



August 5, 2016

The Honourable Bill Morneau  
Minister of Finance  
House of Commons  
Ottawa, Ontario  
Canada K1A 0A6

Dear Minister Morneau;

## **Re: Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists, 2017 Pre-Budget Consultation**

### **Executive Summary**

With the health care debate discussed nationally, and within each province and jurisdiction, it is easy to see that it is an important Canadian value to have a health care system that works.

The principle of access to, and receipt of, appropriate services for those experiencing physical or mental illness, injury or disability underpins this system. Enabling Canadians to access the supports they need to get healthy, to re-engage in their community, to work, play or pursue any other occupation they choose is the primary tenet or philosophy behind the occupational therapy profession.

Occupational therapists, through working with a person's psychological, physical, emotional, and cognitive functions, can assist people to live their life to the fullest, whether that means rebuilding their independence, returning to work, taking care of themselves or participating in other 'day to day' occupations. Through occupational therapist interventions, more Canadians can contribute to the country's economic growth.

The Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists, CAOT, believes that population segments such as elderly seniors, First Nations, those living with chronic disease, veterans, and those in the Canadian Forces or RCMP who are dealing with transition to civilian life and possible post-traumatic stress disorder, will be assisted in overcoming their challenges to everyday life if occupational therapy services are funded through strategic investments in these areas:

1. Home and community sectors with a focus on rehabilitation,
2. On-reserve home and community sectors,
3. Federally administered health care plans,
4. Senior's strategy with a rehabilitation focus,
5. Mental health strategy for RCMP & Canadian Forces.





## **Submission to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance**

August 5, 2016: The Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists (CAOT) is pleased to provide the following recommendation to the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance as part of its 2017 pre-budget consultation.

### **The Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists (CAOT) represents over 15,000 occupational therapists in Canada:**

CAOT represents and relays the insights and expertise of its membership to policy makers and stakeholders with the goal of contributing constructively to the evolution and development of Canada's health care system.

### **Role of Occupational Therapists:**

Occupational therapists (OTs) are regulated health professionals who work with a range of challenging issues and a variety of client cohorts including children, adults, seniors, those with developmental disabilities, Indigenous populations, veterans, those in the Canadian Forces and many other Canadians whose lives and capacity to participate in their day to day activities are, or may be, at risk of being disrupted by injury, illness, environmental or social factors.

By looking at the whole picture; a person's psychological, physical, emotional, cognitive and social functions, as well as the impacts of the environment and social context in which they need to function, OTs assist people to achieve their goals, to function at their highest possible level, to maintain or rebuild their independence and to participate in everyday life activities.

### **Federal measures to help Canadians (generally) and specific groups (i.e. Indigenous people, seniors, disabled) to contribute to economic growth:**

### **Infusing the health care system with a rehabilitation philosophy:**

The delivery of care in the home and the community plays a critical role in minimizing system costs and ensuring a sustainable client-centred approach. To help realize this, CAOT believes that the infusion of a rehabilitation philosophy will allow Canadians the opportunity to maximize their ability to live independently. This involves assessing the capabilities of the person affected and creating a personalized plan to help them make adjustments that will enable a more active participation in what's important to them.

For example, clients recovering from a stroke may need to adjust to decreased mobility and dexterity, requiring new techniques or assistive devices to do simple things such as getting dressed as opposed to have someone else dress them every morning. OTs are experts at designing and creating these personalized solutions.





### **Recommended Action:**

CAOT envisions further support of a system that strengthens the ties of rehabilitation professionals to primary care and inter-professional primary care teams which would include OTs, to assess the potential of the client within their home setting. The end goal of this investment would see a system that supports reduction in:

- the number and length of hospital stays,
- the number of falls that require medical care,
- the number of workdays lost to absenteeism or presenteeism,
- the use of medication,

and an increase in mobility allowing clients to stay active and engaged as productive members of our society.

