

Name of Member of Legislative Assembly (MLA)

Saskatchewan Legislative Building 2405 Legislative Dr
Regina, SK
S4S 0B3

Insert date

Dear ***Insert name of Member of Legislative Assembly***:

I am writing to you as your constituent and as an occupational therapist (OT) to draw your attention to the impact of the acute shortage of occupational therapists, which affects all segments of society from newborns to the elderly. (Learn more at www.oteveryday.ca, the public education site from CAOT that shares case studies and facts about the value of occupational therapy)

If practiced more than 5 years: I have practiced for **XX** years in Saskatchewan. In recent years I have observed/experienced/? a situation where **[Insert here your observations or experiences that show how you have been hit by the scarcity of occupational therapists and/or the increase in people requiring your services]**

If practiced less than 5 years in Saskatchewan: I have practiced just a few years (**or I am a recent graduate**) but the experience of practicing here compared to other provinces has been eye-opening and disheartening. For example, (**[Insert here your observations or experiences that show how you seen the scarcity of occupational therapists and/or the increase in people requiring your services compared to your previous practice area or fieldwork experiences]**)

My story is intended to give you a concrete illustration of how Saskatchewan, with only 27.3 OTs per 100,000 population (compared to other provinces with a range of 36.2 to 47.6), cannot provide the type and level of service which is found in other parts of Canada.

OTs have a wide scope of practice, and, through their interventions, provide significant results for the benefit of patients and clients including:

- preventing falls (the #1 cause of serious injury for seniors);
- improving return-to-work time for employees following disability leave;
- accelerating hospital discharge and preventing hospital re-admission,
- preventing opioid relapse;
- facilitating children's development;
- increasing function for individuals with autism; and
- helping increase function for individuals with chronic conditions such as dementia.

These interventions not only improve an individual's quality of life but have been proven to be cost-effective, by enabling people to stay in their homes, reducing readmissions, and returning people to work. As Saskatchewan's population ages, access to OTs is critical to enable seniors to safely age in place, manage co-morbidities, and live well in their twilight years.

Urgent solutions are needed to ease the strain of an overburdened health system with long wait lists. For example, OTs should be providing critical home and community care as part of primary care teams but we don't have the stable and adequate OT workforce to do this.

Unfortunately, here in Saskatchewan, the government has lagged in ensuring there is an adequate workforce available. The interprovincial agreement with the University of Alberta to train 20 students a year has been in place for decades and, according to many reports, continues to be an ineffective solution to train and retain OTs, despite a number of increases in seats for Saskatchewan students. Manitoba with a similar population graduates 50 OTs a year to meet its needs.

OTs are community practitioners that normally practice across many different fields (health, social services, education, labour, justice) as they can draw upon a broad scope of practice that can be easily adapted to diverse environments and impact the health, well-being and occupational justice through the OTs understanding of the dynamic relationship between the person, occupation, and environment.

The solution to this crisis in the OT workforce is close at hand. To paraphrase the recent Health Minister Paul Merriman (February 2023), a program situated in this province where future clinicians can really “grow from within Saskatchewan to stay in Saskatchewan” would help stabilize the workforce and stop students from feeling forced to leave in order to pursue their career path in health care. The University of Saskatchewan has a School of Rehabilitation Science, but unlike other similar Canadian schools, it only has one program – physical therapy. In all other Canadian Schools of Rehabilitation Science which have a physical therapy program, there is a comparable occupational therapy program. Why is Saskatchewan not taking the obvious step of funding such a Saskatchewan based program?

An occupational therapy program at the University of Saskatchewan would allow for collaboration amongst health care disciplines and ultimately enhance the care provided to Saskatchewan residents. Most importantly, this new program at the University of Saskatchewan is key to address the Health Human Resource crisis with recruitment and retention of clinicians to grow the occupational therapy workforce.

I would like to request a time to meet with you to further discuss how occupational therapists contribute to the health and well-being of your constituents. Please advise on a time to meet you. I look forward to hearing from you. You may reach me at ***insert contact details***.

Your sincerely,

Insert name