

# Does Government Assistance Improve Utilization of Eye Care Services by Low-Income Individuals?

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For the CRDCN 2013 National Conference

October 3, 2013

Waterloo, Ontario

# Eye Care Services in Canada Today

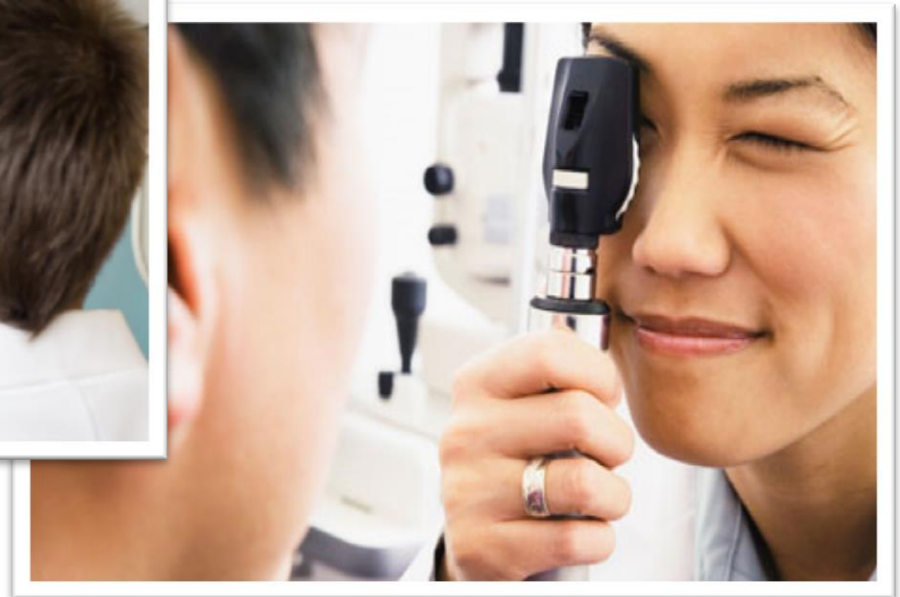
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- Government-insured healthcare coverage exists for eye diseases such as diabetic retinopathy, glaucoma and cataracts
- General eye exams are not uniformly covered by government and may require individual payment
- Eyeglasses are not insured by government
- All provincial governments have low-income vision care support programs
- Whether these programs are effective is unknown

# Purpose

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- To evaluate if government-funded vision care support programs facilitate access to eye care providers amongst low-income individuals in Canada



# Methods

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- Systematically reviewed government-funded low-income vision care support programs in the 10 Canadian provinces: eligibility criteria, coverage policies and amount of assistance provided
- Compared the self-reported utilization of eye care providers between the economically deprived vs. others
  - Data from the Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS) Healthy Aging 2008/09

# Results

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# Government Coverage Policies for General/Routine Eye Exams in Canada

Age group	Frequency of Government Coverage	Provinces
<20	Once every year	Alberta (0-18), BC (0-15), Ontario (0-19), Quebec (0-17), Saskatchewan (0-17)
	Once every 2 years	Manitoba (0-17), Nova Scotia (0-9)
	Never insure or de-insured	New Brunswick, Newfoundland, PEI
20-64	None	All provinces
65+	Once every year	Alberta, BC, Ontario, Quebec
	Once every 2 years	Manitoba, Nova Scotia
	Never insure or de-insured	New Brunswick, Newfoundland, PEI, Saskatchewan

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# Government Coverage Policies for General/Routine Eye Exams in Canada

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<20	Once every year	Saskatchewan (0-17)
20-64	None	All provinces
65+		
	De-insured	Saskatchewan

