

# Advocating for Occupational Therapy

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CAOT Professional Development  
Webinar  
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## Presenters



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## Overview

- **What** is advocacy?
- **Why** is advocacy a **professional imperative**?
- **How** to go about advocating for the profession?
- Advocating for occupational therapy **during the writ period and post elections**
- Advocating for occupational therapy **during and post COVID-19**
- CAOT tools & resources

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## What is Advocacy?

- Advocacy is a set of organized activities by individuals or groups designed **to influence decision makers**.
- Actions that speak in favour of, make recommendations, or argue for certain causes.



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## Reasons for Advocacy

- To increase **knowledge**
- Raise **awareness** about OT value proposition
- Gain **recognition** for the profession as an **essential health care service** that includes mental health
- Convince employers to **hire more OTs**
- **Invite OTs** to join or lead interdisciplinary teams
- **Engage OTs** in emergency preparedness, response and recovery

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## Why Is Advocacy Important for the Profession?

Increased availability  
and accessibility to  
occupational therapy



Positive health  
and wellness



Better engagement in  
activities of daily living



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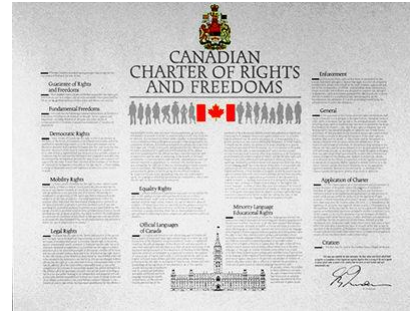
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## Why Is Advocacy a Professional Imperative?

- Occupation is **important**
- To promote **health and well-being**
- To promote **justice and human rights**
  - Right to be **equal**
  - Right to be **different**
  - Right to **engage in occupation**



*“Occupational therapists can contribute to enabling social justice through advocating for occupational rights and opportunities.” – Bonnie Kirsh (2015)*

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## Advocacy: A Collective Responsibility

*“A political process performed by an individual or group that aims to influence public-policy and resources allocation decisions within political, economic, social systems and institutions.” – CAOT*

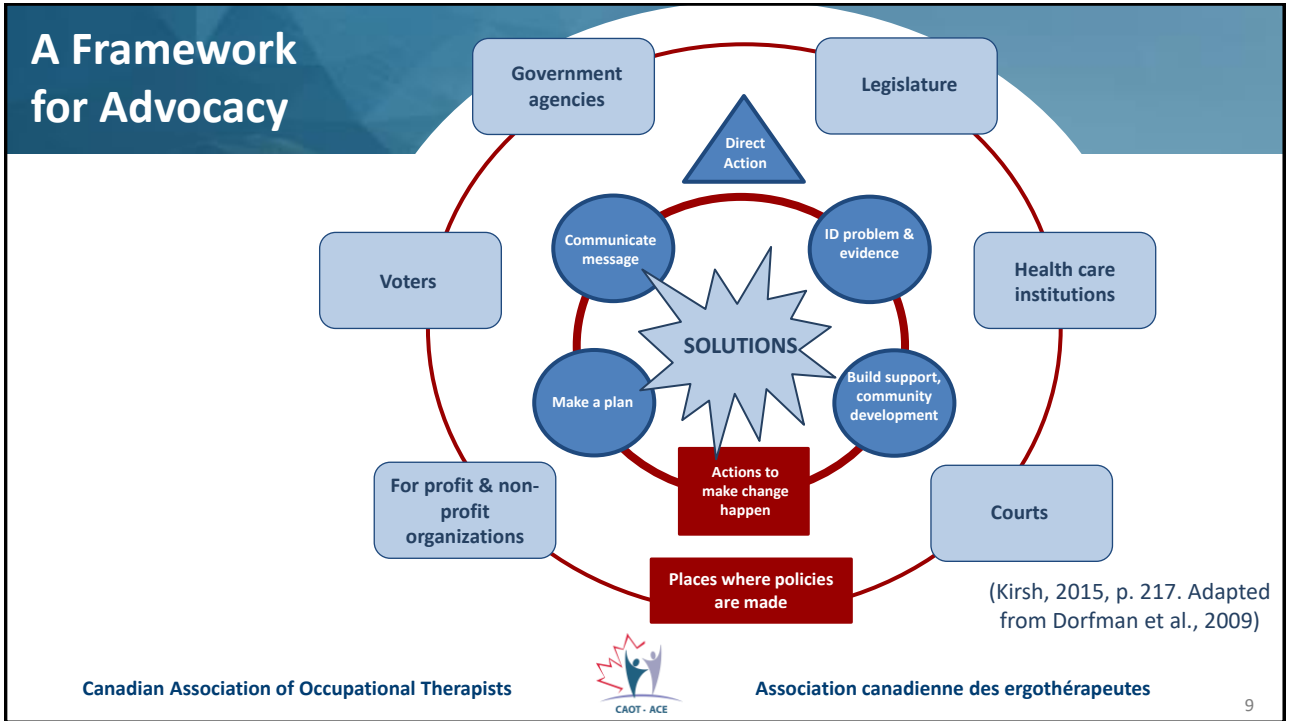
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## Advocating for OT

