



IOWA OCCUPATIONAL  
THERAPY ASSOCIATION

## Occupational Therapist Workforce Shortage

According to Iowa Workforce Development (IWD), there is a significant shortage of occupational therapists (OT) and occupational therapist assistants (OTA) across the state of Iowa, especially in our rural areas. IWD recently outlined the High Demand-High Growth Occupations in Iowa, and OTs/OTAs ranked among the highest for health-related occupations with OTs at an annual growth rate of 2.8% and OTAs at 4.3%.

Due to the shortage, hospitals, schools and other agencies have found it necessary to use out-of-state contracted services, which contribute to an increased financial burden. One solution to addressing this problem is to include OT as one of the recognized professions eligible for the Health Care Loan Repayment Program. Rural loan repayment for occupational therapists will address health care workforce needs in rural areas. Including OTAs in all Future Ready Iowa initiatives would set the stage to ensure these high demand-high growth jobs are being filled over the next several years.

## Rural Iowans Need Access to OT Services

Rural Iowa does not have enough occupational therapists to provide these essential health care services to care for Iowans in need. Many rural areas do not have a licensed OTs in their county. There are only 1,000 licensed Occupational Therapists to cover the entire state; most of them are providing services in urban areas.

According to an independent study by researchers from Johns Hopkins University and University of Maryland, occupational therapy is the **only spending category that reduces hospital readmissions**. Occupational therapy produces a positive return on investment for hospitals, and it can create a positive impact on rural Iowa. Access to occupational therapy across Iowa would contribute to individuals continuing to function in their homes and communities and, in turn, would produce a cost savings for overall health care in Iowa.

## Occupational Therapy in Iowa

### Services:

- Provide treatment for injured, ill, or disabled patients to develop, recover, and improve skills needed to function in all environments (home, school, work, community, etc.) – for example:
- Address physical, psychological, and cognitive aspects of a patient's well-being
- Evaluate a client's abilities and environments, create customized goals and intervention, recommend equipment and deliver training for adaptation, and provide guidance and education for family members and caregivers

### Education & Licensing:

- About half of OTs work in offices of occupational therapy or in hospitals; others work in schools, nursing homes, and home health services
- OTs graduate with a Master's or Doctorate of Occupational Therapy
- All states require Occupational Therapists to be licensed, and require candidates to pass the national examination administered by the National Board for Certification in Occupational Therapy
- The median annual wage of Occupational Therapists in Iowa is \$71,150.
- Iowa currently has 3 programs that will graduate OTs – St. Ambrose University (Davenport), Allen College (Waterloo), Drake University (Des Moines). Additionally, there are 4 programs that graduate Occupational Therapy Assistants – Kirkwood Community College (Cedar Rapids), Indian Hills Community College (Ottumwa), Hawkeye Community College (Waterloo) and Brown Mackie College (Bettendorf).