# Government Coverage Policies for General/Routine Eye Exams in Canada

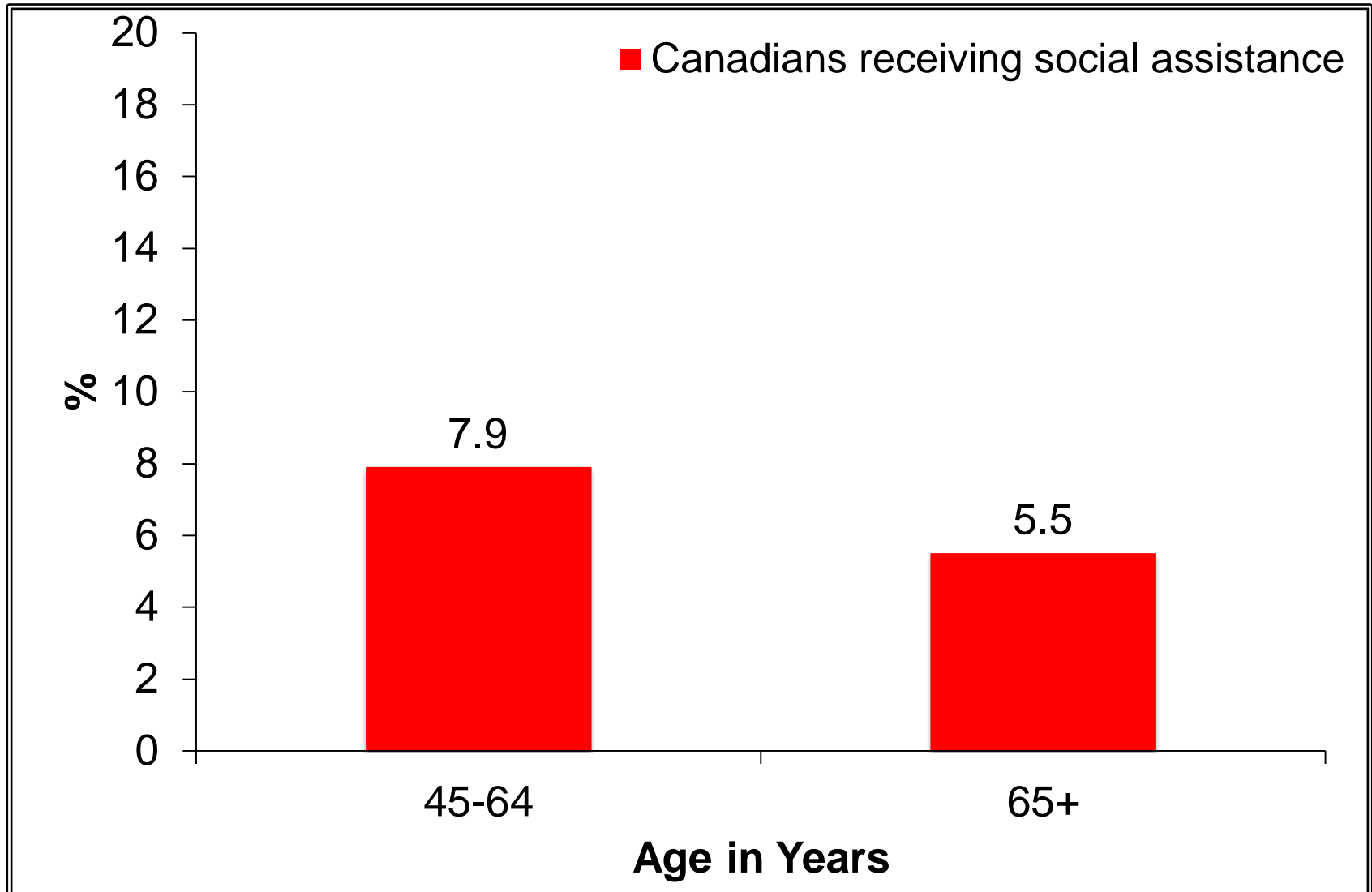
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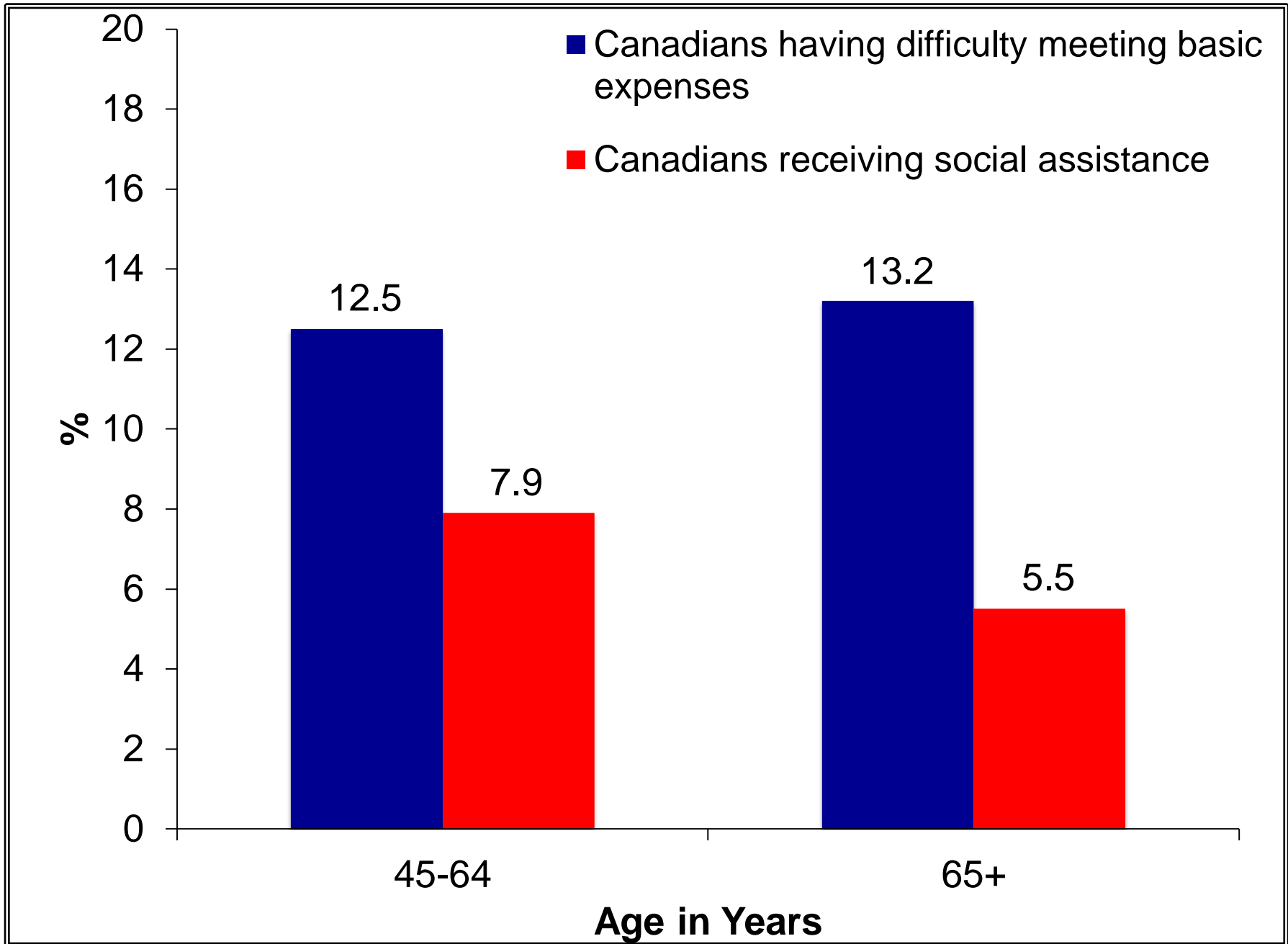
# Eligibility for Vision Care Assistance

