

## **Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists**

### **Responses**

#### **1. Economic Recovery and Growth**

*Given the current climate of federal and global fiscal restraint, what specific federal measures do you feel are needed for a sustained economic recovery and enhanced economic growth in Canada?*

#### **2. Job Creation**

*As Canadian companies face pressures resulting from such factors as uncertainty about the U.S. economic recovery, a sovereign debt crisis in Europe, and competition from a number of developed and developing countries, what specific federal actions do you believe should be taken to promote job creation in Canada, including that which occurs as a result of enhanced internal and international trade?*

#### **3. Demographic Change**

*What specific federal measures do you think should be implemented to help the country address the consequences of, and challenges associated with, the aging of the Canadian population and of skills shortages?*

Recommendations: 1. Implement a Labour Market Transition Strategy to respond to changing abilities in the aging workforce. 2. Promote opportunities to maximize potential and engage Canadians in meaningful and productive work. Maximizing Potential, Minimizing Shortages The Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists (CAOT) proposes a new Labour Market Transition Strategy to support aging workers, and transitioning of the next generation into roles which maximize knowledge, skills and abilities in all sectors of the economy. Responding to Changing Abilities A Labour Market Transition Strategy will mitigate the impact of the changing demographics by developing strategies for workers and employers to maximize skills and abilities by building capacity of individuals to continue to work. Occupational therapists are experts in interventions to support effective return to work programs (that can prevent early retirement), workplace modifications following illness or injury, and strategies to promote ability and maintain occupations of daily life. A Labour Market Transition Strategy, with the support of occupational therapists, would design and implement programs to maximize the human resource potential of the workforce through retention and knowledge-transfer programs for older workers, and strategies to minimize the impact of age-related illness, disability and retirement based on deteriorating health. A Strategy for the Future The goal of a Labour Market Transition Strategy is to retain the experience and expertise of older workers and maximize the skills of new workers entering the labour market. Occupational therapists will be an important part of this strategy to work with individuals of all abilities to find the right fit of skills and strengths to maximize potential, productivity and success. Occupational therapists can further help aging workers, who are unable to continue in their careers due to illness or injury, transition into other forms of meaningful work. In other words, occupational therapists can support this strategy by turning around the impact of retirement due to

poor health or disability (which currently accounts for approximately one quarter of full retirees), promoting the retention of workers in sectors anticipating skills and labour shortages, and support individuals not currently in the labour market find work that compliments their skills and abilities.

#### **4. Productivity**

*With labour market challenges arising in part as a result of the aging of Canada's population and an ongoing focus on the actions needed for competitiveness, what specific federal initiatives are needed in order to increase productivity in Canada?*

Recommendations: 1. Promote health and wellness of the aging workforce 2. Financial incentives to employers to accommodate diverse needs of workers Healthy workers = productive economy Over the next 25 years Canada will be faced with a significant shift in the average age of Canadians. This demographic shift will have both economic and government service impacts as the older generation will be leaving the workforce in record numbers (and no longer contributing to taxes at the same rate), and a larger proportion of the population will be dependent on government-funded programs and services such as the Canada Pension Plan, Old Age Security, the Guaranteed Income Supplement and health services to respond to or delay age-related illness and disability. For this reason, the goal of the federal government should be to not only encourage active participation in the labour market, but provide incentives for employers to accommodate the changing needs of workers. Occupational therapy is a profession that enables individuals to engage in meaningful activities, such as work, and can provide essential programs and services to retain aging workers through workplace modification and design, or effective return-to-work programs for workers who might otherwise retire due to deteriorating health or disability. Supporting employers According to Statistics Canada, "[a]bout one-quarter of full retirees reported that poor health or a disability was a factor in their decision to retire compared with 16% among the partially retired and 14% among retirees who later returned to work" (2009). Early retirement, particularly when prompted by poor health, will have an increasingly significant impact on the Canadian economy. For this reason, a federal strategy should provide incentives for employers to accommodate the changing needs of an aging workforce. An example of this may be creating financial subsidies or tax incentives for employers and industry leaders to invest in technology and assistive devices to adapt work environments and promote healthy work processes. This has the potential of creating not only new industry solutions, but innovative leaders in the Canadian economy, to accommodate the diverse needs and maximize the potential of the broader labour market.

#### **5. Other Challenges**

*With some Canadian individuals, businesses and communities facing particular challenges at this time, in your view, who is facing the most challenges, what are the challenges that are being faced and what specific federal actions are needed to address these challenges?*

Recommendations: 1. Develop an innovative federal health system strategy. 2. Demonstrate leadership in health services for populations under federal jurisdiction. A federal strategy for the next generation The health of Canadians will be the single most important issue facing the economy over the next generation. Currently, provincial and territorial governments are working together to address health system transformation through innovation for the delivery of care under their jurisdictions. However, the federal government should also be preparing an innovative strategy that promotes the health and well-being of individuals and communities that fall under federal jurisdiction (i.e., the Canadian military, veterans, RCMP, federal offenders and First Nations on-reserve and Inuit communities). Using teams to respond to unique needs All populations under federal jurisdiction have unique circumstances, challenges and needs that require a coordinated federal strategy to promote health and well-being, while minimizing health system interventions. Team based models of care are quickly being realized as the gold standard in responding to complex physical and mental health needs. For this reason, the

federal government should begin a process to develop new standards that maximize scopes of practices and advance comprehensive and coordinated care for populations served by the federal health system. More specifically, new or leading interventions and processes can be demonstrated by highlighting innovative practices for occupational therapists working with the Canadian forces, veterans and federal offenders. The federal government can also contribute to the advancement of health system innovation by developing advanced health human resource modeling tools that more accurately predict or respond to interprofessional health system needs. The impact of a federal health system strategy would be tremendous. For example, military and veterans would benefit from comprehensive, team-based models of care, innovative practices and advanced HHR modeling to help them overcome illness or injury acquired during service, while society as a whole would benefit from comprehensive health programs that address the mental and physical challenges faced by many federal offenders. A team-based approach to achieve rehabilitation goals of offenders is important to supports improve re-integration into society, support offenders find meaningful work after release, and reduce rates of recidivism.