



OHIO OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY ASSOCIATION

Ohio Occupational Therapy Association
135th General Assembly Priorities
2023 - 2024

Occupational therapy practitioners work in a number of settings across Ohio. There are approximately 5,732 occupational therapists (OTs) and 4,470 occupational therapy assistants (OTAs) licensed by the Ohio Occupational Therapy, Physical Therapy, and Athletic Trainers Board. As the leading voice for OTs and OTAs, the Ohio Occupational Therapy Association will be pursuing the following policy priorities.

Enactment of Copay Fairness Act

- In partnership with the Ohio Physical Therapy Association and other stakeholders, we are seeking reintroduction and enactment of copay fairness legislation in Ohio. Under this legislation, health plans would be prohibited from charging a copay for occupational therapy and physical therapy services that exceeds the copay charged for a routine outpatient office visit. This would lower the cost burden for patients who require these services.
- Health plans often classify OT and PT services as ‘specialty services’ and assess copays that range from \$50 to \$100 per visit. Most of our patients require multiple visits, therefore their out-of-pocket costs can be hundreds or thousands of dollars. Unlike physician specialties, where these higher copays still represent a small portion of the total cost, OT and PT services are lower and therefore specialty copays force the patient to pay for the bulk of the service.
- This cost barrier leads some patients to discontinue their treatment. This can lead to reinjury or result in patients resorting to prescription drugs or other treatments. Several states are considering and have enacted copay fairness acts in recent years and Ohio should move quickly to adopt this important legislation. Copay fairness does not impact OT and PT providers, it simply lowers the cost for our patients and ensures they can access needed services.

Occupational Therapy Assistants and School-Based Practice

- Operating Standards adopted by the Ohio Department of Education covering services provided to children with special needs are inconsistent with current practice, IDEA, and licensure board rules as it relates to occupational therapy assistants. OOTA has been working for the past two years to address these issues and ensure occupational therapy assistants can practice fully in the school setting.
- Specifically, OOTA has raised concerns over the classification of occupational therapy assistants as ‘paraprofessionals’ as this is inconsistent with IDEA and other state operating standards. This and other issues have led to occupational therapy assistants being removed from direct service or terminated altogether. This adds to the existing workforce issues faced in the school setting.
- OOTA is seeking a legislative change that would clarify the role of occupational therapy assistants as providers who can render services. 10% of licensed occupational therapy assistants nationwide call Ohio home, but we are currently an outlier in how we treat these providers in the school setting. This language would resolve these issues and improve access for Ohio children.

Occupational Therapy in Behavioral Health

- The need for behavioral health services, especially in the pediatric population, continues to grow while the workforce remains diminished. COVID-19 has further exasperated these issues and created major challenges for Ohioans. Occupational therapy traces its roots to behavioral health and our members are well positioned to help address the need for services.
- OOTA is working with the Ohio Department of Medicaid and the Ohio Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services to activate new codes for occupational therapy providers and to restore occupational therapy providers to the status of qualified behavioral health providers in Ohio. This would allow occupational therapy providers to serve patients enrolled in Medicaid or covered in other systems. Services could be rendered in home, community-based, or inpatient settings.

Medicaid Reforms and Managed Care Reprourement

- Given the multi-year effort to redesign Ohio's Medicaid managed care system and rebid contracts, OOTA is committed to working with state officials to ensure occupational therapy providers and their patients benefit from these changes. We are encouraged by the robust stakeholder process and framework that Ohio Medicaid has laid out for its new managed care program.
- OOTA is working to ensure that occupational therapy providers benefit from proposed administrative changes aimed at streamlining credentialing and claims processing. Additionally, we are working to create new opportunities in OhioRISE, the statewide pediatric behavioral health network. Our goal is to ensure all Medicaid enrollees have access to services they need.

In addition to these policy priorities, we will also be monitoring legislation impacting the scopes of practice for healthcare providers, any changes to health coverage or reimbursement, and legislation impacting professional licensure and regulation. We pride ourselves on being collaborative and stand ready to work with our elected officials to strengthen the practice of occupational therapy in Ohio to meet the needs of our clients. If you have questions or would like to meet at occupational therapy practitioner in your district, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Becky Finni, DHS, OTR/L, RAC-CT, FAOTA

President

rebecca.finni@gmail.com

Daniel Hurley

Lobbyist

dhurley@capitol-consulting.net