



Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists
Association canadienne des ergothérapeutes



Occupational Therapists Improve Lives, Save Money



2020 Pre-Budget Consultation Brief
Submitted to the Standing Committee on Finance
From: The Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists www.caot.ca



Summary of Recommendations

1. That the Government of Canada ensures funding to include occupational therapists on all primary health care teams in communities across Canada, as part of the Canada Health Transfer.
2. That changes be made to the Income Tax Act, to allow for occupational therapists to assess claimants' eligibility for the Disability Tax Credit based on mental function in order to assist clients in obtaining their disability tax credit entitlements.
3. That a robust pain management strategy be developed, including access to and coverage of non-pharmacological pain management interventions including occupational therapy, to complement the Government of Canada's national pharmacare plan.
4. That eligibility criteria under Jordan's Principle funding be expanded, to include workforce development and training in cultural safety and humility to support better health and wellness outcomes for Indigenous children and the communities they live in.
5. That funds be allocated for the inclusion of occupational therapists on design/build teams, as part of the rollout of the *National Housing Strategy* and the implementation of the *Accessible Canada Act* to assess home and workplace design and modifications that remove barriers and enhance optimal participation by all persons.
6. That the Government of Canada increase the complement of occupational therapists working within the Department of National Defence (DND), to enable return-to-duty for Canadian Armed Forces members, in line with the Government's Defence Policy Review, Total Health and Wellness Strategy, that prioritizes well-supported, resilient people and families.

Introduction

Occupational therapists assist people in living life to the fullest. They keep people in their homes and communities and out of hospitals, ease the pressure on an overburdened health system, are cost effective, and improve lives. Occupational therapists prevent and solve problems that interfere with a person's ability to do everyday things such as taking care of themselves, engaging in leisure activities, going to work, running errands and participating in the community. Occupational therapists deliver evidence-based solutions that are both clinically and cost effective, and that improve the health and wellness outcomes that matter to the individual. Whether that be aging in one's home and community, volunteer work, or playing with grandkids, occupational therapists work collaboratively with clients to help them continue participation in their valued activities of everyday living, despite changes to their health or functional ability.

Occupational therapists are problem solvers. They identify and remove barriers that prevent full participation in the activities that matter most to clients. They:

- address the whole person – their physical, emotional, spiritual, cognitive abilities and their environment,
- work with all age groups,
- focus on both prevention and treatment,
- provide care in numerous settings – home, community, institutions, schools, industry, business and government.

Six recommendations for inclusion in Canada's Budget 2020

1. Ensure access to occupational therapy through funded inclusion in primary care

Canada's health system is increasingly under pressure, with wait times exacerbating patient distress and crowding emergency rooms. There is an urgent need to expand community-based primary care teams to provide prevention and rehabilitative services in order to avoid hospitalization for non-acute care and integrate patients back into their homes and communities following hospital discharge.

Gatchel et al. (2007) identified that individuals treated by a multidisciplinary team were four times less likely to require medical treatments at follow up appointments. Occupational therapists bring distinct value to an interdisciplinary primary care team, with evidence pointing to the enhanced function, quality of life, satisfaction, and engagement for patients as well as

reduced risk of adverse events such as accidental falls (Garvey, Connolly, Boland, & Smith, 2015)

Additionally, a study by John Hopkins University identified that occupational therapy was the only category of health spending within hospitals where increased spending resulted in reduced re-admission rates (Rogers, Bai, Lavin & Anderson, 2016). Inpatient units with higher occupational therapy input have the shortest lengths of stay by up to 20%, freeing up hospital beds and saving \$15M annually. Study results link these lower readmission rates to occupational therapists' skill set, assessing whether a client can be discharged safely into home and community by addressing potential barriers outside of the hospital, including living situation, and social supports.

Recommendation

That the Government of Canada ensures funding to include occupational therapists on all primary health care teams in communities across Canada, as part of the Canada Health Transfer.

2. Make amendments to the Income Tax Act and expand areas where occupational therapists can certify as medical providers on form T2201, to support clients/patients with mental health issues to obtain their Disability Tax Credit (DTC) entitlements.

Currently, occupational therapists are health care providers authorized to complete form T2201 - Disability Tax Credit application -- for clients in areas such as walking, dressing and feeding. Despite their qualifications, training, proven effectiveness and scope of practice, they cannot certify a client's mental function.

As per the Disability Advisory Committee report, it is recommended "that the Canada Revenue Agency develop a process for expanding the list of health providers with the appropriate expertise who can assess eligibility for the DTC." (Canada, 2019). Occupational therapists, with a distinct focus on the whole person and their valued activities, are uniquely able to assess the impact of mental illness on day-to-day function, including an individual's capacity to eat, get dressed, go to work, and perform the needed activities to thrive in everyday life. Including occupational therapists as medical providers able to assess a client's mental function and the effects on activities of daily living would ease the pressure on physicians and support eligible clients with their disability tax credit entitlements.

