

FEDERAL BUDGET 2021

ELEMENTS OF RELEVANCE TO OCCUPATIONAL THERAPISTS

On Monday, April 19, 2021, the Honourable Chrystia Freeland, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, introduced the Federal Budget for 2021 entitled [*A Recovery Plan for Jobs, Growth, and Resilience.*](#) Key elements of interest and impact to occupational therapists are identified below.

COVID-19 Supports

- \$12 billion overall to extend key COVID-19 business aid programs and commits to continue other income support measures, while plotting out the reopening of society and international borders.
- Canada Recovery Hiring Program - will run from June to November 2021 and act as a transition from the federal wage subsidy for hard-hit industries. This short-term program will be available to Canadian-controlled private corporations, small businesses, charities and non-profits that are looking to hire workers in the coming months and the economy begins reopening. This program will cost \$595 million and each eligible employee would be subject to a maximum of \$1,129 remuneration per week over a four-week period.
- Extension of the federal wage and rent subsidies and other lockdown supports. Set to expire in June 2021, the supports will now be available through to September 25, 2021 as well the Canada Recovery Benefit aimed at people who are not covered by employment insurance (EI), though the \$500-a-week support will drop to \$300 per week after July 17, 2021.
- Employment Insurance enhancements to support affected workers by extending the EI sickness benefit from 15 to 26 weeks.

Mental Health

- \$45 million over two years, starting in 2021-22, to Health Canada, the Public Health Agency of Canada, and the Canadian Institutes of Health Research to help develop national mental health service standards, in collaboration with provinces and territories, health organizations, and key stakeholders.
- \$100 million over three years, starting in 2021-22, to the Public Health Agency of Canada to support projects for innovative mental health interventions for populations disproportionately impacted by COVID-19.
- \$50 million over two years, starting in 2021-22, to Health Canada to support a trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) stream of mental health programming for populations at high risk of experiencing COVID-19 trauma.

Seniors and Long-Term Care Supports

- \$3 billion over five years, starting in 2022-23 to support the provinces and territories in creating and upholding high standards of care inside long-term care facilities.
- \$90 million over three years, starting in 2021-22, to Employment and Social Development Canada to launch the Age Well at Home initiative.

- Increasing Old Age Security for seniors 75 and over, beginning in 2022, providing up to \$766 more for eligible seniors in the first year.
- To support personal support workers (PSW), homecare workers and essential workers involved in senior care, investing \$27.6 million over three years for my65+, a Group Tax-Free Savings Account offered by the Service Employees International Union Healthcare.
- 29.8 million over six years, starting in 2021-22, to Health Canada to advance the government's Palliative Care Strategy and lay a better foundation for coordinated action on long-term and supportive care needs, improving access to quality palliative care.

Social Infrastructure

- National Child Care Plan - \$30 billion over five years with permanent ongoing funding to create more spaces and mirror the Quebec system of \$10/day per space
- National Minimum Wage - \$15 per hour.

Implications for Occupational Therapists

The budget continues to focus primarily on management of the COVID-19 pandemic and its impacts on the economy. Supports to vaccination and ending the spread of the virus are paramount and will be welcomed by occupational therapists who are amongst the many on the frontline addressing Ontarians' health during the pandemic.

OTs will wish to ensure our voice is heard in the development of long-term care standards that complements the work that Ontario is undertaking to address staffing and quality of service delivery in long-term care homes in the province.

Similarly, we will wish to see an OT voice at tables directing the Palliative Care strategy.

While details of the Aging at Home Strategy are vague and appear focused on community agency supports, OTs have insights and expertise to bring to the development of strategy to support safe, dignified aging at home.