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- Receipt of government social assistance required for vision care assistance
- Eligibility criteria for social assistance are very strict
  - Must use up assets and savings in order to qualify for social assistance
  - e.g. Recipients in Ontario should have no more than \$606 → \$2500

# Percentages of Canadians Receiving Social Assistance in 2009





# Suggested Eye Exam Fees & Government Vision Care Assistance

Provinces	Suggested Fees for Eye Exams (\$)	Vision Care Assistance for Eye Exams
Alberta	127.49	Ea 2 yrs (20+), ea 1 yr (19)
Saskatchewan	97.35	Ea 2 yrs (45-64), ea 1 yr (65+)
Manitoba	82.90	Ea 2 yrs
Ontario	153.75	Ea 2 yrs
Quebec	75	Ea 2 yrs
BC	75 – 95	\$44.83 ea 2 yrs
New Brunswick	90	70% ea 2 yrs (>19)
Nova Scotia	111.03	\$55 ea 2 yrs
PEI	85.50	\$54 ea 2 yrs
Newfoundland & Labrador	65	\$55 ea 3 yrs (18+)


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Quebec	75.00	Ea 2 yrs





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# Cost of Eyeglasses & Government Assistance

Provinces	Price Estimates	Assistance for Glasses
BC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Retail Stores: \$240 - \$1000 (taxes not included)</li> </ul>	\$108 – \$179 ea 3 yrs (19+)
New Brunswick		70% ea 2 yrs (19+)
Nova Scotia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Online Stores: \$48 - \$310 (taxes not included)</li> </ul>	\$90 – \$110 ea 2 yrs
PEI		\$115 – \$145 ea 2 yrs
Newfoundland & Labrador		\$125 – \$175 ea 3 yrs (18+)
Manitoba		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Government aid recipients in ON are <b>NOT</b> allowed to order from online stores</li> </ul>
Alberta	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Online purchases are possible in other provinces but often cannot be worn</li> </ul>	Basic glasses ea 2 yrs (co-payment may be needed)
Saskatchewan		Basic glasses after prior approval (co-payment may be needed)
Ontario		
Quebec		

