

WORKSHOP SUMMARY

Private mental health practice – Youth and adult

This document provides a summary of the discussion and findings from the deep dive workshop focused on providers of private mental health supports for youths and adults. The workshop was held on the 8th of December 2021. The workshop was undertaken on behalf of Occupational Therapy Australia (OTA) and sought feedback from a diverse group of occupational therapists, at different career stages and working in a range of services and locations around Australia. The summary below provides a high-level overview of the findings of the workshop.

Key findings

Identifying training and development needs

- For those in smaller and sole trader practices, decisions about training are not typically based on formal frameworks, but rather made by gathering information through a range of different sources including information from peak associations, supervision, information coming through peer networks or from training providers, internet research.
- Covid-19 has positively impacted the availability of high-quality training with a range of international organisations offering training with leaders in different areas of therapy.
- The value of Australian-based training and face-to-face options was emphasised despite the value of international online options.
- Requirements associated with BAMH-endorsement were a key driver in relation to determining training needs, focused primarily on psychotherapy/psychological strategies.
- Counselling and psychotherapy training were key areas recognised as essential to build and maintain capability.
- Personal experience of therapy was highlighted as extremely valuable for practitioners.
- Development of role and identity in private mental health practice often involves not just a more traditional OT role but also counselling, psychotherapy roles.

Career pathways and stages

- Participants discussed the different pathways to mental health practice, noting that it was common to start in public mental health roles to build experience.
- Challenges were raised where practitioners couldn't access those early career roles leading to a more difficult developmental pathway.
- While participants were more typically in smaller organisations with limited differentiation in internal roles, the use of career stages as the basis for a capability framework was supported.
- Some concern was expressed about potential perceived barriers to early career mental health practice—important to be clear that early career requirements are about support to help practitioners provide high-quality services and develop their own skillsets, but not to block provision of mental health services.
- Not all practitioners are likely to progress to level four 'advanced practitioner' as many may remain more broadly focused.

- Endorsement is a necessary and important step but primarily access to funding rather than providing any additional recognition for mental health OT.
- Additional structure to help practitioners develop the prerequisite skills and then achieve endorsement was considered valuable.

Skills and capabilities for private practice

- Private practice skills were considered an area of real need not covered in undergraduate training and not something developed in typical early career roles in public acute and community mental health services.
- Funding schemes such as Medicare and the NDIS are extremely important and have a range of complexities and requirements. Practitioners would benefit from training options focused on working effectively within these schemes, primarily focused on operational aspects and specific requirements.
- Public and private were seen as very different and there was a suggestion that these might be different streams. However, there was recognition that there are increasing numbers of practitioners working across both areas.
- A range of specific areas of capability were highlighted:
 - o Family therapy
 - o Trauma-informed practice
 - o EMDR
 - o Counselling
- Psychotherapy was discussed as both a non-OT area of capability but also as one that could have an OT lens and that it would be ideal to have training available that is delivered by experienced OTs.
- Psychotherapy was discussed as a key need, but it was noted that each of the psychotherapy approaches (ACT, DBT) provides a particular lens to guide treatment. While practitioners would benefit from foundational awareness in a range of core areas, they would not necessarily become more specialised in more than one or two areas.

Additional post-session questions

1. **Are there any other areas of capability that should be included in a capability framework for OTs working in private practice?**
2. **How can OTA best support training and development in areas such as psychotherapy where training may be delivered by other professions?**
3. **Are there any other funding schemes with requirements that impact your training needs? E.g., private health insurers or compensation schemes?**

If you would like to provide feedback, please contact: pherrmann@squarecircleconsulting.com.au.