



CAOT Position Statement Research in Occupational Therapy (2009)

The Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists (CAOT) recognizes that a strong health system is guided by evidence-informed decision-making. Research evidence is essential to advance the knowledge related to occupation as a determinant of health and occupational therapy as an essential health service in every community.

CAOT supports and promotes the development of effective and well-resourced research capacity in the occupational therapy profession in Canada. CAOT works to advance a collaborative research agenda, empower member involvement in research, disseminate research knowledge and conduct research related to professional issues to inform public and private sector health and social policy.

CAOT Initiatives

CAOT will engage in the following actions to strengthen and position occupational therapy to make use of emerging opportunities for collaborative research regionally, domestically and internationally:

1. Create partnerships by bringing together research funders, researchers, practitioners, policy makers and clients. CAOT also supports the development of partnerships with organizations in both the private and not for profit sectors where research agendas are compatible and do not serve as a conflict of interest.
2. Recognize and promote the role and contributions of clients in occupational therapy collaborative research.
3. Identify and work with leaders and champions of collaborative research to develop a collaborative research direction and agenda.
4. Support efforts of researchers to obtain research funding to carry out elements of the research agenda.
5. Leverage areas for collaborative research that will inform public policy such as:
 - Outcome assessments and cost-effectiveness studies
 - Knowledge transfer
 - Occupational performance
 - Intervention research
6. 6. Encourage the use of innovative technology to advance participation in collaborative research.

CAOT will engage in the following actions to build research capacity among members:

1. Participate with funding agencies to determine research priorities.
2. Provide members with access to tools and resources for seeking research evidence to inform their practice and research.
3. Provide mechanisms to disseminate research findings.
4. Encourage the development of partnerships and networks for collaborative research activities.
5. Ensure quality standard development and monitoring mechanisms to recognize and promote research capacity for the profession of occupational therapy in Canada.

CAOT will engage in the following actions to conduct best practice and policy research to address CAOT's strategic priorities and needs:

1. Plan and implement an external relations strategy to build a strong advocacy platform for occupational therapy in Canada.
2. Identify and align research initiatives to address public and private sector priorities.
3. Work with third party funders where possible to support the development and implementation of research projects.
4. Engage expert members and other stakeholders as required to work in collaboration with CAOT for conducting research.

Recommendations for occupational therapists

1. Profile the importance of occupation as a determinant of health and of occupational therapy research as an essential component in advancing professional knowledge.
2. Use the Position Statement on Evidence-based Occupational Therapy (CAOT et al., 1999) to promote excellence in occupational therapy services.
3. Seek out mentors and continuing education where needed to advance research competencies.
4. Provide mentorship opportunities to promote research in occupational therapy.
5. Seek out partnerships with research funders, researchers, practitioners, policy makers and clients to engage in collaborative research.
6. Utilize CAOT tools and resources to support research development and dissemination.

Background

Occupational therapists, the primary service providers of occupational therapy, are university educated and understand the effects of factors like disease and injury on the ability of individuals, groups, and communities to engage in the occupations of life.

Occupational therapists are regulated health professionals in each Canadian province and have skills and knowledge to provide an evidence-based approach to help others identify, engage in, and achieve their desired potential in their occupations.

Participation in meaningful occupation is an important determinant of health. Occupational therapists improve and enhance health by enabling individuals, groups, and communities to identify, engage in, and achieve desired potential in occupations of life. Occupational therapy also enables Canadians to maximize productivity, reduce lifestyle restrictions, and avoid unnecessary dependency.

In 2003 the Canadian Occupational Therapy Foundation (COTF), CAOT, the Association of Canadian Occupational Therapy University Programs (ACOTUP), and the Association of Canadian Occupational Therapy Regulatory Organizations (ACOTRO) set out a Research Strategy for Occupational Therapy in Canada. The vision was to advance occupation and participation through the creation, dissemination, and utilization of new research knowledge.

CAOT has woven this vision into its strategic priorities and has assumed numerous functions and activities to address research in its operations plan. CAOT undertakes activities to promote occupational therapy research in ways that assist members to engage in research and share research ideas. Visits to www.caot.ca reveal the numerous services and databases available to members for searching and sharing research information to support evidence-informed practice. CAOT also works with researchers to provide opportunities to disseminate research findings through the web site and presentations at the annual conference. In the past few years CAOT and COTF have worked closely to create synergies and more opportunities for research funding.

