



Saskatchewan Society of Occupational Therapists

Occupational Therapy
Supporting people to access their environments and live their lives

Saskatchewan Disability Strategy Submission

Occupational Therapists provide therapeutic services in all six of the identified priority areas to clients (children, adolescents, adults and older adults) with all types of disabilities (intellectual, physical, sensory, psychiatric and cognitive).

When an Occupational Therapist works with a client who has a disability they assess the whole person including: physical and cognitive abilities and disabilities, occupations (activities) that the person wants or needs to do in their daily life that are affected by their disability, how these activities will be managed within the client's home, work and/or school environment (building appropriateness and availability of resources), and needs of the client's family as they work to support/assist the client with the disability. (www.ssot.sk.ca)

Occupational Therapists are university educated health professionals who work with their clients to assume or resume the skills they need for the job of living. The job of living for all people includes many occupations, these are any tasks or activities that occupy your time and energy such as getting dressed, doing household chores, your paid and/or volunteer work, attending school and participating in recreational activities. Occupations will vary with age, abilities, interests & responsibilities. The occupations you want or need to be engaged in may be affected by illness/disease or circumstance. Occupational Therapists will work with you to achieve your occupational goals of everyday life.

Saskatchewan residents have had such a low level of occupational therapy services for so long that they do not even know what they are missing. The limited availability of occupational therapy services in Saskatchewan means that the rest of Canada has significantly more support and assistance for residents with disabilities to help them learn to manage their daily occupations (activities) like work, play and self-care.

We believe if there were more of a priority given to the hiring of Occupational Therapists within all Saskatchewan Health Regions in acute care facilities, long term care facilities, community/home care programs, on primary health care teams and within community based initiatives that client's with disabilities would function more successfully within their environments in the occupations that they need and choose to do.

We believe if there were more of a priority given to the hiring of Occupational Therapists within all Saskatchewan School Divisions students with learning challenges related to

Making Everyday Tasks Reachable

disabilities, in elementary, secondary and post-secondary, would be more successful in their studies and develop the valuable life skills needed to participate fully in their communities.

We believe that if occupational therapists were regularly included on community teams to assist Saskatchewan residents with disabilities (primary health care teams, community day programs, collaborative emergency centers...) they could ensure that clients with disabilities were more successful in participating in the activities that are meaningful for them.

Accessibility

“Occupational therapists can play a key role in maximizing the accessibility of the physical environment. Through clinical reasoning, observational skills, task analysis... occupational therapists have the ability to contribute to the development of physically accessible environments... These environmental improvements will allow access for most people with disabilities. However, adaptations for specific [individual] needs will still be required. Designing buildings to meet the needs of all individuals can be complex because the needs of persons with one disability may be at odds with the needs of those with a different disability. For example, an individual who uses a wheeled mobility aid would benefit from a smooth curb cut, but a more pronounced change in threshold would be advantageous to someone who has a visual impairment... here is [the] critical role for occupational therapists in the evaluation of the accessibility of physical environments. Occupational therapists can prove to be invaluable in assisting to remove barriers in the physical environment by considering the importance of the person, [their specific disability and abilities] and their desired occupations within the environment.” (MacIntosh et al. 2007)

Affordability and Availability of Housing

Occupational therapists recognize that there is a lack of affordable and availability of housing for clients across the age span living with a disability. When an occupational therapist meets with a client to assess and discuss suitable housing options they facilitate the client to evaluate their own available funds, look for additional resources for housing funds, determine a location and style of housing that would be most suitable for their client's lifestyle, level of ability and required support services and advocate for more suitable options.

Transportation

Occupational therapists work with clients to ensure that they are able to participate in their community by addressing their issues of transportation. This might include driving, use of public transportation or use and adaption of family vehicles.

“Community mobility is more than driving. As part of [an occupational therapy] assessment, determining how clients get to the places, people and occupations they identify as important is critical. What transportation do they use? What transportation is available in their community? Transportation should be considered as part of the assessment process... occupational therapists are taking a leadership role in the field of driving and community mobility. Our unique training and understanding of health and disability enable occupational therapists to lead initiatives in this field. Most importantly, our client-centred approach ensures that clients are included whenever possible [in the discussion].”

“Driving provides the means to not only complete their activities of daily living, including grocery shopping, attending health appointments and so on, but also to participate in life’s simple pleasures, such as visiting with friends and family... (Vrkljan, 2010)

Employment

Occupational Therapists work with their clients to assume or resume the skills they need in the workplace. This could include assistance to learn and/or develop work readiness skills, search for suitable employment, resume skills to return to previous employment and to educate other people in the workplace about the client’s disability and abilities.

