

Occupational Therapy Truth and Reconciliation Task Force—Report on activities from CAOT Conference 2022: Hybrid and invitation for feedback

Kaarina Valavaara, Angie Phenix, & Monique Lizon on behalf of the Occupational Therapy Truth and Reconciliation Task Force

Current TRC Task Force membership

Co-chairs: Angie Phenix & Kaarina Valavaara

Occupational therapy delegates:

- **Canadian Occupational Therapy Foundation:** Mary Evert & Katie Churchill
- **Association of Canadian Occupational Therapy University Programs:** Leanne Leclair
- **Association of Canadian Occupational Therapy Regulatory Organizations:** Sharon Eadie & Marianne Baird
- **Alliance of Canadian Occupational Therapy Professional Associations:** Melissa Croskery
- **Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists (CAOT) Board representatives (past and present):** Lisa Diamond-Burchuk, Karen Rebeiro Gruhl, Suzanne Lendvoy, & Debra Beach Ducharme
- **Supported by:** CAOT's past president, Catherine Backman; CAOT's president, Giovanna Boniface; and CAOT's CEO, Hélène Sabourin
- **Invited allies:** Gayle Restall & Janna MacLachlan

CAOT Secretariat : Havelin Anand, Emilie Montour, & Monique Lizon

The Occupational Therapy Truth and Reconciliation (TRC) Task Force represents a collaboration among all national occupational therapy organizations in Canada. Established for an initial three-year term (from 2019–2022), the Task Force's purpose is to: (1) promote leadership within occupational therapy in Canada in responding to the TRC calls to action (2015); (2) develop sustainable and culturally appropriate occupational therapy research, clinical practice, and education; and (3) create a foundation for reconciliation and decolonization of the occupational therapy profession. The Occupational Therapy TRC Task Force is co-chaired by two Indigenous occupational therapists who lead the work with respect for Indigenous Peoples' rights and Indigenous Ways of Knowing (CAOT, 2019).

CAOT conferences have been valuable opportunities to transparently communicate and report on task force activities, and to invite delegates to provide feedback to guide approaches, priorities, and plans. Feedback from the session at CAOT Virtual 2021 directly informed priorities for 2021–2022, including: the increased need to access education regarding the truth about the ongoing legacy of colonization

and continued negative impacts on the health of Indigenous Peoples, the importance of building collaborative relationships across occupational therapy to advance progress on the calls to action, improved transparency on Occupational Therapy TRC Task Force activities, and commitment and resourcing of this work to ensure it is prioritized and valued (Valavaara et al., 2021).

On May 5, 2022, the Occupational Therapy TRC Task Force was privileged to facilitate a one-hour CAOT-sponsored session for further knowledge exchange. After reporting on 2021–2022 activities, approximately 90 delegates (attending in person or virtually) were asked to provide written feedback on the following questions:

- Based on your professional and lived experiences, provide two to three priorities for the profession as we move into the next stage of responding to the TRC calls to action.
- Are there additional issues you are experiencing in your day-to-day work (practice, education, scholarship) that we need to be aware of and address?

The co-chairs and CAOT secretariat reviewed feedback from delegates and the following themes emerged:

Ongoing education and (un)learning

- Delegates recognized that education should provide opportunities to focus on local and regional issues that reflect the diversity of Indigenous Peoples.
- Learning opportunities should be targeted, with suggested topics including trauma-informed practice, building relationships with Indigenous leaders and organizations, and navigating and working effectively with relevant funding and insurance programs, such as Jordan's Principle.
- Occupational therapists need to centre perspectives and lived experiences of Indigenous People with intersections such as disability, being 2SLGBTQIA+, neurodivergence, or other self-claimed identities.
- There is need to decolonize and Indigenize occupational therapy curricula (including local and national perspectives) and the national certification exam.