- **Advocacy can be undertaken at various levels:**
  - Individual
  - Organizational
  - Community
  - Societal

A group of approximately 20 people, including men and women of various ages, are standing in a line. They are holding white signs that feature the CAOT logo and the text "Advocacy: CAOT is working for you". The background is a red banner with the same text. The group is standing in front of a building with ornate architecture.

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CAOT - ACE

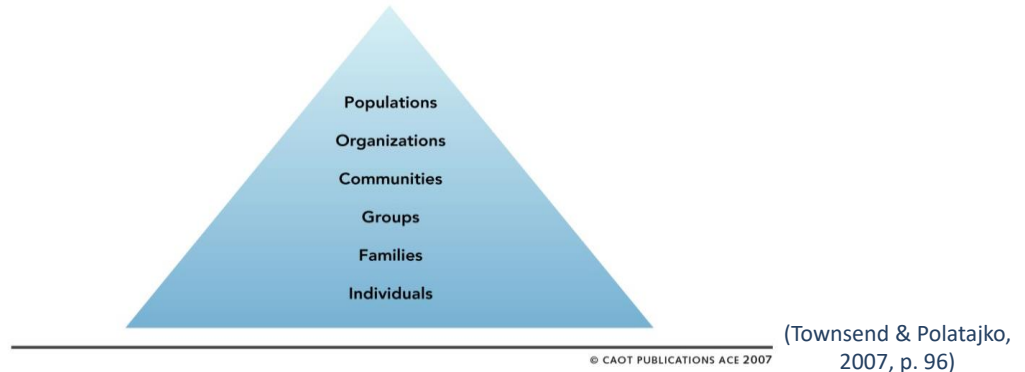
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# Spheres of Influence Advocacy at Several Levels

Figure 4.1 Occupational therapy clients



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# Multipronged Approaches to Advocating

- Letter writing campaign
- Phone calls
- Lobby Days on Parliament Hill
- Face-face meetings
- Email campaigns
- Community engagement activities
- Mobilization events (vigils, marches etc.)
- Use of technology to amplify messages



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## Advocating in the Digital Age

- **What is it?** – Use of technology to contact, inform, and mobilize a group of people around an issue or cause.
- **Its purpose?** - To motivate supporters to act.
- **Why?** - Low cost, wide reach, instantaneous, engagement of disciplines/groups/sectors, ability to monitor your progress.
- **When to make use of it?** - To engage people who use social media.

*77% of Canadians aged 15 or older regularly use social media, that statistic increases to above 90% for Canadians between the age of 15 and 34. (Statistics Canada, 2021a)*



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## Advocating Through Social Media

- **Focus** – Decide on a goal that will make an impact
  - **Grab attention** – Important to be noticed in an overcrowded, over-messaged, noisy world
  - **Engage** – Make people want to connect and
  - **Act** – Empower others to participate -- perhaps spark a movement
- From *The Dragonfly Effect*, by Jennifer Aaker and Andy Smith (2010)



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## Recipe for Success

### Key ingredients:

- Knowledge of the **value proposition** of occupational therapy
- Develop concise, clearly articulated messages
- Appreciate the **context**, operating environment and audience
- Determining envisaged **outcomes**
- Work with **community groups** or with **coalitions**
- Optimize existing domestic and international **evidentiary base**
- Leverage **existing tools** and develop **new resources**

Using these ingredients, you can exert influence at various levels.

