



SAOT – Your Voice for Occupational Therapy in Alberta

Professional Affairs Plan – 2016-2017

Part of SAOT's mandate is to advocate on behalf of the profession to government, insurers and other stakeholders. The area of professional affairs has been identified as a priority in the Society's five-year strategic plan.

Early in 2016, SAOT's board of directors struck the Professional Affairs Committee (PAC) and has approved a phased plan designed to ensure that decision makers within the Government of Alberta have a thorough understanding of the scope of services, capacity and value proposition occupational therapists provide to Albertans.

Through the evolution of health system delivery in Alberta, traditional areas of occupational therapy expertise are sometimes assumed by other disciplines, creating overlap. Job erosion and the perceived duplication of services with other professions may be a direct result of the lack of understanding of the true value of full utilization of occupational therapy throughout the health care system.

The current government has indicated that it is willing to listen, and SAOT is creating opportunities to be heard.

Key Strategic Considerations

- The NDP government's mandate is to ensure the "right" health professionals are providing the "right" care in the "right" place and have indicated in correspondence from the Minister of Health that this will be inclusive of occupational therapy;
- This inclusion will not happen without active encouragement through consistent engagements by SAOT in both political and bureaucratic levels of government; and
- Through the SAOT Professional Affairs Committee (PAC), it was decided that the initial focus will be on engaging with Alberta Health & Alberta Health Services in the areas of mental health, primary care and community care services. However, this does not limit SAOT from advocating in other areas such as Education, Human Services and Justice at the appropriate time or if opportunity becomes available as the overlap of OT services across these sectors may in fact be indivisible.

Phase One: Building the Foundation

June – September 2016 (Completed)

Through the summer and early fall, SAOT's PAC engaged the Canadian Strategy Group to assist in completing a series of preliminary activities that have laid the foundation for a strong professional affairs plan. This included but was not limited to aligning short term advocacy goals as well as customizing and gaining consensus on written materials to be used in the advocacy work.

Three specific areas were identified on which to focus initial advocacy efforts. These will not be the sole areas of focus for all advocacy efforts, but by limiting the scope they do provide a focus and a starting point to launch advocacy efforts:

Mental Health

- The Alberta government has taken an increased interest in expanding the scope of mental health care in the province. The government hopes to change the way that mental health care is being delivered and there is an opportunity for OT to be an active part of the early conversations that will frame what the future of mental health care could look like in the province.

Primary Health Care

- Alberta Health undertook a review of Primary Care Networks (the Review) in 2015 as part of the Ministry's internal oversight responsibility to ensure primary health care is being delivered in an effective manner. Because of this review, Alberta Health is actively working on developing policy based on the findings. Therefore, an opportunity was identified to create a dialogue around the benefit of greater inclusion of OT into the interdisciplinary health care teams within the primary care networks in both urban and rural settings.

Community Care Across the Life Span

- The Alberta government has identified community based care as a pillar in its plan to improve and modernize health care to protect patient and population needs in the province. Through its strategic plan, the Government has outlined its intent to directly invest in community based services that will improve the delivery of primary health care services throughout the province.

Customized briefing documents and position papers have been prepared on the following:

- Mental Health
- Primary Health Care
- Community Care
- Medically Assisted Dying

These documents are available to all registered OTs at www.saot.ca under Professional Affairs.

Phase Two: Building Relationships, Educating & Creating a Dialogue with Department Officials

October 2016 – June 2017

Phase Two will focus on building relationships and creating an informed dialogue within the Government of Alberta. A comprehensive contact matrix has been developed. The PAC will achieve these objectives in three critical ways:

- Bottom up - Focus on bureaucrats and advisors within government (from Manager, to Director, to Executive Director level), primarily within Alberta Health and Alberta Health Services.
- Top down - The senior decision makers accountable for the file or issue, and their political and department advisors (from Ministers, to Chiefs of Staff, Deputy Ministers & Assistant Deputy Ministers).
- Encircle - SAOT's position will be stronger if it engages third-parties to support the plan, and ensures that influencers of the decision makers are familiar with and supportive of the plan. This will include visits with both rural and urban MLAs to familiarize them with the issues and prepare them for NDP caucus discussions.

SAOT has already begun this process, through an initial meeting in July 2016 with the Minister of Health and upcoming meetings with the Health Professions Division at Alberta Health.

Phase Three: Engaging & Creating Awareness with Elected Officials

July to October 2017

Phase Three will target members of the legislative assembly, ministerial offices, officials within the Office of the Premier as well as the public. The tactics employed may include but not be limited to the following methods to engage with political stakeholders:

- Hosting forums or information sessions to educate key government officials on the role of occupational therapy;
- Attending and/or hosting receptions & political events;
- Planning strategic tours to demonstrate OT capacity in the field;
- Involvement in favourable community and charity opportunities in the provinces; and
- Engaging through social or traditional media.

Phase Four: Moving Opportunities into Reality

November - December 2017

After working to build the dialogue with government the fourth phase will focus on moving opportunities previously discussed into reality and pushing decision makers towards actually making decisions.