

# The African Ophthalmology Council: Driving excellence in African eye health

BY WANJIKU MATHENGE AND MARCIA ZONDERVAN

**H**ave you been wondering about how you can impact, or even just understand, the eyecare landscape in Africa from those who experience it daily? Ever wondered about which one body brings all eye health professionals in Africa together, united in the vision that everyone in Africa can access the eye health services that they need? Meet the African Ophthalmology Council (AOC) which was founded 10 years ago.

The AOC is delighted to be included in this issue of *Eye News* and invites readers to explore the numerous benefits that mingling with this supranational society can bring, including personal growth, increased understanding of diverse cultures, and enhanced global perspectives. It is our desire that once you know the AOC better, engaging with us will foster empathy, broaden your horizons, and lead to greater innovation and creativity through exposure to different ideas and approaches that are applicable to our part of the world. On our side, we wish to strengthen our international relations and cooperation by building bridges between eye health professionals from various backgrounds.

The AOC is more than just a non-profit; it's a dynamic and influential society uniting ophthalmologists and eyecare professionals from every corner of the continent. Their overarching aspiration? To optimise eye health and genuinely improve the quality of life for communities far and wide. The AOC is driven by a profound commitment to public welfare, focusing on elevating professional skills, championing eye health at high levels, and building a robust, enduring organisation.

## The AOC visionary roadmap and strategic imperative

At the core of the AOC's vibrant energy are our clear bylaws and well-thought-out strategic initiatives for 2024–2030. These serve as our guiding framework, leading us to address unique challenges and capitalise on significant opportunities in African eyecare. Our primary goal is to significantly enhance the standard of ophthalmology and ensure top-tier eyecare is accessible and affordable throughout



**AOC 2026 Congress**  
Cape Town, South Africa

**31 July - 2 Aug 2026**  
Cape Town International Convention Centre

The African Ophthalmology Council is the Supranational Society for Africa that brings together all Ophthalmic Societies on the African continent as well as individual eye care professionals working in Africa, their partners and their colleagues in the Diaspora.  
All regions of Africa are represented.

**SAVE THE DATE**

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*Come and Interact with our members and other ophthalmic experts at AOC2026.*

the region. We pursue this through these key objectives:

### **Building a skilled eyecare team**

We are dedicated to empowering our ophthalmic workforce, fostering highly skilled, ethical, and adaptive professionals. This involves the acquisition of professional and non-clinical competencies and facilitating enriching continuing professional development. Our initiatives include collaborating with local and national institutions to create diverse skill-building opportunities for all cadres, introducing cutting-edge technologies and actively promoting eLearning. Our ultimate aim is to ensure every ophthalmologist and allied eyecare provider possesses the necessary clinical, surgical and practical expertise to serve their communities effectively.

### **Delivering eyecare with precision and efficiency**

Our fundamental belief is that quality eyecare should be within everyone's reach and economically feasible, aligning seamlessly with global visions like VISION 2020. We are developing innovative models for ophthalmologist-led eyecare delivery, particularly for underserved areas, and championing self-sustaining practices that incorporate social entrepreneurial principles. The AOC is a steadfast advocate

for integrating eyecare comprehensively into national health systems and encourages strong collaborative efforts among professionals and with non-governmental organisations.

### **Empowering member societies**

Recognising that strong national and regional societies are foundational to a thriving ophthalmic community, the AOC provides crucial support for organisational development. This includes defining best practices for societies, maintaining a comprehensive database of African ophthalmologists, offering grants to support young ophthalmologists' attendance at congresses, and assisting countries in establishing new societies where needed. Our mission is to foster dedicated and motivated membership, thereby strengthening leadership within each country's eyecare community. Currently, the AOC boasts over 1200 registered individual members from 46 countries and a significant network of 32 member societies or institutions, highlighting its extensive continental presence.

