

SASKATCHEWAN TOOLKIT

TAKE ACTION FOR OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY



CAOT · ACE

Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists
Association canadienne des ergothérapeutes



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POST-ELECTION TOOLKIT

1 - WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

Despite occupational therapists (OTs) providing low-cost, high-impact professional interventions, access to occupational therapy is limited in Saskatchewan due to the OT workforce shortage in critical areas such as:

- Mental health and addictions.
- Seniors who wish to age at home in their communities.

2 - PURPOSE OF THE TOOLKIT

To assist OTs and occupational therapy advocates in communicating with newly-elected Members of Saskatchewan's Legislative Assembly (MLAs).

3 - HOW CAN YOU TAKE ACTION?

Write a letter or request a meeting with your MLA using the provided letter templates and let them know how OTs make a difference for their constituents and in their communities!

Connect your MLA with www.oteveryday.ca, the new public education site from CAOT that shares case studies and facts about the value of occupational therapy, essential in mental health and helping seniors to age in place.

KEY MESSAGES TO MEMBERS OF SASKATCHEWAN'S LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

- Occupational therapy is about equipping people for the job of living and thriving and supporting the meaningful participation of individuals in all aspects of life, across the lifespan and throughout the health care continuum.
- OTs are essential to the COVID-19 pandemic fight, working in acute and rehabilitative care, in hospitals, long-term care (LTC), and home and community settings. With OTs being accessible throughout the health care continuum, it is important that their full scope of practice be recognized and utilized for the health and well-being of Saskatchewanians.
- OTs are critical members of rehabilitation teams that are central to restoring function and independence to Saskatchewanians recovering from COVID-19, particularly for COVID-19 "long-haulers."
- OTs are a vital part of primary care health care teams and reforms should include OTs on every primary health care team in Saskatchewan.
- Efforts to improve long-term care in Saskatchewan must include staffing full-time OTs in every LTC home to help support residents living with chronic and progressive conditions experience better function, participation, and quality of life.
- Access to OT interventions can be a vital part of opioid use recovery through a focus on meaningful occupation and nonpharmacological pain management.

HOW CAN WE MAKE OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY MORE ACCESSIBLE?

- Increase funding for occupational therapy services in homes and communities.
- Include coverage for occupational therapy in extended health benefits plans.
- Include OTs on all primary care teams.

A woman with long dark hair, wearing a light blue button-down shirt, is sitting at a table in a meeting. She is looking towards the camera with a neutral expression. There are papers and a pen on the table in front of her. The background is a stone wall.

**OT WORKFORCE
SHORTAGE**

A group of four people are sitting in a circle on chairs in a meeting. From left to right: a woman with blonde hair, a man in a black hoodie, a woman with red hair, and a man with a beard and glasses. They are all looking towards the center of the circle. The room has a wooden floor and a white wall.

**MENTAL HEALTH
AND ADDICTION**

An older man with a white beard and glasses, wearing a light blue shirt and a brown apron, is standing in a kitchen. He is looking down at something on the counter. Next to him, a woman with short dark hair is sitting at a table, looking down at a plate of food. She is wearing a grey cardigan over a blue top. The kitchen has white cabinets and a wooden countertop.

**SENIORS WHO WISH TO AGE AT
HOME IN THEIR COMMUNITIES**



OT WORKFORCE SHORTAGE

- The OT workforce shortage is a major issue. At the national level, there is a shortage of OTs projected from 2017-2026 to meet the demand for occupational therapy services, with new job openings expected to total 11, 800, while 9,600 new job seekers are expected to fill them (GoC, 2020).
- An inadequate supply of OTs is even more acute in Saskatchewan where the number of OTs per 100K population is 31 vs 51 nationwide. This shortage is further exacerbated by not having a school of occupational therapy in the province to fill the labour pipeline.
- The 20 OT educational seats purchased at the University of Alberta are not enough to bridge the gap and OTs remain chronically underrepresented on primary care teams despite 80% of health interactions occurring in this sector.



MENTAL HEALTH AND ADDICTION

- Mental health & addictions are significant issues and yet Saskatchewan spends the lowest amount per capita on mental health & addictions of all the provinces compared to the national average; \$86 provincially versus \$106 nationally. Pursuant to the Canada-Saskatchewan Emergency Treatment Fund Bilateral Agreement (GoC,2018), that provided a one-time investment of \$5M for the development and delivery of treatment services related to substance use – including opioids – OT expertise in the mental health arena is not being leveraged by the province.
- Addressing mental health issues is part of occupational therapy training and skills. This includes a client-centred approach that addresses anxiety, depression and PTSD following major illness. OTs can assess clients and customize an immediate care plan, delivering interventions to help Canadians regain a sense of calm, normalcy and resilience, despite COVID-related upheaval to so many everyday lives.



SENIORS WHO WISH TO AGE AT HOME IN THEIR COMMUNITIES

- The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the vulnerability of seniors. 15.5% of Saskatchewan's population is over 65 according to Statistics Canada. It is anticipated that by 2040 it will be as high as 23%.
- In light of recent COVID-related illness and deaths in LTC, it is anticipated that more seniors will want to “age in place” safely, staying at home in their communities for as long as possible, while enjoying positive health and wellness outcomes. The following are some examples of evidence based, low-cost, high-impact occupational therapy interventions that facilitate seniors aging in place:
 - OTs make seniors homes safe, functional and aesthetically pleasing through collaboration with industry partners and provision of advice on customized structural modifications to design living spaces and layouts;
 - OTs recommend, fit, and evaluate assistive technologies such as wheelchairs, grab bars, and bathroom fixtures to assist seniors experiencing physical, sensory and cognitive challenges;
- OTs are adept at providing non-pharmacological pain management interventions such as splinting, cognitive or physical rehabilitative interventions to prevent progression to chronic pain, recommending psychoeducational strategies to reduce pain intensity, and suggesting ways to adapt activities to reduce the physical and emotional demands;
- OTs facilitate socially inclusive environments that foster recreational, civic, cultural, leisure and social activities that reduce social isolation which has become a particularly difficult issue for seniors.

POST-ELECTION TOOLKIT

TO FIND YOUR MLA, GO TO:

Search: <https://www.elections.sk.ca/voters/gis/>

Saskatchewan Party: <https://www.skcaucus.com/members>

Saskatchewan New Democrats: <https://www.ndpcaucus.sk.ca/team>

SAMPLE LETTERS TO SASKATCHEWAN'S LEGISLATORS



Letter to Saskatchewan Party



Letter to Saskatchewan NDP

WHO ARE OCCUPATIONAL THERAPISTS?

Regulated health care professionals with graduate and post graduate degrees

Have been in professional practice for more than a century, since World War I

Are ranked amongst the top 10 professions in North America by CNN and Forbes

Provide low cost, high impact solutions



Are in high demand and enjoy a 92% to 96% employment rate in Canada



Preventing falls



Helping seniors age in place



Improving home and community care



Supporting caregivers



Delaying hospital admission

OT: CHANGING LIVES FOR THE BETTER



Accelerating hospital discharge



Improving mental health outcomes



Helping prevent opioid dependence and relapse



Alleviating chronic pain



Accelerating return to work