

2023 PRE-BUDGET SUBMISSION



Presented to:

Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs

On behalf of:

The Ontario Society of Occupational Therapists

OUR RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1: Decrease waitlists to access mental health services for children, youth, and older adults by expanding use of all mental health professionals including occupational therapists.

Recommendation 2: Invest in funding multidisciplinary health teams across the health care continuum.

Recommendation 3: Increase funding, recruitment, and retention of occupational therapists in long-term care, and home and community care.

OUR ORGANIZATION

The Ontario Society of Occupational Therapists (OSOT) is an organization that represents the interests of over 4,600 members through advocacy, professional development, member services, and other career development capacities in Ontario. Occupational therapists (OTs) are regulated health care professionals that work in many settings such as schools, clinics, hospitals, home care, long-term care, rehabilitation, primary care, and many more. OTs demonstrate a wholistic approach to helping individuals and groups continue, or resume, daily activities which can include dressing, getting back to work, socializing, and coping with anxiety and stress.

Occupational therapists provide strategies, resources, and support for optimal performance of activities of daily life. Over the last three years, daily life for many has changed, and Ontarians are transitioning back to work, school, and normal life routines. These transitions have not been easy, but we continuously rely on our health care professionals for the care and support we need to function. The current health human resource crisis has increased the need for all health care professionals to collaborate and contribute to our health care system. The COVID-19 pandemic has raised awareness of the gaps in our health care system and we propose a few recommendations to further address these issues.

Occupational therapists work in several areas of public health—they continue to support rehabilitative and functional treatment for their clients and have exceptional skills in mental and physical health care. Our recommendations for Ontario's 2023 budget focus on mental health, multidisciplinary care, and the allocation of funding for long-term and home and community care.

Recommendation 1:

Decrease waitlists to access mental health services for children, youth, and older adults by expanding use of all mental health professionals including occupational therapists.

Historically, occupational therapists have worked as successful mental health professionals—but they are not recognized as such. Access to mental health services over the last few years has become “out of reach”, yet the demand increases.

Mental health is a vast area of health care that requires substantial support in funding and access. OTs are often overlooked as mental health professionals due to limited awareness of the profession by the government, the health care system, and the public. Occupational therapists can provide counselling and psychotherapy services to clients as they are one of the five regulated health care professionals that can practice the controlled act of psychotherapy in Ontario. Currently, the landscape of mental health centers around only psychologists, psychotherapists, registered social workers, and a few others. These professionals are vital to mental health but can be further **augmented** by OTs who use multiple therapeutic modalities to enhance and support daily life.

OSOT requires government recognition and funding for OTs to occupy more mental health roles where they can. Without tapping into our current resources, we create larger, **unmanageable gaps**.

Our recommendation focuses on **alleviating waitlists with the use of occupational therapists to their full scope of practice**.

The nature of occupational therapy poses various helpful approaches toward daily functionality and mental health. OTs support within the well-established mental health multidisciplinary team can provide many benefits. In this, mental health literature outlines that well-integrated, coordinated systems of care provide flexibility and continuity—two essential aspects of progress (Haggerty et al., 2003).

Useful links:

[Occupational Therapists: Facilitating hope and recovery](#)

[Occupational Therapy and Mental Health](#)

[CAOT Position Statement: Occupational Therapy and Mental Health Care](#)

[CMHA testimony before FEWO: young women and girls mental health study](#)

Recommendation 2:

Invest in funding multidisciplinary health teams across the health care continuum.

Multidisciplinary health teams include a diverse range of professionals that can contribute to address complex conditions. With the combination of different expertise and foci, multidisciplinary teams are at an advantage when it comes to complex care. The focus of the Ontario government has been on nursing, physician, personal support, and medical laboratory technologist/medical laboratory sciences, which must be changed. Integrating the appropriate professions in multidisciplinary teams is **more equitable for all regulated health professionals and improves client experience and outcomes.**

An example of the usage of multidisciplinary care is the St. Joseph's Healthcare Hamilton Integrated Comprehensive Care (ICC) program. The ICC program uses a model of care (integrated funding models) that promotes health care integration in service delivery. The program is available to patients who have hip/knee replacement, general surgery, chronic disease, etc. Patients have access to an ICC Coordinator who assists with a care plan, which includes occupational therapy, physiotherapy, respiratory therapy, and nursing support. Additionally, SE Health has launched a Care Transition program which includes community-based care teams, 24/7 access to care, patient-and-family centered care, and more. This program focuses on ensuring patients have the care they need at home, from a multidisciplinary team. The program is both collaborative and allows patients to receive a personalized monitoring plan and access to a reactivation centre, if needed.

