



Occupational
Therapy
Australia

Outline:

Capability Framework for Occupational Therapists Working with People with Pain



Outline of Capability Framework for Occupational Therapists Working with People with Pain

This document is a brief overview of Occupational Therapy Australia's (OTA) Capability Framework for Occupational Therapists Working with People with Pain. The purpose of this document is to provide an overview of the capabilities occupational therapists should demonstrate and use when working with people with pain at different career stages and to explain how the framework can be used.

Purpose of the framework

The Capability Framework for Occupational Therapists Working with People with Pain was developed for occupational therapists to:

- Support self-reflection and decision-making about their practice.
- Help identify areas for skill improvement relevant to their service setting.
- Set expectations at different career stages.
- Advocate for the role of occupational therapy in the pain space.

Format

The framework sets out a series of capabilities, grouped in four key domains:



The framework also describes how these capabilities differ across the career stages of **foundational**, **intermediate** and **senior** practitioner to recognise how skills, knowledge and behaviours develop over the course of a person's career, as they gain experience and build expertise.

More information about the domains for working with people with pain

The key capabilities for occupational therapists working with people with pain are described across the following four domains:

- **Knowledge of pain and pain management systems:**
This domain includes capabilities focused on understanding the complex and multi-dimensional nature of pain. It discusses pain-related presentations and trajectories as well as the influence of contextual factors such as age, sex/gender, family background, culture and environment on the pain experience. Capabilities in this domain guide occupational therapists to develop their understanding of various funding and service structures and the challenges experienced by people with pain as they engage with healthcare.
- **The therapeutic process and guiding principles:**
This domain includes capabilities focused on ensuring therapists are aware of the need to remain current in their understanding of pain and pain management approaches, informed by emerging evidence. It supports occupational therapists to build the therapeutic relationship and provide responsive, collaborative care.
- **Assessment and planning:**
This domain provides an overview of a range of occupational-focused assessments and how they are applied to people with pain. It describes how therapists might use these assessments for the development of appropriate clinical formulation and planning of supports and therapeutic interventions, and how this evolves across the career stages.
- **Occupational-focused interventions and therapeutic strategies:**
This domain focuses on capabilities supporting the provision of strengths-based therapeutic interventions that are focused on the important and meaningful activities of the person to support engagement. Occupational-focused interventions focus on motivation, leisure and play, habits and routines, meaningful roles, life skills, functional cognition, physical activity, community engagement and independence, communication and interaction, self-management, emotional regulation and environment.

More information about the career stages

Each capability is set out across three career stages. The career stages are reflective of proficiency rather than years of practice. An experienced practitioner may be working at an intermediate or senior level in one area but have foundational capabilities in a new, less familiar area of practice.

- **Foundational Practitioners** are developing their knowledge related to the capability and can identify and apply relevant knowledge and skills with the support of senior practitioners to situations or scenarios of lower complexity.
- **Intermediate Practitioners** can apply a more analytical lens to their practice, operate more autonomously in their practice and can operate in more complex situations.
- **Senior Practitioners** can deliver services across a range of clinical complexities and situations, can evaluate and critique their practice at a high level, are expected to support the design and development of systems and structures to ensure best clinical practice, and support the skill development of foundational and intermediate practitioners.

How to use the framework

The capability framework was developed as a tool for occupational therapists to guide good practice, however it is helpful for people working with occupational therapists, those who employ occupational therapists, and people accessing the services of occupational therapists to better understand what they do, how they approach their work and what falls within their scope of practice in a specific area, such as pain.

- **For occupational therapists:** The framework is designed to be used alongside other standards and frameworks, ensuring a holistic approach. It is not intended to be prescriptive or a strict checklist with clinicians encouraged to apply relevant skills, based on their specific context. Clinicians aren't expected to be proficient in all capabilities listed. Occupational therapists can use the framework to guide their professional development and training plans, to navigate conversations with their employer about scope of practice and to advocate for their services.
- **For people working with occupational therapists:** The framework can provide other professionals with a better understanding of the unique role that occupational therapists play in a multi-disciplinary team and the ways occupational therapists can work with clients to improve their ability to participate in meaningful activity (occupation).
- **For organisations that employ occupational therapists:** The framework will provide employers with insight into the scope of practice of occupational therapists and the reasonable expectations of employees at various career stages or in new areas of practice, as well as appropriate supports for occupational therapists (such as professional supervision).
- **For clients accessing the services of occupational therapists:** While the framework has not been developed for a consumer audience, it is available to the general public and can be used by clients to understand what occupational therapists do and the services that may be of benefit to them or their loved one.

Occupational Therapy Australia will also use its suite of capability frameworks to advocate for the profession, ensuring the scope of practice and vital role that occupational therapists play in multi-disciplinary teams is understood by funding bodies and relevant government departments.

Acknowledgements

The framework was developed in collaboration with an Expert Advisory Group and through multiple consultation phases with the broader occupational therapy profession. OTA acknowledges the contribution of the Expert Advisory Group and all occupational therapists who contributed their time, insights and expertise to the development of the framework.

Reference

The framework can be accessed via the Practice Support section of OTA's website: otaus.com.au or via this link: [Capability Framework for Occupational Therapists Working with People with Pain](#) if viewing this document electronically.



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