Occupational Therapy Australia

Code of ethics (2025)



Occupational Therapy Australia

Introductory statement

The ethos of the occupational therapy profession and its practice requires its members to discharge their duties and responsibilities, at all times, in a manner which professionally, ethically, and morally compromises no individual with whom they have professional contact, irrespective of that person's position, situation or condition in society.

The Code of Ethics is founded on the bio-ethical principles of beneficence, non-maleficence, honesty, veracity, confidentiality, justice, respect and autonomy.

The following statements, which constitute a Code of Ethics, are intended to act as clear guidance to all occupational therapists in pursuance of their professional practice. These statements do not replace the principles and procedures adopted by employing bodies, regulatory bodies, relevant legislation nor do they deny other rights within society not specifically mentioned.

The code is set out with a 'Statement' which is an essential component of the code, accompanied in most instances by an 'Interpretation' which is designed to amplify the relevant statement.

Complimentary Codes

This code sits alongside other codes that support occupational therapists to work fairly, justly and ethically.

OTA members are also bound by the Member Code of Conduct that sets out the values and the standards of conduct and behaviour expected from OTA members to protect the reputation of the association.

Registered occupational therapists in Australia have a professional responsibility to adhere to the Ahpra Code of Conduct for registered health practitioners. The code supports good patient care within an ethical framework, helping to keep the public safe.

About Occupational Therapy Australia

Occupational Therapy Australia is the peak professional membership association for occupational therapists in Australia.

Our members are qualified occupational therapists employed throughout the public, private, community and not-for-profit sectors. They work in partnership with clients and communities to lead meaningful lives.

Our vision is to empower occupational therapists and their communities so that people are engaged in occupations that bring meaning and purpose to their lives, fostering health, wellbeing participation and inclusion. Our purpose is to protect and progress occupational therapy in Australia. We strive for excellence, increased collaboration and inclusion and forecast a future where occupational therapy continues to make a profound impact.

Members are provided benefits through access to professional support and resources, professional development, advocacy and through opportunities to contribute to, and shape, professional excellence.

For more information about Occupational Therapy Australia, visit www.otaus.com.au.

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Relationship with and responsibilities to clients

Confidentiality

Beyond the necessary sharing of information with professional colleagues, occupational therapists are to safeguard confidential information and protect client privacy in all forms of communication.

a. The disclosure of confidential information is permissible when:
    i. there is a legal compulsion
    ii. a client gives informed consent.
b. Refer to relevant legislation relating to access of information e.g. Freedom of Information legislation and Privacy Act.

Personal Relationships

Occupational therapists shall not enter into personal relationships which damage the establishment and maintenance of professional trust.

Occupational therapists might experience strong positive or negative feelings towards clients which may be detrimental to the therapeutic relationship. When necessary, consideration should be given to a change of therapist.

Respecting Clients' Rights

Occupational therapists have a responsibility to promote and protect the health care rights of all individuals they work with. This includes respecting each person's right to access services, make informed choices, participate actively in decision-making, and receive services that are free from discrimination.

Occupational therapists must ensure all practice respects the dignity of care, upholding each client's intrinsic value, privacy, autonomy, and safety. Therapeutic services should be compassionate, person-centred, and culturally responsive, fostering trust and mutual respect.

In addition, occupational therapists should acknowledge and support the dignity of risk. This means respecting clients' rights to make informed decisions, even when those decisions involve risk, so long as they have the capacity to do so. Occupational Therapists should facilitate informed risk-taking that aligns with the person's values, goals, and lifestyle, and provide necessary support to manage potential consequences safely.

Occupational therapists must follow relevant local procedures and ethical standards, and clearly inform all clients and decision makers of any financial costs associated with goods and services. These costs must be fair, transparent, and proportionate to the services provided.

a. Occupational therapists are to ensure that they also observe the provisions of the current health, regulatory schemes and other relevant acts pertaining to the area of work.
b. Protecting privacy may extend to safeguards when publishing visual or written material. It is necessary to refer to local procedures and guidelines.

c. Autonomy implies that clients and carers are active participants in any decision regarding their involvement in services.

Withdrawal of Services for Clients

While occupational therapists have a right to state and support their views about the service for which they work, they shall avoid any action which places clients at risk, even if this is during the course of an industrial dispute.

