, directly supporting the Ministry of Health's aim to integrate eye care into primary healthcare systems.

From a global perspective, OPTOGLOBE—the international network of Optometry students—can serve as a vital link between Nigerian student efforts and the wider Optometry community worldwide. OPTOGLOBE can elevate Nigeria's eye care initiatives by documenting and sharing stories of student-led outreach and advocacy, attracting global attention and support. It can facilitate international collaborations through virtual training sessions, webinars, and mentorship programs, thereby enhancing the skills and capacities of Nigerian students.

Additionally, OPTOGLOBE can coordinate multi-country research projects in partnership with VOSH/INTERNATIONAL and other key optometric organizations to involve Nigerian students in collecting evidence on eye care access and public health outcomes, amplifying Nigeria's voice at major international eye health forums. This global engagement can also open doors for funding, technical assistance, and partnerships that strengthen Nigeria's eye care infrastructure and regulatory frameworks.

Together, NOSA, SVOSH, and OPTOGLOBE members form a powerful synergy.

While NOSA galvanizes national student mobilization and policy advocacy, SVOSH drives humanitarian clinical outreach, education, and logistics, and OPTOGLOBE acts as the global amplifier.

By working collaboratively, these student bodies can support the Federal Government's vision of equitable and sustainable eye care services, enhance the integration of Optometry into primary health care, and help combat challenges like quackery and lack of public awareness. This united approach positions Nigerian Optometry students not only as beneficiaries but also as active architects of a more resilient and inclusive eye health system, setting an example for student-led initiatives across the Global South.

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