### **Strategic advocacy and external engagement**

The AOC's vision is to proactively engage on the global stage, raising awareness among governments and decision-

makers about the critical importance and cost-effectiveness of eyecare. Our dedicated AOC leaders are committed to mobilising resources, securing essential funding for training and practice support, and forging enduring partnerships with leading international ophthalmologic societies such as the Ophthalmology Foundation, Middle East African Council of Ophthalmology (MEACO), and American Academy of Ophthalmology (AAO), as well as the International Agency for the Prevention of Blindness (IAPB), and other relevant organisations. The Council endeavours to be the recognised voice of ophthalmology in Africa, building its credibility through tangible achievements and enhancing external communications via its website and newsletters.

The AOC is a committed and evolving force dedicated to transforming eye health in Africa. Through its unwavering dedication to professional education, strategic advocacy, and robust organisational development, the AOC is tirelessly working to empower African ophthalmologists, fortify eyecare systems, and ultimately enhance vision and quality of life for millions across our incredible continent. Its collaborative spirit and clearly defined strategic objectives firmly position it as a key partner in addressing the pressing eye health needs of the African population.

### Four things to know about the AOC

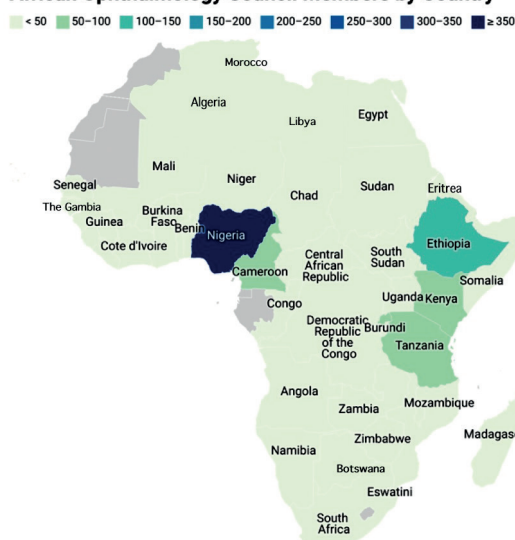
#### 1. Governance: Board of Trustees

The Board of Trustees serves as the overarching management body responsible for strategic development, prudent fiscal management (including fundraising and budget approval), and comprehensive oversight of its membership and committees. The current Board President is Professor Wanjiku Mathenge. The Board's composition, encompassing five vice presidents from each region in Africa, a general secretary, treasurer, past president, president of the AOC Foundation, and representatives for young and senior ophthalmologists, ensures broad representation across the continent.

#### 2. Governance: AOC Advisory Council

The dynamic AOC Advisory Council, made up of heads of all organisational members, functions as a vital link between the Board and its member societies and institutions. At the time of writing, the current President of the Advisory Council is yet to be decided. The council provides crucial expertise and channels valuable feedback from national, regional and subspecialty organisations, playing an

### African Ophthalmology Council Members by Country



AOC Membership Map 2023.

essential role in bringing country-specific issues to the Board's attention and disseminating information to the broader AOC membership.

#### 3. Membership

The AOC currently has individual members from 46 African countries. It also has 31 member institutions or societies. There are five categories of AOC membership:

1. Active individual membership: open to any fully licensed ophthalmologist who works in Africa.
2. Active organisational membership: open to any fully recognised national, regional, or subspecialty eye society based in Africa or working in Africa.
3. International individual membership: open to any ophthalmologist residing outside Africa who is fully licensed.
4. International organisational membership: open to organisations based outside the African region that support the AOC purpose.
5. Associate member: open to any person who is or works with medical professionals but is not an ophthalmologist, or non-eyecare organisations engaged in a field allied with, or in a basic science related to, ophthalmology.

#### 4. AOC meetings

Regular member gatherings, including the Annual General Assembly and Biannual Scientific Congresses, provide policy direction, performance review, and educational exchange. The AOC Scientific Congress, a flagship event rotating across Africa, draws ophthalmic workers for accredited CME credits and fosters scientific collaboration. AOC2024 in Kigali, Rwanda, was a resounding success, attracting global speakers and industry

leaders. It featured impactful symposia from African societies, the National Eye Institute, the International Centre for Eye Health, Stanford University, the Royal College of Ophthalmologists UK, and the Ophthalmology Foundation, highlighting a global commitment to African eye health. The next meetings will be the AOCvirtual2025 in September and AOC2026 in Cape Town, South Africa.

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**Declaration of competing interests:**  
None declared.

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