The use of occupational therapy in both of these examples **demonstrate how real-life applications of integrated patient care can be effective and efficient.**

Currently, health care professionals are commonly siloed to avoid overlap of services, while creating repetition of assessments and smaller scopes of practice. While these issues can occur, multidisciplinary teams can overcome these inefficiencies through communication and collaboration. With an increase in patients with chronic or complex mental and physical difficulties, we are seeing an increase in utilization of health care services—which is where occupational therapy can have a positive impact. Occupational therapists' unique care is vital to multidisciplinary teams, as they are helpful in improving the overall quality of life of patients,

their caregivers, and the health care professionals by improving: self-autonomy, increasing independence in daily routines, success in daily functions, emotional regulation, coping, and much more (Leland et al., 2017).

Useful links:

[Manage at Home](#)

[Recover in Hospital](#)

[Effective interdisciplinary teamwork: an occupational therapy perspective](#)

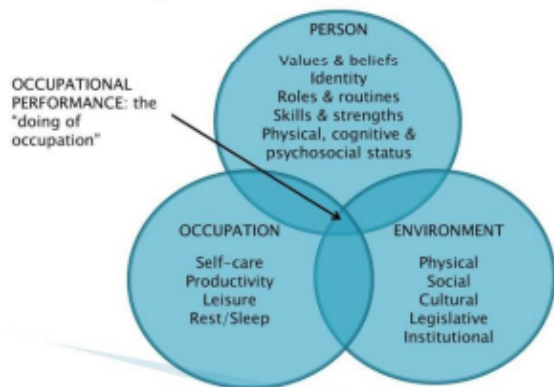
Recommendation 3:

Increase funding, recruitment, and retention of occupational therapists in long-term care, and home and community care.

The full scope of practice for occupational therapy is not currently being utilized in either long-term care or home and community settings. This issue stems from the lack of funding for the recruitment and retention of occupational therapists. Similar to the above recommendations, the lack of awareness and interdisciplinary collaboration for OTs are all related. This recommendation focuses on long-term care and home and community care and prioritizes alleviating the pressures on staffing, while increasing the independence and quality of life for residents/clients.

Within Long-Term Care, the current policy for [occupancy and acuity-adjustment funding](#) from the Ministry of Long-Term care includes funding for program and support services, under which occupational therapy can fall. This policy is intended for therapies for long-term care homes, but is not always utilized as it is shared between staff and “equipment related to programs”. Unfortunately, this does not recognize that occupational therapy is essential to long-term care home residents and puts essential therapeutic services in the same category as holiday decorations.

OT Perspective: P-E-O Model



In our [2020 submission to the Long-Term Care Staffing Review](#), we included fulsome recommendations on how to further integrate and use the full scope of occupational therapy in long-term care homes. OT interventions are resident-focused, contributing to the quality of life for residents and enhances independence resulting in decreased need for PSW and nursing support.

OTs consider the person, environment and occupation as key foci in their interventions.

To further the retention of OTs in long-term care and home and community care, we must acknowledge that OTs are often contracted and have not been historically associated with rehabilitative or restorative care. We advocate for full-time, permanent, and flexible position within the health care system which will support the retention efforts for our health human resource. Recognition that occupational therapists are professionals that have worked tirelessly to keep Ontario healthy and safe throughout the pandemic and require more investment and attention.

The client success stories and the impact OTs have made on peoples' lives are impactful and further demonstrate the need for additional, specific allocated funding in long-term care and home and community care settings.

Useful links:

[Input to Long-Term Care Home Staffing Review](#)

[Occupational therapy is a key part of improving long-term care in Ontario](#)

[Occupational Therapy and Behavioural Symptoms of Dementia](#)

CONCLUSION

Occupational therapy is a well-rounded health care profession that can improve the quality of life for individuals regardless of their care setting. The three recommendations outlined above have provided insights and resources in the hopes to continue the discussion on improving our health care system in Ontario. Our organization will continue to strive to practice to the full scope of occupational therapy as key stakeholders in health care.

OSOT appreciates the opportunity to participate in this consultation and is open to discussing our recommendations further. Should any questions arise, please reach out to Marnie Lofsky, Executive Director for the Ontario Society of Occupational Therapists at mlofsky@osot.on.ca.

Thank you,



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QUESTIONS? CONTACT US.

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