

NDIS Review Secretariat

Via: contactus@ndisreview.gov.au



11th July 2023

Dear Secretariat,

I am writing to bring to the attention of the NDIS Independent Review Panel the crucial role that occupational therapists play as a core provider within the NDIS and in the broader mental health system, in the treatment and management of mental health issues and psychosocial disability. I also seek assurance from you that the role of occupational therapists in this area of practice will continue to be recognised as an active and important part of the scheme.

Recently the NDIS Independent Review (the Review) sought feedback via Mental Health Australia's (MHA) members on ways to enhance psychosocial supports available through the NDIS. OTA has communicated its position on the importance of the role of occupational therapists in this area through its membership of MHA, including at several policy forums.

However, I am keen to ensure that any recommendations arising from the Review, including any proposed expansion of tier 2 supports, reflect a clear understanding of the work of occupational therapists in the mental health field, and that the important skillset and support pathway provided by them continues to be recognised in any future scheme reforms.

Occupational therapists who provide mental health services provide vital supports for NDIS participants with psychosocial disability. By focussing on the functionality of participants in their activities of daily living, occupational therapists are uniquely positioned to enable NDIS participants to build capacity, achieve independence, realise personal goals, and reduce the need for intensive NDIS funded supports over time. Occupational therapists also play an important role in bridging the gap between clinical and non-clinical service delivery to support holistic, person centred and recovery orientated supports and strategies.

Mental health service provision is a longstanding and core area of practice in occupational therapy, dating back to the beginning of the profession more than 100 years ago. This expertise is nationally recognised and well-established in academic literature, and allied health practice. Occupational therapists working in mental health draw on a broad range of frameworks and models to provide strengths-based, behaviourally oriented, interventions to improve mental health and wellbeing.

Occupational therapists are trained in occupational therapy specific tools and approaches as well as psychological techniques used by other qualified mental health professionals, including psychotherapy, counselling, and other psychological strategies such as services for eating disorders. Occupational therapists apply a unique, goal-directed occupational focus, addressing the activities and occupations that are important and meaningful to a person's daily life.

The practical, recovery-focused approach used by occupational therapists addresses not only an individual's diagnosis, but how the person may experience mental illness and the impact it has on their ability to function in daily life. For example, their ability to work, manage household responsibilities, participate in schooling, sleep, personal care or engage with others. This makes occupational therapy ideally suited for those experiencing complex mental illness or a significant impact on their day-to-day life as a result of their mental health condition.

Occupational therapists also understand the interplay between the bio-psychosocial and cognitive issues that typically coexist with people with mental health conditions.

Occupational therapists working in mental health provide services to a wide range of clients including:

- Children and young people experiencing behavioural issues as a result of diagnosed or undiagnosed mental health conditions such as anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, developmental trauma, Autism Spectrum Disorders, ADD/ADHD, intellectual disability and sensory processing differences.
- Adults experiencing mental illness, including anxiety and depression as well as more complex mental illness such as schizophrenia and borderline personality disorder.
- Older adults, including Behavioural and Psychological Symptoms of Dementia (BPSD).
- People experiencing symptoms of severe mental illness that require trauma-informed support for suicide and/or self-harm behaviours.

In addition to providing therapeutic supports, occupational therapists can also provide holistic and recovery orientated supports including functional and environmental assessments, environmental adaptation, the prescription of aides and approaches (including sensory modifications), care planning, relapse prevention, and case management.

Nationally, occupational therapists can achieve mental health endorsement through the OTA Mental Health Endorsement program. The OTA Mental Health Endorsement program is underpinned by the occupational therapy mental health capability framework, and provides formal recognition of the additional knowledge, skills, and experience of occupational therapists formally credentialed in their scope of mental health practice.

The program provides an important signal to practitioners, funders, and users of occupational therapy services about what the profession considers to be the foundation for safe and effective practice, and provides access to mental health funding through Medicare via the Better Access initiative, Department of Veteran Affairs, WorkSafe Victoria and other schemes.

OTA welcomes the Review's intention to co-design supports for participants (including those with psychosocial disability) and would appreciate the opportunity to assist the Review to understand the scope and potential that occupational therapists can contribute to the NDIS, and the broader mental health support system for Australians with psychosocial disability.

My team would be very happy to engage further with you on this topic. Please feel free to contact me at officeofceo@otaus.com.au to arrange a discussion.

Yours sincerely,



Samantha Hunter
Chief Executive Officer

cc CEO Mental Health Australia, Carolyn Nikoloski