CAOT conducts its own research to advance best practices in occupational therapy practice. The research findings have an important function to inform public and private sector policy development regarding occupational therapy.

Many of CAOT's research activities are related to the development of standards and workforce capacity for the profession. CAOT has developed a research standard for academic accreditation (CAOT, 2005) and identified new roles for occupational therapists in the Profile of Occupational Therapy Practice in Canada (CAOT, 2007). These new roles are "scholarly practitioner" and "researcher" and are designed to advance research capacity within the profession.

Research activities are usually closely aligned with the federal government agenda. CAOT encourages and participates in working relationships with other research organizations to address mutual goals. Some of these organizations are Research Canada, Canadian Cochrane Centre, Canadian Health Services Research Foundation, and the Institute for Mobility and Aging. Through collaborative strategies with Research Canada, the interests of CAOT are positioned front and centre in advocacy campaigns. These campaigns promote the importance of health related research to politicians and decision-makers.

In the last five years, CAOT has conducted a number of research projects through contribution agreements from federal government departments such as Health Canada, Human Resources and Skills Canada, and the Public Health Agency of Canada. This research is aligned with both CAOT and government priorities and is undertaken to advance practice and/or inform public policy.

Two major collaborative studies were funded under the Government of Canada's Primary Health Care Initiative. The Enhancing Interdisciplinary Collaboration in Primary Health Care (EICP, 2006) and the Canadian Collaborative Mental Health Initiative (CCMHI, 2006) has had major impact on both provincial and federal policies on primary health care. A very positive result is the creation of the Mental Health Commission which will continue to advise the government on policy and programs for people with mental health issues.

As a result of the pan-Canadian shortage in occupational therapists (von Zweck, 2002), CAOT has undertaken numerous studies on occupational therapy health human resources. The studies range from sources of data on occupational therapy to workforce integration of international graduates. One of the most positive outcomes has been The Workforce Trends of Occupational Therapists in Canada that addresses the development of a national occupational therapist data set coordinated by the Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI, 2007). Through this database the profession will have the opportunity to annually monitor the supply and distribution of occupational therapists in Canada. This is a major step towards effective human resources planning for the profession.

Two major research projects on internationally educated occupational therapists (IEOTs) have recently been completed including Enabling the Workforce Integration of International Graduates: Issues and Recommendations for Occupational Therapy in Canada (von Zweck, 2006) and Building An Access and Registration Framework for Internationally Educated Occupational Therapist (CAOT et al., 2007). CAOT and its partners ACOTRO and ACOTUP, continue to work with the Government of Canada's Foreign Credential Recognition Program to implement the recommendations of these studies.

CAOT practice research has been aligned with public health priorities and has resulted in confirming the link between occupation and health. These studies have increased the evidence base for practice and set the foundation for new public policy and programs for seniors' health. For example, the funded project National Blueprint on Safety for Older Drivers is intended to create major policy changes related to older adults' driving. These policy changes will ultimately impact occupational therapy human resources planning, development of evidence informed programs for older adult drivers, and changes to legislation related to driving.

The 2006 Professional Issue Forum on Research without Borders (CAOT) identified opportunities such as collaborative research to produce research that will enable occupational therapists to address best practices that go beyond regional approaches and new challenges in the international and domestic workplace. Collaborative research is defined as a deliberate set of interactions and processes designed specifically to bring researchers, decision-makers, practitioners and citizens to broaden ways to define problems and research methodologies so that the research results are relevant in practice and can also inform policy decisions.

Collaborative research is relevant to the development of new knowledge for occupational therapy for a number of reasons. Occupational therapists in Canada have built a global reputation for excellence in the development of new knowledge and research capacity in occupational therapy. We recognize that

the demands as well as opportunities for research will increase in the future. The most important factors include; growing global competition for occupational therapy services and professionals, comparative international assessments of outcomes, and the rapid diffusion of new approaches, best practices and knowledge. Occupational therapists will also continue to experience competition at home from other professional groups with well-established research infrastructures. CAOT needs to be positioned so that our research informs public policy decisions.

Collaborative research has many advantages over single discipline research. A higher quality of research may result when many disciplines and/or organizations combine their expertise and resources. It also lowers the duplication of similar work across disciplines and organizations. Reflecting the values of the client-centred profession of occupational therapy, CAOT largely endorses the involvement of clients in collaborative research projects.

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