Occupational therapists should be aware of their scope of practice and identify when clients needs exceed their capabilities and make appropriate steps to refer to a suitable health professional.

a. No action shall be taken which affects clients whose ultimate safety might be at risk. This would include services which, if withdrawn, could cause severe hardship. In such circumstances it is acknowledged that occupational therapists at times provide services pro bono to ensure continuity of care and uphold ethical responsibilities.

b. Occupational therapists should refer to relevant scheme or funding bodies guidelines and contractual agreements to understand their obligations.

c. When further guidance is required consult Occupational Therapy Australia or the relevant union(s).

d. It is recognised that there are times when therapeutic services should be withdrawn for safety of the provider.

Professional Integrity

Advertising

Occupational therapists may advertise in connection with their professional practice if the advertising is not false, not misleading or deceptive or likely to mislead or deceive, is not vulgar or sensational, does not claim or imply superiority of the occupational therapist over any or all other occupational therapists, and does not contain testimonials or endorsements concerning the occupational therapist. The advertisement for the occupational therapist may contain a statement of the areas of expertise in practice.

Discrimination

Occupational therapists shall not discriminate in their professional practice, on the basis of ethnicity, culture, impairment, language, age, gender, sexual preference, religion, political beliefs or status in society.

Personal Misuse of Alcohol or Other Drugs

Occupational therapists should not be under the influence of alcohol or drugs which adversely affect the performance of their professional duties.

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Collegiality

Occupational therapists are expected to act with integrity, demonstrate respect for their profession, and support ethical standards and values of their professional organisation. They should foster collegial relationships with fellow practitioners, contributing to a respectful, inclusive and supportive community.

Members are bound by a Member Code of Conduct that sets out the values and the standards of conduct and behaviour expected from OTA members to protect the reputation of the association.

Professional Relationships and responsibilities

Public Comment

Occupational therapists must ensure that when publishing articles, posting on social media or engaging with media outlets, or making any public facing comments, it is clear whether they are representing the profession or expressing a professional opinion. No OTA member is authorised to speak publicly on behalf of the association without delegation.

Working Relationships

Occupational therapists shall respect the needs, traditions, practices, special competencies, and responsibilities of their own and other professions, as well as those of the institutions and agencies that constitute their working environment.

Professional Development

All members of the occupational therapist profession have an individual responsibility to maintain their own level of professional competence and each of them must strive to improve and update knowledge and skills.

Occupational therapists as members of the profession shall promote and maintain practice based on current knowledge and research, and develop this body of knowledge as appropriate.

They shall promote the understanding of occupational therapy to the general public.

Occupational therapists have a responsibility to contribute to the continuing development of the profession by critical evaluation of professional practice, instigating and participating in research, supporting student education with placements, continuing education and membership of the professional association.

Research

Occupational therapists undertaking research will seek ethical approval from relevant bodies prior to commencement.

Any research undertaken has ethical requirements with which the occupational therapist must comply.

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Professional Standards

Competence

Occupational therapists must acknowledge the boundaries of their competence. They shall provide services and use interventions for which they are qualified by training and experience. Occupational therapists should refer to Capability Frameworks for the relevant practice area for guidance.

a. Occupational therapists who delegate services must be satisfied that the people to whom these are delegated are competent in their execution. Occupational therapists in these circumstances retain ultimate responsibility for the management of their clients.

b. Occupational therapists shall refrain from undertaking any activity in which problems or conflicts of a personal nature are likely to affect their competence or cause harm to clients or colleagues.

c. Occupational therapists should recognise that a number of professions share common skills and thus boundaries of practice may overlap.

Referral of Patients and Clients

Occupational therapists shall respond to referrals in a timely manner.

Occupational therapists have the right to refer patients and clients on to a more appropriate service or decline the referral as appropriate.

Keeping Records of Patients and Clients

Occupational therapists shall keep records and reports clearly and concisely for the information of patients and clients, professional colleagues, legal purposes and to record occupational therapy services.

a. Clear and concise records assist in the provision of optimum quality and service delivery.

b. Provision must be made for the secure and confidential storage and timely and adequate disposal of such records.

c. Requirements of schemes in which services are provided should be adhered to.

d. Refer to the relevant legislation on access to personal information.

e. Contact Occupational Therapy Australia for guidance in specific instances

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