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## Your Core Message

- **KISS** – Keep It **Simple & Straightforward**
- Message has to be tailored to the **audience** and its **priorities**
- Highlight **economic evidence**
- Use stories to **humanize** facts and figures
- Prepare your “**elevator pitch**”
- Advocacy tools could include: template letters; email and phone scripts; tweets; Facebook, LinkedIn or Instagram posts; infographics; facts sheets; stories; videos; podcasts

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## Relationships

- Relationships are key for successful advocacy at any level
- Cultivating relationships takes time and effort
- Relationships must be **initiated, nurtured, established maintained** not only with decision makers but other stakeholders
- You need coalitions of the willing to effect change as there is strength in numbers

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## Relationships

- Relationships must be cultivated with other organizations and other professions in health care or other sectors
- With formal coalitions with which you or your organization belongs to
  - **Why?** To mobilize community groups and stakeholders to exert pressure
  - **Why?** Because decision makers reach out to you when making important decisions



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## Value Proposition: Return on Investment

- Dr. Christopher Simpson states that a one day stay in hospital costs \$1,000, one day at a long-term care facility costs \$130, and one day of supportive housing or home and community care costs \$55 (Simpson, 2015).
- According to a survey conducted in the UK, OT interventions to support employees with managing their health and well-being led to a significant reduction of time spent away from work due to sick leave resulting in an average cost savings of £3,299 per employee. (Royal College of Occupational Therapists, 2019)
- *Re-Sharing the Housing Market for Aging in Place and Home Modifications*, published by Home Modifications Canada in 2017, highlights the importance of engaging OTs in new construction & renovation (Lantz & Fenn, 2017)
- Research in the US & UK demonstrates that housing adaptations from OT interventions reduce the need for daily home care visits and can save \$2,000 to \$50,000 and postpone entry into residential care, saving up to \$48,000 per person per year (Laing & Buisson, 2008; Heywood & Turner, 2007)

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## Articulation of the Value Proposition of OTs



<https://youtu.be/6sIHxzhZDds> (1fq, 2015)

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## Extended Health Benefits Plans: Why is OT Coverage Important?

### Let's talk about an example:

- Inclusion of occupational therapy in extended health benefits plans in the context of COVID-19 and its impacts on seniors & “aging in place”, mental health, social isolation – given the situation in LTC
  - Seeking occupational therapy coverage in public and private insurance plans is a complex multi-layered and multi-faceted issue that entails advocacy at the micro, meso and macro levels

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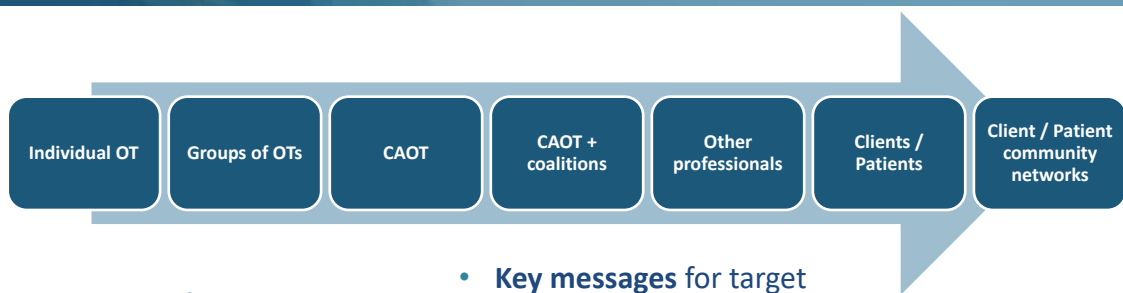


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## Extended Health Benefits Continuum



Include OT as a defined benefit or flex option in Extended Health Benefits plans



- **Key messages** for target audiences
- **Communication** strategies and tactics
- **Asks**

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## Advocating During a Writ Period

- Opportunity to **interview future decision makers** at the federal, provincial, territorial and municipal levels
- Members of Parliament, Members of the Legislative Assemblies, Mayors, City Counsellors **are hired by their constituents**
- Candidates want to hear from **YOU** as Canada's health care professionals



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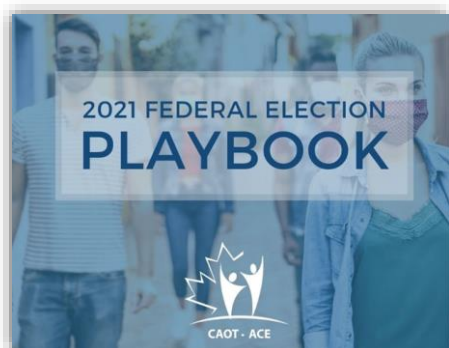


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## CAOT 2021 Pre-Election Playbook



**Advocating for OT solutions to ballot box issues.**

This year's playbook focused on:

- Long-term care
- Aging in place
- Mental health
- Return to work
- Pediatric health & well-being

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## Advocacy Post-Election

### Minority government situation – who do I engage with?

- All Members of Parliament, both in government and in opposition.
- Members of all parties participate in Standing Committees, which are important forums for studying and recommending policies, programs and services.
- Every member’s vote is critical and could influence policies and programs.
- MPs have dual roles – as representatives of their constituents, and as policy-makers.