### **Including occupational therapists in the Public Service Health Care Plan (Plan):**

The OTs' scope of practice extends to rehabilitation and accommodation in both the home and work setting. The OT can play an instrumental role in assisting Plan members with accessing the public service health benefit plan in order to return to work with a new or adjusted environment that meets their new or evolving needs.

OTs are experts in ergonomic design and in the prevention of repetitive strain and other injuries in the workplace, providing both preventative and curative interventions. Additionally, occupational therapy can help those in the public service overcome many challenges returning to work, or at work, by improving skills for self-management of chronic diseases, chronic pain, depression and other mental health issues, all of which are essential for a healthy and productive workforce.

### **Recommended Action:**

CAOT recommends that occupational therapy services be identified, included and funded in the Public Service Health Care Plan, to deliver:

- strategies that enable public servants to return to work faster
- plan savings due to reduced employee absenteeism
- a reduction in claims
- heightened workforce productivity and well-being

### **Occupational therapy assisting Indigenous communities on reserve:**

First Nations across the country have a host of complex health issues including a high incidence of multiple chronic diseases, both physical and mental. To date, a shortage of on-reserve medical professionals and facilities and, to some degree, a cultural insensitivity and western-style methodology have further challenged the administration of on-reserve care. OTs often deliver care in the client setting and are therefore well positioned to engage with





First Nation members in their home and familiar settings. OTs can assist First Nation communities to deliver health promotion training, mental health services, chronic disease management and more, all in a culturally comfortable setting.

### **Recommended Action:**

CAOT recommends a further investment to strengthen home and community care systems on-reserve, to help ensure:

- health professionals such as OTs are placed on multidisciplinary teams where they can apply the breadth and depth of their client-centred expertise to First Nations care, and
- that prevention of health-related issues rather than a sole focus on treatment options is built into community-based programs.

### **Occupational therapy for seniors:**

As part of a Canadian seniors' care strategy, care needs to be delivered at the right time, at the right place, by the right professional. OTs specialize in promoting and supporting independence for seniors through their work in community-based settings such as family health teams, seniors' residences and community health centres, collaborating with other health professionals to provide seniors with the right type of primary care that will help maintain a quality of life.

Occupational therapists can provide seniors with home care including consultation services, assessment, education and training for caregivers, assistance with system navigation, home accessibility and driver safety screening. This can include 'assess and restore' programs, chronic disease management, falls prevention, incontinence management, wound care and mental health services.

### **Recommended Action:**

CAOT urges a renewed focus on the provision of seniors' care in the home and community which OTs can deliver:

- at a low cost and with high impact,
- without housing seniors in costly chronic care settings, and
- without subjecting the senior to unnecessary disruption or danger due to inappropriate health care settings.

### **Occupational therapists assisting those in the Canadian Forces, Veterans Affairs and the RCMP:**

OTs can play a vital role in transitioning injured or ill soldiers back to civilian life. OTs can assist through the initial transition and also provide ongoing mental health supports so that veterans, those serving in the armed forces, and the RCMP can maintain function, physical health and overall mental health and well-being during and post service.





### Recommended Action:

CAOT recommends incorporating OTs into an outreach mental health strategy for veterans, members of the Canadian Forces and the RCMP during critical transition points:

- service to civilian life
- intervals throughout the transition
- ongoing support during service

Measures are available to track client progress in:

- reducing the feeling of isolation,
- increasing re-engagement in activities important to family, personal and work life,
- teaching practical, non-pharmaceutical ways of coping with adverse symptoms such as stress, pain, and sleep disruption, and
- replacing unhealthy activities, such as substance abuse, by increasing engagement in healthy, meaningful activities.

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in the Federal Government's 2017 pre-Budget consultation. We look forward to further engagement regarding greater inclusion of occupational therapists in realizing cost-effective health care change in Canada.

Yours sincerely,

Ms. Janet Craik,  
CAOT Executive Director