



Day at the Capitol February 7, 2023



**OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY:
A HEALTH CARE SOLUTION FOR TEXANS ACROSS THE LIFESPAN**

Occupational therapy services support the developmental, physical, and behavioral health of Texans across the lifespan. Maintaining funding and access to services for our most vulnerable citizens is more crucial than it has ever been. This legislative session, TOTA is advocating for occupational therapy continued inclusion as an effective intervention in existing settings (outpatient rehabilitation, inpatient rehabilitation, school-based services, and early childhood intervention programs) and promote occupational therapy as an effective solution to the emerging mental and behavioral health challenges experienced by Texans across the life span.

Early Childhood Intervention Services (ECI)

Occupational therapy practitioners promote participation, and occupational engagement using a client centered approach in the client's natural environment as part of ECI services (AOTA, 2104). TOTA supports legislative appropriations for article II and HHSC's continued budget allocations for the Early Childhood Intervention program which can contribute to improved outcomes for children and represent a sound investment in our future.

Children with Special Needs

Children with special needs are children that have complex or chronic conditions that require a variety of services for the children and their families. Prevalent amount this population include children and youth with autism spectrum disorder. Occupational therapy ranks second to speech-language pathology as the most frequently provided services for individuals with autism throughout the United States. Prevalence data suggests that Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) currently affects approximately one in 68 children (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2014), and the World Health Organization (WHO; 2013) estimates the prevalence of ASD to be one in 160 individuals worldwide. The needs of children with speaking needs are met with supports and services that are provided separately from their medical care, including occupational therapy. State funding allows schools and community-based programs to provide occupational therapy and other services for children with disabilities or at risk for disabilities. TOTA appreciates programs that address the needs of children with complex or chronic conditions program such as Medicaid and CHIP. These programs serve more than 3.4 million children across the State and we respectfully request that funds for these services be sustained or increased for the upcoming biennium as well.

Behavioral Health Services

Occupational therapists have practiced in mental health for over 100 years, but people living with mental illness may not have access to occupational therapists. More than 80 percent of Texas counties are designated as "mental health professional shortage" areas. OT practitioners' training and accreditation requirements include mental health, and as part of an interdisciplinary team, OT practitioners can help to identify concrete goals, assess capacity, identify barriers, improve skill development to promote participation and independence in both the community and educational setting. HHSC's continued funding for community-based mental health services, such as the Community Living Assistance and Support Services (CLASS), Home and Community-based Services (HCBS), and programs such as Texas Home Living (TxHML) can potentially increase access and availability of services while further promoting independence. Funding for the School Health and Related Services (SHARS) program for behavioral health services rendered by related services personnel, such as OTs or OTAs, can increase prevention and early intervention for students with mental health disorder. We ask OT to be included in legislation referencing school, community, and inpatient mental health services for Texans across the lifespan.

Licensure Compact Act:

Through the OT Compact, consumers have greater access to care. The OT Compact allows licensed occupational therapists (OTs) and occupational therapy assistants (OTAs) to provide continuity of care as clients/patients relocate. OTs and OTAs also will be able to reach populations that are currently underserved, geographically isolated or lack specialty care.

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