Recommendation

That changes be made to the Income Tax Act, to allow for occupational therapists to assess claimants' eligibility for the Disability Tax Credit based on mental function in order to assist clients in obtaining their disability tax credit entitlements.

3. Develop a complementary pain management strategy alongside pharmacare

The absence of affordable alternatives to medication in Canada's health care system has contributed to an overreliance on opioids as a first-line treatment. (CSEPM, 2019) According to the report "*Reducing the Role of Opioids in Pain Management*", a recent review suggests that 8-12 per cent of people who are initiated into opioid therapy for chronic pain develop an opioid use disorder (CSEPM, 2019). The opioid crisis and pain management are therefore inextricably linked.

Improving the integration of, and access to, non-pharmacological treatment alternatives is critical to stemming the tide of opioid-related deaths and hospitalizations. (CSEPM, 2019) Pain is a multifaceted condition and as such, must be treated using a biopsychosocial model (Gatchet et al., 2007). Occupational therapists validate a patient's pain, and provide evidence-based strategies such as splinting, mindfulness and cognitive behavioral therapy to help manage pain, in line with the goals and objectives of the client.

Recommendation

That a robust pain management strategy be developed, including access to and coverage of non-pharmacological pain management interventions including occupational therapy, to complement the Government of Canada's national pharmacare plan.

4. Expand Jordan's Principle to include workforce training and development to advance health outcomes for children through cultural safety and humility

The experiences of many First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples within the mainstream health care system have often been negative, perpetuated by ongoing, entrenched racism and systemic barriers to health care access (Allan & Smylie, 2015). Occupational therapists, through a patient-

centred and community lens, are committed to promoting equitable health and health services for Indigenous children.

Expanding Jordan’s Principle to include consideration for workforce training and development in cultural safety and humility would lead to better service delivery and better health and wellness outcomes for Indigenous children. Supporting professional development content that teaches the occupational therapy workforce about key concepts such as decolonization, self-determination, self-governance, cultural safety, and cultural humility, along with principles of anti-oppressive practice would be central to advancing reconciliation through education.

Recommendation

That eligibility criteria under Jordan’s Principle funding be expanded, to include workforce development and training in cultural safety and humility to support better health and wellness outcomes for Indigenous children and the communities they live in.

5. Enact the recommendations in the Accessibility Act as part of the National Housing Strategy

The National Housing Strategy included the goal of 20% of new housing units meeting accessibility standards and be deemed barrier-free. This aligns with the goals of the recent accessibility legislation that factors in barrier-free design in federally administered housing stock and new builds.

Occupational therapists have a unique understanding of how individuals function in their living and working environments and can collaborate with design/renovation professionals to implement universal design elements into built environments, making it possible for people with a wide range of cognitive, physical and functional capacities to participate in daily life without impediment. According to a study by the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation (CMHC), universal design elements can be affordably included in the design of new homes. The cost of including 75% of the required accessibility features in new homes is less than \$500 per home.

Recommendation

That funds be allocated for the inclusion of occupational therapists on design/build teams, as part of the rollout of the *National Housing Strategy* and the implementation of the *Accessible Canada Act* to assess home and workplace design and modifications that remove barriers and enhance optimal participation by all persons.

6. Increase complement of occupational therapists serving the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF)

Occupational therapists provide services to CAF members, with the primary objective being to assist ill and/or injured military members to return to active duty. Occupational therapists work with members of the CAF to address a broad scope of issues that impact Return to Duty (RTD) including physical health issues, pain, and vocational challenges (Brown & Marceau-Turgeon, 2015).

The Department of National Defence occupational therapists use a biopsychosocial approach with their clients and utilize mental health screening tools/ frameworks and provide mental health interventions to restore functional activities are an essential part of the rehabilitation team that can facilitate transitions back into active duty.

Recommendation

That the Government of Canada increase the complement of occupational therapists working within the Department of National Defence (DND), to enable return-to-duty for Canadian Armed Forces members, in line with the Government's Defence Policy Review, Total Health and Wellness Strategy, that prioritizes well-supported, resilient people and families.

About CAOT

The Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists represents approximately 18,254 (CIHI 2018) occupational therapists across Canada with regional chapters in Quebec, British Columbia and the North.

Occupational therapy is a regulated health profession that removes barriers to the full participation in life following changes to functional ability. Occupational therapists provide both clinically proven and cost-effective solutions to allow individuals and communities to thrive in life.

Contact

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