Occupational therapists provide “significant contributions in the workplace by providing individualized intervention to workers on workers’ compensation as well as facilitating healthy work environments, developing and operating disability management programs and planning individualized return-to-work programs. Until recently workplace-related issues have focused on the injured worker or the worker with a physical disability. Occupational therapists are well known for their work in increasing such workers’ physical readiness to return to work through structured, goal-oriented work hardening programs... Workplace stress and other mental health problems require a mental health approach. Medical treatment alone is not sufficient to help workers cope in the workplace nor is it sufficient to help people return to work from a mental health-related leave. Occupational therapy provides the bridge back to work for both [these] employees and their employers.” (Wisenthal, 2004)

Education

Occupational therapists facilitate students to be successful in their studies, assist students to find successful ways for them to learn as well as work with teachers to adapt the environment and teaching style to the needs of the client.

The evidence supports the effectiveness of occupational therapy in the school setting on goal attainment and skill development in areas underlying and supporting school performance. School performance in the areas of reading, writing, mathematics, manipulation of tools, performance in physical education, independence with self-care

tasks and social integration are dependent on gross motor and fine motor abilities, visual-motor integration, and visual-perceptual skills. Occupational Therapists can provide assessment and treatment plans to develop a student's gross motor and fine motor abilities, visual-motor integration, and visual-perceptual skills to facilitate success for the student in the classroom and in developing as a healthy independent individual. (Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists. 2002)

Support for Community Inclusion

Occupational therapists work with clients to facilitate their involvement in their community. Occupational therapists enable clients to speak up for themselves, will advocate on the client's behalf and will promote inclusive communities for those who are differently abled. Occupational therapists work with, and advocate for, clients to participate in their community at home, work, school or anywhere they want to be.

Support for Caregivers

Occupational therapists can assist caregivers to understand the disease and/or injury and how the resulting disability affect's the person's day-to-day function. Occupational Therapists will work with families and caregivers to provide solutions and strategies to compensate for the resulting difficulties and can assist in dealing with stress by teaching coping skills, providing support, and counselling.

Occupational therapists "recognize that care-giving predisposes participants to impairments, activity limitations and/ or participation restrictions through increased risks for: injury or exacerbation of pre-existing issues, risky health behaviors, physiological changes due to chronic stress, changes in sympathetic arousal and cardiovascular state, and participation restrictions in everyday activity." Many caregivers are also now seniors and "given these current understandings of care-giving, older adult caregivers would seem to be at additional risk for health problems, and in particular, at risk for physical injury..." (Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists. 2010)

Future Challenges and Changes Needed

Occupational therapists focus in on how a client with a disability will learn to manage the activities they want and need to do in their daily life. **As occupational therapists we WANT to do this work with Saskatchewan people!** Occupational therapists want to help clients to achieve the ability to manage and live healthy, exciting, fulfilling lives. We believe that an increase of Occupational Therapists to health care, education and community teams would assist Saskatchewan residents with disabilities to improve their quality of life.

If we want Saskatchewan to be the best place to live with a disability, occupational therapists have much to offer to Saskatchewan residents. The challenge for this can be seen within the data below.

The 2012 Canadian Institute of Health Information (CIHI) report was released on December 12, 2013. In this report it states that the Canadian average is 40 occupational therapists for every 100,000 provincial residents. Saskatchewan has only 29 occupational therapists/100,000 people, which is the lowest of all Canadian provinces.

Canadian Institute of Health Information (CIHI) 2012 Report – Provincial # of OTs

Canadian Average is 40 Occupational Therapists/100,000 people

BC – 39

AB – 43

SK – 29 Occupational Therapists/100,000 people

MB – 45

Qu – 48

ON – 34

NS – 43

NL – 35

NB – 42

PEI - 33

Evaluation of Services and Supports

The people of Saskatchewan who live with a disability need to be asked how satisfied they are with:

- their ability to manage daily activities that they need or want to do
- their access to occupational therapy,
- the quality of occupational therapy services that they were able to receive

The Saskatchewan Society of Occupational Therapists is interested in promoting Saskatchewan resident's with disabilities to be successful and satisfied with their ability to participate in their activities of daily living and in their communities. We look forward to future collaborations with the Saskatchewan Disability Strategy to improve services for our client's with disabilities.

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