# Cost of Eyeglasses & Government Assistance

	Price Estimates for Glasses	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Retail Stores: \$240 – \$1000 (taxes not included)</li></ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Online Stores: \$48 – \$310 (taxes not included)</li></ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Government aid recipients in ON are <b>NOT</b> allowed to order from online stores</li></ul>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Online purchases are possible in other provinces but often cannot be worn</li></ul>	
		44.8% of eyeglasses delivered online did not meet optical requirements or safety requirements

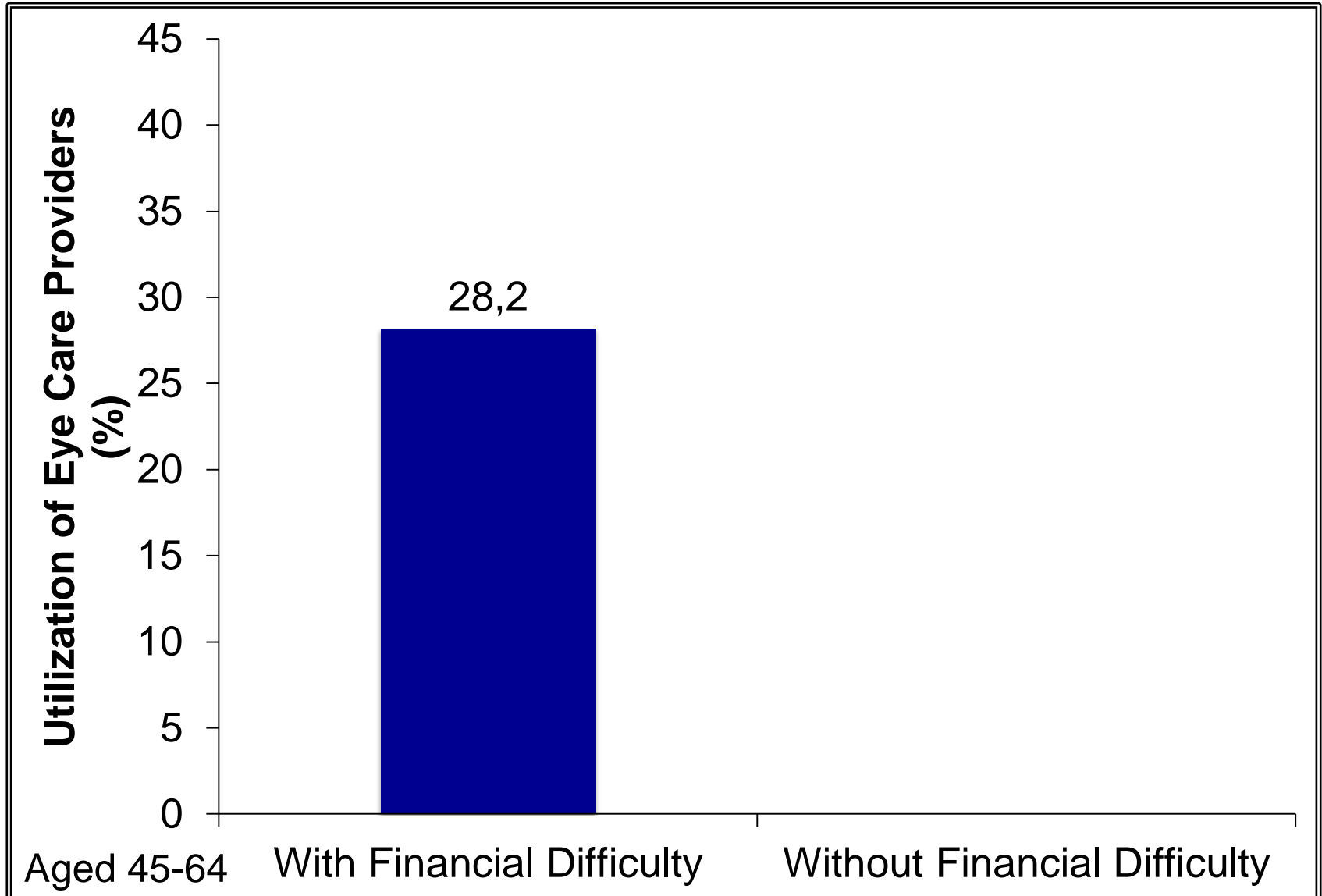
