



Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists • **British Columbia**  
Association canadienne des ergothérapeutes • **Colombie-Britannique**

## MEDIA RELEASE

### Chronic Shortage of Occupational Therapists in BC to Worsen as Population Grows and Ages

*Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists urging doubling of training spaces to keep up*

**NORTH VANCOUVER, BC (May 11 , 2015):** The number of occupational therapists in BC is not keeping pace with our growing population, and the Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists – British Columbia Chapter (CAOT-BC), blames an ongoing shortage of training opportunities as the main contributing factor.

There are 48 training seats at UBC, the only occupational therapy (OT) training program in the province, and the association is calling for a doubling of training spaces. With demand already exceeding supply, CAOT-BC is urging a sharp increase in the number being trained in BC, to brace themselves for a sudden surge in demand expected soon.

With OTs in short supply, BC presently relies on OTs trained outside of the province. In fact, 74 per cent of new OTs coming to BC are trained elsewhere. As a result, BC has one of the highest rates of internationally trained practitioners in the country.

#### **OTs BENEFIT ALL BRITISH COLUMBIANS**

Unless you need one yourself, many people are unaware of the valuable individualized services OTs provide to help patients recover and become more independent.

- Occupational therapists “enable” people who cannot do the things they want and need to do.
- OTs provide patients with therapeutic guidance in performing everyday activities (or “occupations”). This includes helping children with disabilities to meet their goals at school and thrive socially and academically, helping people recovering from neurological or physical injury, and providing elderly British Columbians with assistance as they age.
- OTs remove a heavy cost burden from BC’s health care system, by keeping people healthy and reducing the need for emergency and hospital care.

#### **SUPPLY IS CHRONICALLY SHORT**

- Almost every OT graduate from UBC (86 per cent) enters practice immediately – and for each of them hired in BC, three more from out of province are hired.
- Only four per cent of all practicing OTs locate and practice in rural BC – less than a third of what’s needed in BC’s non-urban communities.

(more)

- The average age of an OT in BC is 41 years, older than the national average of 39.7 years. BC also has greatest proportion of occupational therapists above the age of 50 in Canada, therefore approaching retirement, at 25.8 per cent, another factor that will contribute to the difficulty in accessing this vital service.

### **DEMAND IS ON THE RISE**

- BC's population of 4.6 million will increase another third to 6.1 million by 2041, according to BC Statistics.
- Seniors comprise an increasing proportion of our population. The number of seniors (65 and older) in BC is expected to almost double to 1.49 million by 2036.
- Seniors are among those who benefit most from individual care by OTs for the cognitive and physical challenges that emerge with aging. Falls in the home are the number one reason that seniors lose their independence. Home safety assessments by OTs reduce and prevent the risk factors associated with falling.

“It’s clear where we’re headed, unless we act to make sure the number of OTs keeps up with the swell in demand we’re about to see,” says Giovanna Boniface, Managing Director of CAOT-BC.

“With only 48 training seats at UBC, were going to keep running short, and the problem will only worsen as the population grows and ages, and our aging OTs start to retire. We can’t keep depending on an outside supply we can’t control. We need to ramp up training in BC now, to ensure we have enough therapists to meet the demand. Otherwise, our overburdened health care system will suffer by picking up the slack at greater cost, and by overcrowding facilities with patients who can be better served with individualized care.”

“The Ministry of Health is encouraging individualized, client-centred attention to patients right across the health care system,” Boniface added. “The help provided by occupational therapists supports that model, keeping British Columbians healthy, improving patient care, reducing unnecessary hospitalizations, and reducing costs to the system.”

### **The Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists- BC Chapter (CAOT-BC)**

The Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists- BC Chapter (CAOT-BC) is a provincial, member-based association representing over 2200 occupational therapists in British Columbia. CAOT-BC is a chapter of CAOT, the national member-based association representing occupational therapists in Canada. With over 15,000 practicing occupational therapists in Canada, CAOT provides leadership to actively develop and promote the client-centered profession of occupational therapy in Canada and internationally. [www.caot.ca](http://www.caot.ca)

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