



July 25, 2022

Hon. Bruce Fitch
Minister of Health
P.O. Box 6000
Fredericton, NB E3B 5H1

Dear Minister Fitch:

On behalf of the 451 Members of the New Brunswick Association of Occupational Therapists (NBAOT), congratulations on your appointment as Minister of Health.

NBAOT is the professional and regulatory organization representing occupational therapists province-wide and advancing quality occupational therapy through effective regulation, governance, education, and advocacy. As such, we would like to work with your department on how occupational therapists (OTs) can help you deliver even more access to primary care for New Brunswickers.

Occupational Therapists (OTs) are health professionals trained in evaluating an individual's **function**, their ability to carry out their day-to-day activities (personal care, managing household activities, going to work/school and being productive, participating in leisure) by considering the **person's abilities** (physical, cognitive, emotional) and **context** (e.g., home, workplace, school, community, social supports, etc.).

On July 19, we met with several of your staff to discuss how OTs could assist in several areas outlined in "Stabilizing Health Care: An Urgent Call to Action."

1. Access to Primary Health Care

Occupational therapists are essential to achieving a true interdisciplinary model of primary health care. OTs work in health promotion – in both keeping New Brunswickers well in the community and also helping them return to the community.

- Community Health OTs can offer group appointments with New Brunswickers with chronic conditions, including how to manage activities with their conditions and acquiring appropriate home aids to promote safety and independence at home.
- OTs can organize health promotion activities (e.g., chronic conditions, fall prevention). Community Health OT was involved in the creation of the Zoomers program which is now expanding to the rest of the province.



2. Access to Surgery

Occupational therapists are a critical component of successful surgery outcomes.

- OTs can offer presurgical education to prepare New Brunswickers for their surgeries and to facilitate shorter stays in the hospital (e.g., arranging home equipment in advance).
- If not already seen by OT pre-surgery, OTs can identify and prescribe the right equipment for quicker discharges (e.g., bathroom aids, visual aids, etc.).

3. Access to Addiction and Mental Health Services

Occupational therapists are an important component of a successful interdisciplinary mental health team – for all ages and in all settings (e.g., acute psychiatry, paediatric, rehabilitation, community). OTs in mental health work with clients to problem solve in their own personal situations and to find a long-term practical approach to return to functional daily living. This helps to minimize the disability impact of mental illnesses.

- OTs work with children to successfully cope at home and school.
- OTs help clients find strategies to return to work and become productive again.
- OTs work with clients with long-term mental illnesses to find ways to improve their daily living skills (e.g., to make a meal, to plan household routines, etc.).
- OTs work in forensic rehabilitation with clients to help prepare for return to community.

4. Support Seniors to Age in Place

Occupational therapists are critical for successful aging in place, by assessing their physical and cognitive abilities, as well as their environmental and social supports.

- OTs are critical for determining their actual functional abilities and level of assistance (e.g., what specific home supports/strategies would allow a person with a dementia to return home).
- OTs are uniquely qualified to identify and prescribe appropriate home equipment and adaptations. EMP OTs are needed to see seniors in their own homes.
- OTs are critical for identifying strengths and gaps (physical and cognitive) for discharges from hospitals that have the best chance of long-term success.
- OTs are also an important support for special care homes and long-term care facilities in terms of identifying appropriate equipment for them to meet the needs of seniors – e.g., adaptive aids that will facilitate caregiving and prevent injuries among staff, specialized equipment for pressure redistribution, etc.



Occupational therapists are important team members whose essential skill is problem solving based on a person's abilities and their context, to find cost-effective solutions to encourage the best possible functional outcomes.

NBAOT would like to become a **trusted resource** to your department and would welcome the opportunity to work with you and your staff to implement how OTs could play a more significant role in improving primary care.

Yours truly,

Lilli Ju Lin, OTReg (NB)
President

Andrew McLeod
Executive Director