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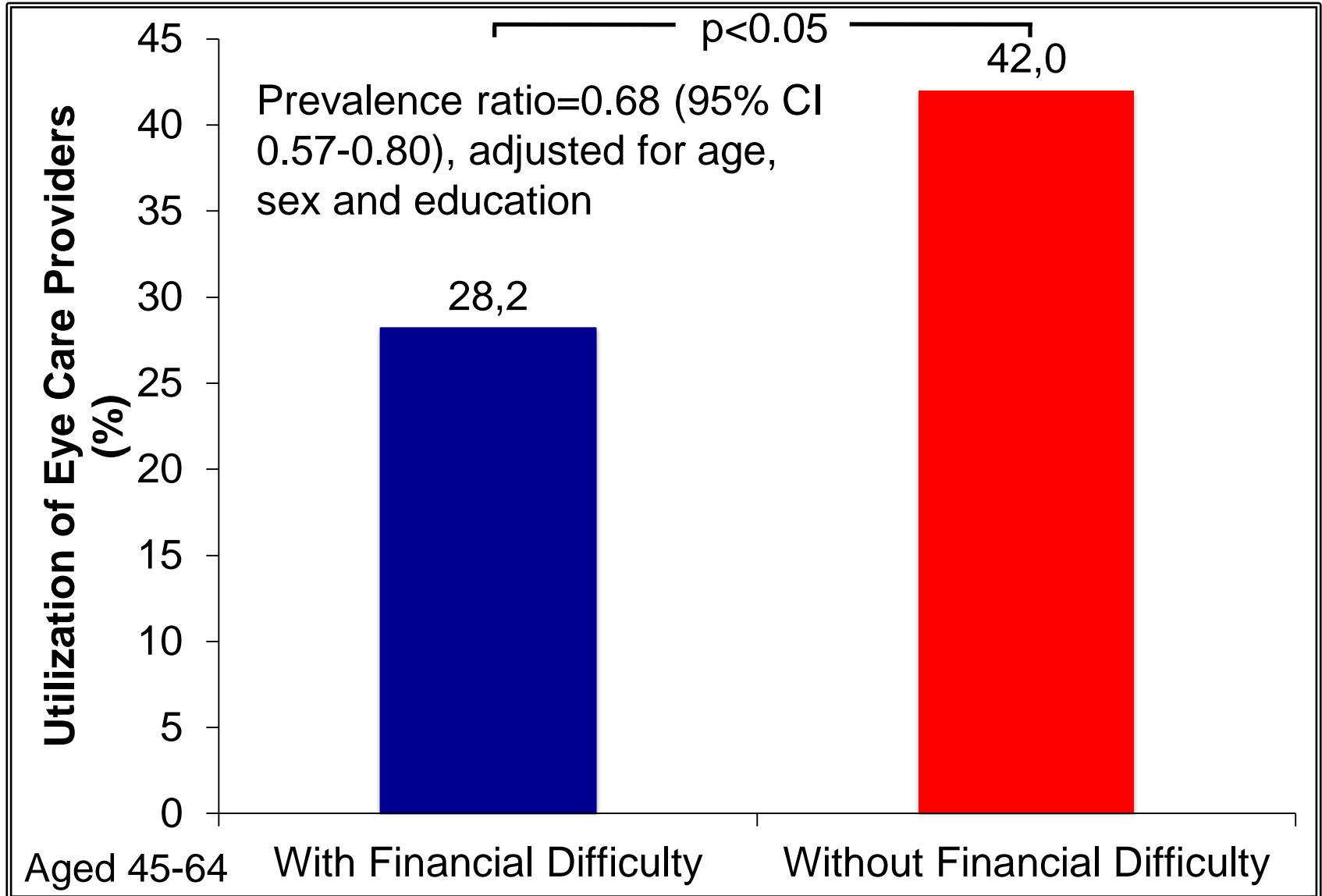
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Manitoba (MB)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Government aid recipients in ON are <b>NOT</b> allowed to order from online stores</li> </ul>	Basic glasses every 3 yrs (co-payment may be needed)
Alberta		Basic glasses ea 2 yrs (co-payment may be needed)
Saskatchewan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Online purchases are possible in other provinces but often cannot be worn</li> </ul>	Basic glasses after prior approval (co-payment may be needed)
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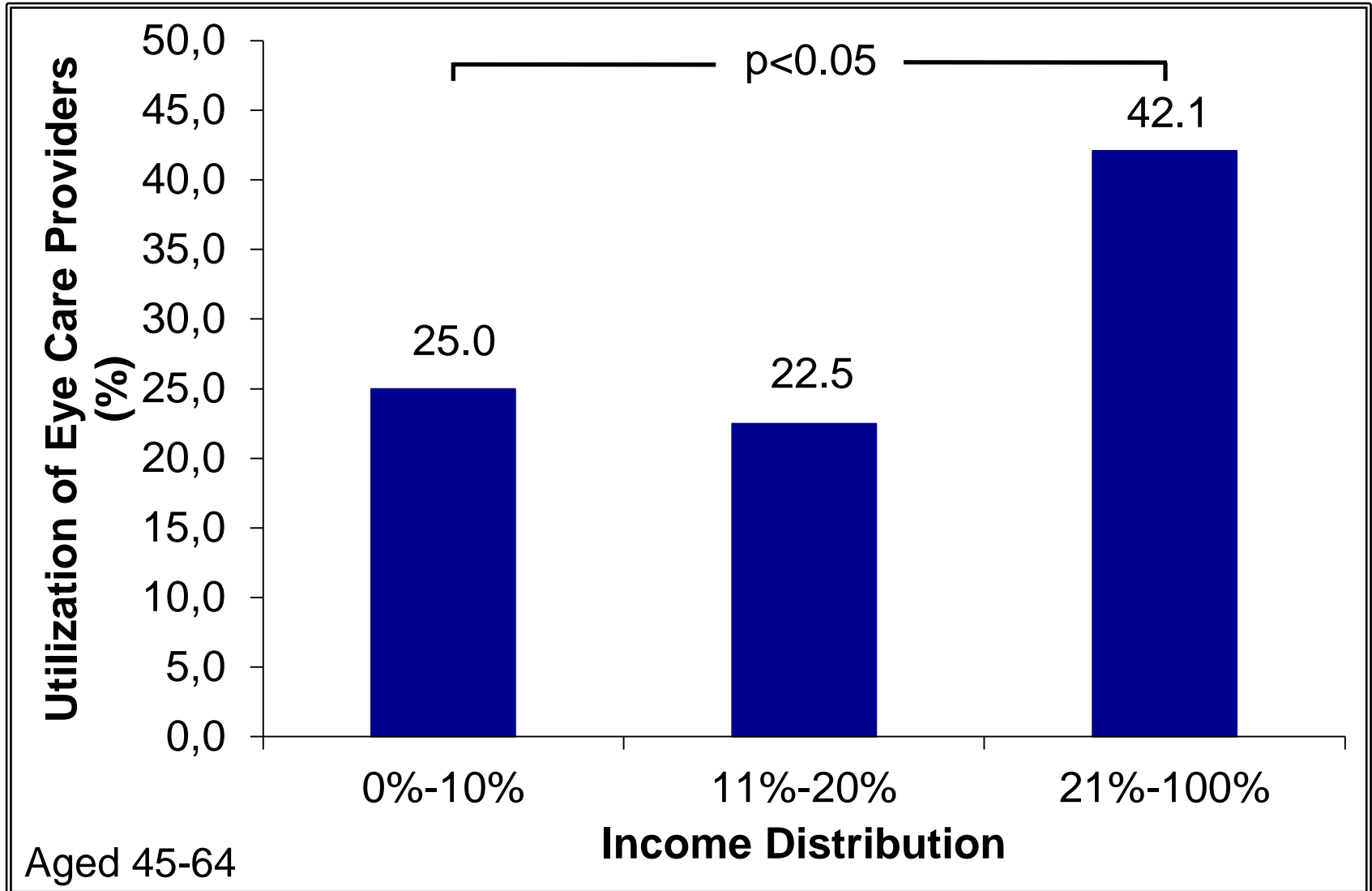
# Utilization of Eye Care Providers Among Middle-Aged Caucasians who Self-Reported not Having Glaucoma, Cataracts, Diabetes or non-Refractive Vision Problems



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# Utilization of Eye Care Providers by Income Distribution





# Conclusions

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- In spite of government assistance, there is a significant reduction in utilization of vision care services by the poor
- Government assistance for vision care services is restricted due to:
  - 1) Strict eligibility criteria,
  - 2) Inadequate financial coverage for vision care services

# Thank you!

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Funding:



**CIHR IRSC**

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