



May 14, 2020

Ms. Helen Angus,
Deputy Minister
Ministry of Health

Mr. Matthew Anderson,
President and CEO, Ontario Health
Ministry of Health

Dr. David Williams,
Chief Medical Officer of Health
Ministry of Health

Dear Ms Angus, Mr, Anderson and Dr.Williams,

On behalf of Ontario occupational therapists, I am writing to extend both an offer and a request to engage with your planning tables as the province begins to move forward in its planning for re-opening and resumption of a more fulsome range of health care services.

The Ontario Society of Occupational Therapists serves a membership of over 4500 and is committed to support both members and the government in efforts to assure access to essential occupational therapy services across the province.

Occupational therapists work across the health care system from primary care to long-term care with clients across the lifespan who are experiencing health related barriers to managing day to day living skills and occupations that are meaningful and important to them. Enabling patients to resume or maintain life roles, self care, or work, school or community participation after injury or illness, or mental health issues, autism, chronic disease, disability or the impacts of aging, occupational therapists play critical roles in effecting good discharges from hospital and enabling people to live safely and as independently as possible, and to thrive in their homes. The pandemic period has underlined the importance of professions like occupational therapy that best support timely discharge from hospital and focus on enabling patients to manage well and safely with as limited demands for community-based care in their home as possible.

The Premier's announcement on May 14th of services to begin to re-open effective May 19th is likely universally welcomed as a sign that as a province we are reaching a point where a cautious approach to re-opening is possible. At the same time, the messaging was unclear and occupational therapists seek guidance as to impacts on their services.

While there is clearer direction for OTs working in mental health services and those that provide post-surgical rehabilitation services required to support a return to elective surgeries, we recognize the great detail that will be required to bring these directions to life. It is less clear what the direction is for other

occupational therapy services including those that support primary care, home and community care, long-term care homes, the auto insurance system, WSIB, children's services as well as a host of private services that support families with children with autism, persons requiring seating and mobility assessments, and more. These services have been restricted and there is an urgency to ensure that plans are in place to assure clients that need access to essential services can do so in a timely manner. These services remain critical to system flow.

While limited to provide only urgent services in person, virtual care has been evolving as a positive outcome of the pandemic. However, virtual care is not a solution for all aspects of occupational therapy services and the planned return to options of person to person essential care, where appropriate and with precautions, will be welcomed by patients/clients and therapists alike.

As an association we wish to facilitate a smooth transition through a staged re-open plan. We have shared the province's *Framework for Re-Opening our Province* with members and continue to promote access to all Ministry communications, but, we recognize the additional supports that will be required to enable occupational therapists to proactively prepare to be ready to re-engage. To this end, we reiterate our commitment and request to participate as an active stakeholder in planning for re-opening of health services.

I look forward to hearing from you and discussing how we might best contribute.

Sincerely,



Christie Brenchley, OT Reg. (Ont.)
Executive Director



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