Partnerships

- We should continue to foster partnerships across occupational therapy organizations for ongoing education, stable funding for progress on TRC calls to action, sharing of successes, and reporting on progress.
- Partnerships should be pursued with organizations and disciplines outside of occupational therapy to reduce the burden of asks on Indigenous communities.
- Relationship building and collaboration with Indigenous organizations, communities, Elders, and knowledge keepers needs prioritization.
- Partnerships between universities and Indigenous communities should be fostered to generate interest in occupational therapy as a career choice.
- Local and regional success stories on implementing applicable TRC calls to action need to be shared.

Mentoring and support for Indigenous students

- Indigenous representation in occupational therapy programs (students, faculty, and scholars) needs to be increased.
- There is a need to improve understanding of how Indigenous individuals become interested in occupational therapy as a career and how best to support recruitment.

- Institutional policies, programs, and services that pose barriers to accessing occupational therapy programs for Indigenous students should be addressed.
- Building relationships with Indigenous communities and health organizations could increase fieldwork opportunities for Indigenous student occupational therapists in Indigenous communities.
- Further information sharing is needed across academic institutions regarding federal/provincial funding opportunities available to Indigenous students entering university programs.
- Opportunities for a self-governed Indigenous occupational therapy program centred in Indigenous Ways of Knowing and Indigenous pedagogies should be explored.

Additional practice and policy challenges

- There are ongoing issues with equitable access and funding for services provided by the First Nations and Inuit Health Branch.
- There is a lack of culturally relevant assessments and practices that use strengths-based approaches.
- Resources and supports are needed for occupational therapists to report systemic racism, such as a hotline for whistleblowers.
- There is a need to build capacity for occupational therapists to contribute to and participate in policy and governance solutions.

The Occupational Therapy TRC Task Force will review these themes and feedback for incorporation into its final report and recommendations by September 2022.

In addition to this CAOT-sponsored session, members of the TRC Task Force attended a full-day strategic planning session (both virtually and in person) on May 4, 2022, to review commitments make meaningful, tangible progress on the TRC calls to action and the calls for justice of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG; 2019), in the various spheres of influence represented by members. Elder Albert McLeod opened and closed the day, sharing teachings on the importance of healing from pandemic-related challenges within health care and moving forward together to continue the journey of reconciliation, with a focus on actions with generational impact.

During this strategic planning day, all occupational therapy organizations provided concrete goals and commitments that will be presented to Indigenous Elders and Boards of the Occupational Therapy TRC

Task Force member organizations for approval, which will subsequently be shared publicly with occupational therapists.

Conclusion

The Occupational Therapy TRC Task Force is in the final stages of proposing commitments to tangibly advance several TRC calls to action and MMIWG calls for justice in occupational therapy and will share details in the coming months.

The co-chairs thank CAOT for its leadership and vision that resulted in the establishment of the task force and for its ongoing financial and secretariat support for all activities—including for conference meetings and sessions. Thank you to all of those who took time at the conference to provide feedback and continue the ongoing work of reconciliation within our profession. We invite readers to provide feedback via the email address included.

Further details on the Occupational Therapy TRC Task Force, including the most up-to-date action

plan can be found at: <https://www.caot.ca/site/adv/indigenous?nav=sidebar>

References

- Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists. (2019). *Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists 2019–2022 strategic priorities*. <https://www.caot.ca/document/6890/CAOT%20Strategic%20Plan%202019-2022.pdf>
- National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. (2019). *Reclaiming power and place: The final report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls*. <https://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/final-report/>
- Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. (2015). *Honouring the truth, reconciling for the future: Summary of the final report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*. https://ehprnh2mwo3.exactdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Executive_Summary_English_Web.pdf
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About the authors

The first two authors are Métis occupational therapists who co-chair the Occupational Therapy TRC Task Force. They are committed to doing their part in advancing relevant TRC calls to action within the occupational therapy profession. The third author is an occupational therapist and interim policy analyst at CAOT and supports the Occupational Therapy and Indigenous Health Network. For any questions or comments about the article, please contact: kjvalavaara@gmail.com

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