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Dear Ms Clinch and Ms Beaulieu

Thank you for your letter to the Greens (WA) outlining the priorities identified by the members of Occupational Therapy Australia (OTA) in the lead up to the 2021 WA State Election. As Greens (WA) spokesperson for health and disability I am pleased to respond on behalf of the party.

### **Increased number of occupational therapy positions in mental health**

There is no question the WA mental health system is in crisis. Unfortunately the Labor Government is continuing outdated funding models which do not prioritise prevention, early intervention and community-managed mental health services. The Greens (WA) are committed to rebalancing our health and mental health systems away from predominantly reactive, acute, hospital-based systems towards a strong focus on prevention, equity, early intervention and community care. We are committed to reaching targets outlined in the Western Australian Mental Health, Alcohol and Other Drug Services Plan 2015-2025, including that spending on mental health prevention should reach 5% of the total mental health budget, and investment in community-managed mental health services should reach 22% of total spending, by 2025.

The Greens (WA) recognise the important, and often undervalued, role played by allied health professionals, including Occupational Therapists. Your work is important for wellbeing and quality of life, as well as reducing long term health costs. I note the findings of National Disability Services' *State of the Disability Sector 2020* report, including that 86% of respondents found it moderately or extremely difficult to fill occupational therapist roles, and that nearly half of respondents (48%) found it difficult to retain occupational therapists. This is incredibly troubling. I also note the concerns raised in the NDS report regarding the

allied health workforce more broadly, including difficulties attracting and retaining speech therapists and physiotherapists. I acknowledge that the situation is particularly dire in rural areas, further disadvantaging these populations.

The Greens (WA) support increased access to mental health services which meet individual need, and we are committed to a model of care and service delivery underpinned by the principles of the recovery movement. We recognise that occupational therapy can play an important and valuable role in that model and in supporting people's individual recovery process. We would welcome the opportunity to meet with representatives from Occupational Therapists Australia to discuss how we can support your work to ensure Western Australians have access to the therapies, services and supports they need.

### **Increased number of occupational therapy positions in schools**

The Greens acknowledge the significant barriers preventing children from receiving the supports they need to succeed at school. These include:

- There is not enough funding
- There are cultural barriers impacting on relations between schools and externally employed allied health professionals
- There are siloes between disability and education services, and
- Schools do not have the resources and expertise to facilitate access to supports through the NDIS process.

The Greens support a range of mechanisms to address these barriers. We are committed to more funding to provide the necessary supports and services for children at educational risk. We also support the Western Australian Council of State School Organisation's call for schools to be resourced to enable dedicated staff to support and coordinate disability supports, including the utilisation of therapy services.

I know that significant work is needed to improve this situation. This work is crucial. If children do not have their needs met in school the impact is likely to be life-long. Ensuring children at educational risk have access to appropriate supports is an area, along with improved mental health care, in which I have been a passionate advocate. I have regularly raised concerns in parliamentary speeches and questions, as well as directly with the Minister and in the media. I hope to be in a position to continue this advocacy following the upcoming state election.

### **Greater regulation of vehicle modifications**

The Greens (WA) acknowledge the disparity in vehicle modification standards and processes across all state and territory jurisdictions and support improved regulation and greater uniformity between state and federal laws regarding vehicle modification standards.

When determining these standards, The Greens (WA) support evidence base approaches, requiring evidence to provide modifications are safe rather than an absence of evidence they are unsafe. We acknowledge the important role that Occupational Therapists should play in this work.

The Greens believe that the issues you raise regarding the lack of regulation and funding to ensure vehicle modifications are prescribed and assessed by qualified experts should be addressed by the incoming state Government, following consultation with Occupational Therapists Australia and other stakeholders.

I thank your members for the important work that they do to improve the lives of Western Australians. The Greens (WA) look forward to working closely with you in the next Parliament.

Yours sincerely,



Hon Alison Xamon MLC  
Member for North Metropolitan

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