

Outline of Capability Framework for Occupational Therapists working with Older People (Aged Care)

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This document is a brief overview of Occupational Therapy Australia’s (OTA) Capability Framework for Occupational Therapists working with Older People (Aged Care). The purpose of this document is to provide an overview of the capabilities occupational therapists should demonstrate and use when working with older people at different career stages and to explain how the framework can be used.

Purpose of the framework

The Capability Framework for Occupational Therapists working with Older People (Aged Care) was developed for occupational therapists to:

- Support self-reflection and decision-making about their practice.
- Help identify areas for skill improvement relevant to their service setting.
- Sets expectations at different career stages.
- Advocate for the role of occupational therapy in aged care.

Format

The framework sets out a series of capabilities, grouped in five key domains:



The framework also describes how these capabilities differ across the career stages of **foundational**, **intermediate** and **senior** practitioner to recognise how skills, knowledge and behaviours develop over the course of a person’s career, as they gain experience and build expertise.

More information about the domains for working with older people

The key capabilities for occupational therapists working with older people are described across the following five domains:

1. **Knowledge of aged care systems, aged care conditions and co-occurring factors:**
This domain includes capabilities focussed on understanding relevant legislation, funding and governance systems as well as conditions commonly experienced by older people, their associated symptoms and how they impact occupational performance and participation. It also encompasses knowledge of the ageing process, and the unique challenges faced by the ageing population such as grief and loss, loneliness, life and role transitions and palliative or end-of-life care.
2. **Assessment, Planning of Needs, Goal Setting, and Outcome Measures:**
This domain includes capabilities focussed on implementing client-centred assessments to develop appropriate planning of supports and therapeutic interventions. Capabilities in this domain guide occupational therapists to consider the views of carers, advocates, and the broader care team where appropriate and be familiar with the assessment requirements of the aged care system, using outcomes measures to evaluate clinical approaches and goals.
3. **Occupational-Focused Interventions and Therapeutic Strategies:**
This domain focusses on capabilities supporting the provision of strengths based therapeutic interventions that are focused on the important and meaningful activities of the older person to support engagement. Occupation-focused interventions focus on motivation, leisure and play, habits and routines, meaningful roles, life skills, functional cognition, physical activity, community engagement and independence, communication and interaction, self-management, emotional regulation and environment.
4. **Client-Centred Practice and continuous improvement:**
This domain includes capabilities focussed on providing care that integrates client feedback and reflective practice and acknowledges the importance of continuing professional development. Capabilities in this domain encourage Occupational therapists working in aged care to ensure that they are gathering feedback and input from clients, experienced aged care occupational therapists and other aged care professionals as part of their practice. This domain also encourages Practitioners to develop their own capacity to provide supervision and support to other aged care professionals.
5. **Working with other health professionals and significant others:**
This domain includes capabilities focussed on engaging with other healthcare professionals and carers to provide comprehensive care. Capabilities in this domain guide Occupational therapists to understand the role and contribution of different aged care workforces, the vital role of significant others and the importance of coordinator and intermediary roles. This domain also encourages Practitioners to actively seek to develop their experience in working with others at all career stages, across a range of settings.

More information about the career stages

Each capability is set out across three career stages. The career stages are reflective of proficiency rather than years of practice. An experienced practitioner may be working at an intermediate or senior level in one area but have foundational capabilities in a new, less familiar area of practice.

- **Foundational Practitioners** are developing their knowledge related to the capability and can identify and apply relevant knowledge and skills with the support of senior practitioners to situations or scenarios of lower complexity.
- **Intermediate Practitioners** can apply a more analytical lens to their practice, operate more autonomously in their practice and can operate in more complex situations.
- **Senior Practitioners** can deliver services across a range of clinical complexities and situations, can evaluate and critique their practice at a high level, are expected to support the design and development of systems and structures to ensure best clinical practice, and support the skill development of foundational and intermediate practitioners.

How to use the framework

The capability framework was developed as a tool for occupational therapists to guide good practice, however it is helpful for people working with occupational therapists, those who employ occupational therapists, and older people accessing the services of occupational therapists to better understand what they do, how they approach their work and what falls within their scope of practice in a specific area, such as Aged Care.

- **For Occupational Therapists:** The framework is designed to be used alongside other standards and frameworks, ensuring a holistic approach to aged care. It's not meant to be prescriptive or a strict checklist with clinicians encouraged to apply relevant skills based on their specific context. Clinicians aren't expected to be proficient in all capabilities listed. Occupational therapists can use the framework to guide their professional development and training plans, to navigate conversations with their employer about scope of practice and to advocate for their services.
- **For people working with occupational therapists:** The framework can provide other professionals with a better understanding of the unique role that occupational therapists play in a multi-disciplinary team and the ways occupational therapists can work with clients to improve their ability to participate in meaningful activity (occupation).
- **For organisations that employ occupational therapists:** The framework will provide employers with insight into the scope of practice of occupational therapists and the reasonable expectations of employees at various career stages or in new areas of practice, as well as appropriate supports for occupational therapists (such as professional supervision).
- **For clients accessing the services of occupational therapists:** While the framework has not been developed for a consumer audience, it is available to the general public and can be used by clients to understand what occupational therapists do and the services that may be of benefit to them or their loved one.

Occupational Therapy Australia will also use its suite of capability frameworks to advocate for the profession, ensuring the scope of practice and vital role that occupational therapists play in multi-disciplinary teams is understood by funding bodies and relevant government departments.

Acknowledgements

The framework was developed in collaboration with an Expert Advisory Group and through multiple consultation phases with the broader occupational therapy profession. OTA acknowledges the contribution of the Expert Advisory Group and all occupational therapists who contributed their time, insights and expertise to the development of the framework.

Reference

[The Capability Framework for Occupational Therapists working with Older People \(Aged Care\) – Version 1 – May 2024](#)



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