

## Positioning Occupation as a Public Health Issue



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**Introduction:** The links between participating in meaningful activities (occupations) and health are clearly supported by research evidence and are fundamental to occupational therapy practice. In the field of public health, however, the potential value of meaningful participation is often overlooked, apart from a relatively narrow focus on physical activity. Occupational therapists have a broader understanding of occupation (eg. social, mental, spiritual dimensions), and of the meaning and value of occupation within a personal, social and political context. We therefore have the potential to be leaders in promoting occupation as a public health issue.

**Objectives:** Participants will learn about the challenges and opportunities associated with positioning occupation to the Canadian public as a fundamental element of health and well-being.

**Approach:** Findings from initial focus groups with leaders in the public health and health promotion fields will be presented, as well as findings from focus groups with key stakeholders in the general public. Participants will discuss the key challenges that emerged, as well as respond to initial frameworks and strategies for communicating the concept of occupation and its potential to promote health and well-being with the public.

**Practice Implications:** The ideas generated in this session will inform ongoing efforts to define the concept of occupation and communicate evidence about the relationship between occupation, health and well-being with the general public.

**Conclusions:** Clearly articulating the health promoting potential of engagement in occupation can help position occupational therapy as an essential public health service.