



OT PRACTICE DOCUMENT: HEALTH PROMOTION & WELLNESS

WHAT IS HEALTH PROMOTION?

Health promotion is the process of implementing strategies to support people in managing their health conditions, and to improve and/or maintain their physical, emotional, spiritual, and mental health by making healthy lifestyle choices. By addressing individual, social, and environmental factors, health promotion interventions aim to¹:

- Prevent or reduce the incident of illness and disability
- Reduce health disparities among underserved populations
- Enhance mental and physical health and quality of life
- Support the overall wellbeing of individuals living with chronic conditions
- Create environments that promote healthy living
- Promote healthy communities

It is important to note that the definition of health can vary in different cultural, social, and medical contexts. Additionally, perspectives on health may evolve over time as our understanding of the complexity of human well-being deepens.

THE ROLE OF OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY IN HEALTH PROMOTION

Occupations and health are intricately connected². Occupations can either promote or limit health and wellbeing, and they can have both benefits and costs in relation to living well. Occupational therapists' understandings of the relationship between occupations, health and wellbeing uniquely positions them to support health promotion. Occupational therapists work collaboratively with clients to understand their perspective on how occupations relate to their health and wellbeing, and to identify strategies that they can use to live their lives in ways that promote their health and wellbeing³. These include strategies to participate in occupations that support the physical, cognitive, emotional, cultural, social, environmental, and spiritual health and wellbeing of the person. Occupational therapists have a role in health promotion at the individual, community, and population level, which may include^{4,6,7}:

Individual

- Working with people across the lifespan to participate in occupations, habits, and routines that promote their health and wellbeing.
- Supporting individuals living with a chronic condition in figuring out ways to live well with their condition, pacing and prioritizing their occupational participation, learning their occupational balance, and developing symptom-management strategies.
- Enhancing mental health by promoting participation in meaningful occupations, and occupations that build hope, affirm, and help connect with our humanity.
- Promoting positive mental health through skill development (e.g., emotional regulation strategies), occupational and/or environmental adaptations, and connecting the person with community supports.
- Meditating the development of cognitive adaptive strategies so that people can participate in occupations that benefit their health and wellbeing.
- Putting our normative judgements aside and recognizing that there is a dark side of occupations⁷. As occupational beings, clients will have diverse occupations, not just "positive" and "good" occupations.

Community

- Collaborating with communities to identify ways to adapt occupations and environments to support healthy choices.
- Consulting with organizations on ways to reduce work-place injuries by modifying the work environment and practices.
- Consulting with organizations on making workstations more ergonomic and improving workplace mental health.
- Collaborating with communities in developing accessible occupations for promoting environmental sustainability.



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- Facilitating fall-prevention programs for community-dwelling older adults.
- Facilitating CarFit programs to promote increased road-user safety.
- Developing and supporting social, occupation-based programs for individuals at-risk for social isolation.
- Collaborating with city planners, organizations, disabled people, and activity leaders across sectors, on accessibility development.
- Collaborating with community partners to enhance opportunities for occupational engagement and community connection amongst houseless community members.

Population

- Contributing to the development of policies that promote the participation in meaningful and necessary occupations by all individuals.
- Advocating for accessible environments and adaptive occupations.
- Advocating for equitable policies that support the occupational health of all community members.
- Collaborating with populations on navigating life transitions and disruptions in ways that promote health, healing, and wellbeing (e.g., refugees, retirees).

The role of occupational therapy in health promotion also includes humility, critical reflexivity, flexibility, and collaboration in decolonizing everyday occupations as ways of humanizing and healing⁸.

USEFUL RESOURCES

The [Do-Live-Well](#) framework is a health promotion approach that describes some of the links between people's daily activities and their health and well-being.

REFERENCES

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All Occupational Therapy Practice Documents have been developed and reviewed in collaboration with diverse occupational therapists with lived experience and expertise in the respective areas of practice. For any feedback, contact practice@caot.ca.