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## CAOT 2021 Post-Election Toolkit

### Toolkit includes:

- Key messages to Members of Parliament (MPs)
- Guidance on how to take action
- How to find your MP
- Letter templates & email scripts
- Social media posts

**COMING SOON!**



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## Advocacy for OT During COVID-19

### *Engage OTs in emergency preparedness, response and recovery*

- **Aging in place** - 91% of Canadians of all ages report that they plan on supporting themselves to live independently in their own home as long as possible. (National Institute on Ageing [NIA], 2020)
- **Long-term care** - 58% of COVID-19 deaths in Canada have been residents living in LTC. (NIA, 2021)
- **Mental health** - 6 in 10 Indigenous people reported that their mental health worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic. (Statistics Canada, 2021b)
- **Return to work** - 5.4 million Canadian employees work mainly from home, compared to 1.8 million pre-pandemic. (Conference Board of Canada, 2021)
- **Pediatric health & well-being** - 200,000 children's treatments (essential development services) were placed on hold because of COVID-19. (Children's Healthcare Canada, 2020)

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## Advocacy for OT Post-COVID-19

*36.5% of people experienced "long COVID", persisting COVID-19 symptoms, more than 3 months after testing positive for COVID-19. (Taquet et al., 2021)*

**What is the ask?** – Include OTs on interdisciplinary health teams treating COVID-19 "long-haulers" & cover OT services under Extended Health Benefits plans to help Canadians experiencing physical, emotional and mental effects of COVID-19, help manage disruptions, transition back to work safely and engage in ADLs.

**Evidence?** – OTs have been recognized by the John Hopkins Hospital and the Mayo Clinic in the United States as well as the UK National Health Service where OTs are integral members of the interdisciplinary health teams treating post-COVID 19 syndromes. (Vanichkachorn et al., 2021; John Hopkins Medicine, 2021; Parkin et al., 2021).

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## TAKE AWAYS

### EVERY VOICE MATTERS

- Recognize that **your voice has power**
- Whether you consider yourself an advocate, a champion, a challenger of the status quo or a disruptor – your voice matters
- Use your voice
- Use your **stories** to **convey** and **amplify** your messages
- Exert your **influence**
- Become a **“change agent”**
- “Be the change you wish to see in the world” – Mahatma Gandhi



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## Tools to Support You

- Articles from *OT Now & CJOT*
- CAOT stories/facts sheets
- CAOT Position Statements
- Political Advocacy (CAOT Election/Post Election Playbooks, letters to decision makers during and post COVID-19)
- CAOT webinars
- Economic Evidence Clearinghouse - ROI or value proposition studies
- Academic research from:
  - *CJOT*, Academia, Think Tanks, NGOs, Conference Board of Canada, Statistics Canada, Health Canada, Public Health Agency of Canada, Provincial Occupational Therapy Associations, International Occupational Therapy Associations
- Media
  - CBC, G&M, MacLeans, the Economist, etc.



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# Connect With a Larger Online Community



## CAOT's Occupational Therapy Practice Networks & Communities of Practice

- |  |                                   |  |
|--|-----------------------------------|--|
| OT & Indigenous Health                                   | The Student and New Practitioners | OT and Sensory Processing                  |
| OT for Armed Forces Members, Veterans and their Families | Sexuality and OT                  | Occupation in Practice                     |
| OT in Vision Rehabilitation                              | Poverty and OT                    | Neurology                                  |
| Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion                 | Palliative and End-of-Life Care   | Mental Health & Substance Use              |
| Suicide and OT   | OTA/PTA Network                   | Chronic Pain                               |
| Technology for Occupation and Participation              | OT and Global Health Practice     | Northern Territories Community of Practice |
|  | OT Working in Dementia Care       | And more...                                |

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# Questions?



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# Contacts

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