



## 2021 NCOTA Legislative Priorities

What is Occupational Therapy? Occupational therapy is the only profession that helps people across the lifespan to do the things they want and need to do through the therapeutic use of daily activities (occupations). Occupational therapy practitioners enable people of all ages to live life to its fullest by helping them promote health, and prevent—or live better with—injury, illness, or disability. Common occupational therapy interventions include helping children with disabilities to participate fully in school and social situations, helping people recovering from injury to regain skills, and providing supports for older adults experiencing physical and cognitive changes.

What is the NCOTA? The NC Occupational Therapy Association (NCOTA) is North Carolina's leading association for occupational therapists, occupational therapy assistants and occupational therapy students. Headquartered in Raleigh and affiliated with the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA), NCOTA was founded in 1957 and later incorporated as a not-for-profit membership organization in 1976.

### 2021 Legislative Priorities

**Expansion of Telehealth opportunities for occupational therapy in North Carolina:** We urge the General Assembly to support telehealth opportunities for occupational therapists like those adopted in other states with great success. Occupational therapy is an excellent example of a health care service that can be effectively utilized in the telehealth environment. Utilization of telehealth for occupational therapy during the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in positive outcomes for patients throughout North Carolina.

**Interstate Compact for Occupational Therapists:** NCOTA supports the passage of legislation to enact the proposed Interstate Compact for Occupational Therapy. If adopted by 10 states, the Compact will provide increased mobility to occupational therapists and occupational therapy assistants to practice across state boundaries in the states that have enacted the compact. North Carolina has already adopted interstate compacts for physical therapists, speech-language pathologists, audiologists, and nurses.

**Need for increased salaries and resources for OTs who practice in the public school setting:** We urge the North Carolina General Assembly to increase salaries and resources for occupational therapists and occupational therapy assistants who work in the public school setting.



**Need for expanded resources for OTs who practice in the public**

**school setting:** We urge the North Carolina General Assembly to increase funding for children with disabilities. We also support allowing schools to access Medicaid reimbursements for services to students in both traditional public schools and public charter schools.

**Increased access to occupational therapy should be an essential part of Medicaid**

**Transformation:** Occupational Therapy benefits patients with a cost effectiveness that often keeps patients from having to endure more extensive and costly procedures. As the Legislature works to implement Medicaid Transformation, increased access to occupational therapy should be included in the transformation framework.

**The General Assembly should pass legislation to close the Medicaid coverage gap:** Closing the Medicaid coverage gap would cover an estimated additional 500,000 North Carolinians and would provide those individuals with essential health care, including occupational therapy. NCOTA supports effort to expand Medicaid and provide individuals with greatly needed health coverage.

**Medicaid should cover occupational therapy for individuals over 21 in a private practice setting.** Currently, North Carolina's Medicaid policies fail to provide coverage for occupational therapy for individuals over 21 seen in a private practice setting. This often means that individuals in need of occupational therapy go without these services and end up in a much more severe health crisis. Medicaid policies should be updated to include Medicaid coverage for occupational therapy for individuals over 21 seen in a private practice setting.

**The mental health benefits of occupational therapy should be supported via legislation and policy.** Occupational therapy not only provides individuals physical health benefits but also significant mental health benefits. Occupational therapy empowers individuals to physically reach their individual potential and gives them the skills to successfully conduct their daily lives and maintain safe and healthy routines. Legislation and health policies should be updated to reflect the beneficial outcomes on mental health provided by occupational therapy.

### Talking Points

Occupational therapy is a cost-effective way to provide integrated care. In a recent study, comparing spending for various medical treatments and therapies, OT was the only service where additional spending on OT was significantly associated with lower hospital readmission rates. Authors noted that OTs address both clinical and social determinants of health,



highlighting our contribution to integrated, cost-effective care. In addition, an occupational therapy intervention with older adults addressed lifestyle changes, including physical activities, transportation use, time use, and daily routines. The researchers found this was a cost-effective intervention with positive impacts on pain, social functioning, life satisfaction, and several indicators of mental health including depressive symptomatology. Occupational therapy is also effective for individuals who suffer substance use disorders.

Another example is OT support of housing maintenance. While addressing housing maintenance, OT practitioners simultaneously address falls risk and home safety in order to prevent ED visits or hospital (re)admissions. Occupational therapy practitioners address habits and routines, such as clients developing safe medication routines, which positively affect outcomes related to diabetes and other chronic conditions. OT practitioners can offer caregiver training to ensure skills and techniques taught during therapy are lasting and sustainable.

**For more information:**

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