

OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY STATEMENT OF COMMITMENT TO INDIGENOUS PEOPLES IN CANADA

September 2023



OT TRC TASK FORCE MEMBERSHIP 2019-2023

Co-chairs: Angie Phenix & Kaarina Valavaara

Occupational therapy delegates:

- **Canadian Occupational Therapy Foundation (COTF):** Mary Evert & Katie Churchill
- **Association of Canadian Occupational Therapy University Programs (ACOTUP):** Leanne Leclair & Mary Forhan
- **Association of Canadian Occupational Therapy Regulatory Organizations (ACOTRO):** Sharon Eadie, Marianne Baird & Michelle Martin-Strong
- **Alliance of Canadian Occupational Therapy Professional Associations (ACOTPA):** Melissa Croskery
- **Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists (CAOT) Board representatives:** Lisa Diamond-Burchuk, Karen Rebeiro Gruhl, Suzanne Lendvoy & Debra Beach Ducharme
- **Supported by:** CAOT's past presidents Catherine Backman and Giovanna Boniface and current president Phillip Wendt; and CAOT's CEO, H el ene Sabourin
- **Invited allies:** Gayle Restall & Janna MacLachlan

CAOT Secretariat: Havelin Anand,  milie Montour, Candice McEwen & Monique Lizon

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Transforming our colonial reality must be a responsibility shared by all Canadians. As beginning steps in embracing this shared responsibility, the members of the Boards of Directors of the CAOT¹, COTF², ACOTPA³, ACOTRO⁴, and ACOTUP⁵ acknowledge the following statements of our complicity and commitment to change through meaningful actions aimed at redressing colonialism in our respective spheres of influence within the profession of occupational therapy. This statement draws primarily upon the [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples \(UNDRIP\)](#), the [Truth and Reconciliation Commission \(TRC\) of Canada Calls to Action](#), and the [Final Report on the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls \(MMIWG\)](#) to guide our reconciliation efforts. This statement of our commitment to change is reflective of the ongoing journey of reconciliation within Canada and as progress continues, is to be referred to on a continuous basis as learning and unlearning, and relationship building occurs. Occupational therapy organizations will create processes to foster individual commitment and social accountability to this statement within and among organizations via an annual review process with the Boards of Directors and occupational therapists and occupational therapist assistants across Canada.

- We acknowledge that harmful colonizing⁶ narratives, policies, and practices have been, and continue to be, embedded in occupational therapy education, research, and practice, perpetuating power imbalances.
- We express deep regret for the harms experienced by Indigenous Peoples and communities due to continued and ongoing colonizing narratives, policies, and practices.
- We commit, within our individual and collective spheres of influence, to act in ways that lessen, redress, and eventually end the presence of colonizing narratives, policies, and practices in the profession, and the harms they cause.
- We commit to documenting the truth of the occupational therapy profession's role in colonial institutions. Documenting the truth of the history of our complicity⁷ and recognizing that this truth must be acknowledged is essential before reconciliation is possible.
- We reaffirm the importance of developing a comprehensive strategy that promotes collaborative and respectful relationships with Indigenous Nations, communities, and organizations to initiate actions that support and affirm the strength, resiliency, and contribution of all Indigenous Peoples – including occupational therapy leaders, clinicians, educators, researchers, and students.

As we are guided by the UNDRIP, TRC, and MMIWG in our reconciliation efforts, we commit to the following actions:

1. Post the Statement of Commitment and a territorial acknowledgement on the CAOT/ACE, COTF, ACOTPA, ACOTRO, ACOTUP websites and share CAOT/OT TRC Task Force territorial acknowledgement resources.
2. COTF, ACOTPA, ACOTRO & ACOTUP will seek to advance practice to make space for improving access to culturally safer occupational therapy and to integrate multiple Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing as part of providing evidence-informed occupational therapy, including, but not limited to:
 - Improving access to culturally safer and evidence-based occupational therapy services for Indigenous persons and their communities.
 - Incorporating within Standards of Practice those aspects of lived experience that reflect Indigenous ways of knowing, such as gift-gifting, relationship-based processes, etc.
3. CAOT/ACE, COTF, ACOTPA & ACOTUP will collaborate in the development of support of Indigenous self-determination in research, program evaluation, and publication.
4. CAOT/ACE will consult with Indigenous Elders and Knowledge Keepers to ensure that its vision, mission, principles, and activities support and advance reconciliation.
5. CAOT/ACE will actively recruit Indigenous representation in its staffing, Board of Directors, and volunteers, and foster a supportive environment for their success.
6. CAOT/ACE will collaboratively develop and maintain mentorship networks/communities of practice with and for Indigenous occupational therapists, occupational therapist assistants, and students and graduates.
7. ACOTRO will work with occupational therapy regulators to create occupational therapy expectations related to working with Indigenous Peoples and supporting occupational therapy practices that uphold rights and promote equity and justice.
8. ACOTRO will support the work of the occupational therapy regulators to:
 - Include Indigenous views to inform Board and Committee decisions.
 - Include Indigenous perspectives to inform complaints and college/regulatory programs, processes, and structures.
9. ACOTUP will promote the implementation of anti-oppressive systems and structures that provide strengths-based and trauma-informed supports for Indigenous student occupational therapists and members of occupational therapy departments and/or programs.

10. ACOTUP will promote the hiring, development, recruitment, and retention of Indigenous occupational therapists as educators and scholars in occupational therapy educational programs.
11. ACOTUP will promote engagement with Indigenous Elders, Knowledge Keepers, and community members in development of Indigenous curriculum for occupational therapy programs.
12. ACOTUP, ACOTPA & CAOT/ACE will promote and support recruitment and retention of Indigenous students into entry level occupational therapy programs, post-entry-level graduate programs, and occupational therapy assistant or rehabilitation assistant programs.
13. ACOTUP, ACOTPA & CAOT/ACE, in collaboration with Indigenous communities and organizations, will develop strategies to increase awareness of the occupational therapy profession as a career choice to primary and secondary Indigenous students throughout Canada.

For more information about the development of the Statement of Commitment or to provide feedback, please contact advocacy@caot.ca.

NOTES

^[1] Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists

^[2] Canadian Occupational Therapy Foundation

^[3] Alliance of Canadian Occupational Therapy Professional Associations

^[4] Association of Canadian Occupational Therapy Regulatory Organizations

^[5] Association of Canadian Occupational Therapy University Programs

^[6] European colonization of Canada brought injustice, ill health, and disruption to Indigenous Peoples' traditional occupations and ways of being, knowing and connecting (CAOT, 2018). Occupational therapy was developed from a Western and Global North context, with a focus on independence, productivity, and returning to occupations deemed suitable by the settler majority societies and governments (Emery-Whittington, 2021; Grenier, 2020; Johnson & Lavalley, 2020; Kiepek et al., 2019.). Indigenous Peoples, historically, have not been in positions to contribute meaningfully to the development of occupational therapy models, theories or standards of practice in occupational therapy scholarship, leadership, or practice. This ongoing marginalization of Indigenous ways of knowing and doing perpetuates ongoing colonialism within the profession.

^[7] Occupational therapists may cause harm when failing to recognize how routine professional actions can negatively impact cultural safety and trauma-informed practice (Gerlach & Smith, 2015). Change is needed within the profession to address the ways that colonialization impacts occupation for Indigenous Peoples and, by extension, occupational therapy with Indigenous Peoples (Phenix & Valavaara, 2016). In 2021, the new Competencies for Occupational Therapists in Canada were released and includes an indicator outlining the expectation of occupational therapists to identify the ongoing effects of colonization and settlement on occupational therapy services and practices (ACOTRO, ACOTUP, & CAOT, 2021). It is imperative for the occupational therapy profession to continue to respond and take meaningful action as inaction will work to uphold colonial structures and perpetuate the marginalization and oppression of Indigenous Peoples (Restall et al., 2016).

REFERENCES

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