

# The Best Vision Plans for 2000: A Matter of Choice

by Paul Gross

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Senior Director of Marketing, EyeMed Vision Care Vision care plans aren't what they used to be. They're a whole lot better.

Providing clients and plan members with a variety of options rather than restrictions has become a defining element in the best vision plans.

Choice of value-added services...Options in eyewear brands and styles, as well as lenses and lens add-ons... Choice of plan design... Above all, the option to visit either a private practitioner or optical retailer for eyecare services... While on the surface, it might seem that many plans offer a similar array of choices, a closer look reveals vast differences in a member's right to choose different options. A COMPREHENSIVE PANEL OF PROVIDERS MAXIMIZES FREEDOM OF CHOICE

Industry statistics show that approximately 65% of eyewear consumers visit private practitioners, while 35% go to chain store retailers. It's never a matter of which is better, but rather the freedom to choose. Each group of providers brings something different to plan members in terms of convenience, comfort level and service. Plans that offer members both options fulfill a wide variety of different demands and needs.

Retailers guarantee consistency and convenience. Provider panels featuring a national quality retailer offer many patient conveniences in our frenetic world. These include:

- Convenient hours -- Most large optical retailers are open seven days a week, and most holidays, with hours that extend well into the evening. Retailers that offer this level of convenience bring new meaning to the concept of easy provider access.
- Walk-in appointments -- Many people today find it extremely difficult to commit to long-range appointments. Oftentimes, retailers are able to accommodate walk-ins with no appointments, when schedules permit, further expanding the concept of convenience and easy access.
- Optimum accessibility -- Often, retailers are located in such heavy traffic areas as malls and shopping centers. These locations invite even easier access to members; they become a convenient one-stop shopping experience in a day's busy schedule.
- Maximum flexibility -- National retailers provide state-to-state capabilities for repairs, replacements, exams and a wide variety of other benefits to members. Imagine the convenience of buying frames in one state...and enjoying after-care service such as repairs or adjustments far from home.
- Consistency -- Company-wide programs and policies instituted by a quality national retailer, such as 30-day no-risk guarantees or breakage protection plans ensure quality care and service excellence from location to location.
- Quick service -- Members who opt for a retailer often enjoy the convenience of getting their eyes examined, purchasing the frames and having them fitted within a few hours.
- Greater resources -- Traditionally, retailers have made substantial investments in a wide array of products, in employee training, and in a larger staff. With more staff availability at point of sale—and with thousands of frames from which to choose—members often perceive faster service and greater choice of product at a national retailer.

Private practitioners are perceived as trusted family vision care specialists. Plan members who prefer private practitioners cite these value-added benefits:

- Comfort level. As in all areas of health care, people prefer dealing with a doctor they know and trust. In vision care, the private practitioner is often perceived as the optical counterpart of the trusted family physician.
- Perception of quality. Being a trusted vision care specialist leads to a perception of

