

Messaging guide

Right Support, Right Time: Unlocking the Power of OT

In this guide you'll find the core messaging for RCOT's **Right Support, Right Time: Unlocking the Power of OT** campaign. It's designed to help you speak clearly and confidently about the value of occupational therapy when it's delivered early and in the right way.

The campaign places occupational therapy at the heart of health and social care, shifting the focus to prevention: helping people sooner, easing pressure across services and showing how OT is an essential part of the solution.

Use this guide to keep your conversations and communications aligned, confident and clear and to help show why occupational therapy must be central to the future of health, education and social care.

What's included:

1. **Campaign name and purpose:** what the campaign is about and why it matters
2. **Key messages:** the essential points to repeat and reinforce
3. **Summary:** a short version of the narrative for quick use
4. **Full narrative:** the complete story of the campaign
5. **Definitions:** what we mean by prevention and early intervention
6. **Tailored messages:** for each nation and some areas of practice including stats and examples

For ready-to-use content including the narrative in different lengths, social media posts and image descriptions please refer to the **Communications ready content** document, provided separately. There are also PowerPoint slides with speaker notes, social media graphics, an email banner and posters.

We'll be launching the campaign on 3 November 2025, at the start of OT Week. Until then, please only share content that promotes your own activities. Sharing campaign-related content too early could dilute its overall impact.

1. Campaign name and purpose

Right Support, Right Time: Unlocking the Power of OT

- Always use sentence case exactly as shown
- Where possible use the full title unless you're creating short-form content (for example, social media posts, email subject lines and slide headers)

#RightTimeOT

- During OTWeek this can be used in conjunction with ` #OTWeek25

This campaign positions occupational therapy at the heart of health and social care. It's about shifting the focus to prevention: helping people earlier, easing pressure across services and showing how OT is an essential part of the solution.

2. Key messages

- Occupational therapy helps people stay well for longer and avoid crises – especially when occupational therapists are involved early.
- Occupational therapists bring unique skills that have the greatest impact when used early and in the right way.
- Occupational therapists help avoid unnecessary hospital admissions, support recovery from hospital to home and reduce the need for long-term care – saving money across health and social care.
- Occupational therapists help ease pressure on health, social care and special education services.
- Occupational therapists help reduce health inequalities and improve sustainability.
- We want to shift the focus from crisis-driven care to prevention-focused approaches.
- Occupational therapists must be embedded in the places where people live, work and seek support.
- Occupational therapy must be central to the future of health, education and social care – supporting UK-wide plans to shift care into communities and take a more preventive approach.

3. Summary

Occupational therapy delivers measurable impact across health, social care and education by helping people stay well for longer and avoid crises – especially when occupational therapists are involved early.

Their unique, person-centred approach reduces hospital admissions, supports recovery from hospital to home and eases pressure on acute and specialist services. By embedding occupational therapists in community settings – like GP practices, workplaces, schools and housing – they can intervene sooner, reduce inequalities and promote sustainable, cost-effective care.

To build a proactive, prevention-focused system that meets population needs, occupational therapy must be central to future planning and investment.

4. Long narrative

Occupational therapy helps people stay well for longer and avoid crises – especially when occupational therapists are involved early. It plays a vital role in health, social care and society by enabling people to stay connected and engaged in the activities that matter to them.

Occupational therapists bring unique skills that have the greatest impact when used early and in the right way. Their timely input helps people manage changes before they become more complex and entrenched. Across all stages of life, from childhood to older age, occupational therapists make the biggest difference when they apply their full expertise.

Occupational therapists help avoid unnecessary hospital admissions, support recovery

from hospital to home and reduce the need for long-term care – saving money across health and social care. They do this by providing proactive, person-centred support. By looking at the whole person – their environment, routines, goals and challenges – they offer practical solutions tailored to everyday life.

Occupational therapists help ease pressure on health, social care and special education services. Whether supporting people to get safely home from hospital, enabling community living or helping people take part in leisure activities, education and employment, occupational therapists help prevent needs from escalating and reduce reliance on acute services.

Occupational therapists help reduce health inequalities and improve sustainability. They use occupations to promote social inclusion and connect people to the activities that benefit their health. By getting involved early, they reduce the likelihood of people becoming unwell. Participating in work, education and leisure improves wellbeing and can provide a way out of poverty. Pivoting services to meet population needs prevents hospital admissions, making better use of hospital resources and equipment, saving time and costs, easing system pressure and reducing energy use.

We want to shift the focus from crisis-driven care to prevention-focused approaches. Rather than reacting to problems, we need to reach people sooner. The right support at the right time will have the greatest impact. This means involving occupational therapists early and enabling them to work in ways that make full use of their expertise.

Occupational therapists must be embedded in the places where people live, work and seek support. They should be visible and accessible across the entire system, especially in local services, where early signs of need often emerge. For example, in GP practices, schools, housing services and community mental health teams.

Occupational therapy must be central to the future of health, education and care – supporting UK-wide plans to focus on care in communities and take a more preventive approach. By recognising the value of occupational therapy and enabling occupational therapists to work in the right way, we can build a more proactive, person-centred system that supports people to live well and thrive.

5. Definitions

Prevention is about providing the right support for people, so health conditions, disabilities or social problems – and any functional impacts of those – are minimised, delayed or prevented. It involves supporting people to get the care they need, including self-care, lifestyle adjustments and supportive strategies, so they can stay well for longer.

Early intervention is about making sure people can access the care and services they need at the earliest possible stage to stop health and social problems getting worse. For children, in particular, it's about optimising their potential so they thrive and live their best lives.

6. Tailored messages, facts and examples

Across the nations

You can use these messages to connect the campaign to what's happening in your nation. Every government across the UK is committed to prevention and moving care closer to home, and occupational therapy is key to making that happen.

In **England** the UK Government's [10 Year Health plan](#) sets out an ambition to embed prevention at every level of the system. It's about reducing avoidable illness, supporting people to stay well and shifting care into communities. Occupational therapy does exactly that – helping people earlier and easing pressure on services.

Conditions like diabetes, chronic pain, anxiety, depression and kidney disease are expected to rise by over 30% in England, with many managed in primary and community care. Cardiovascular disease, respiratory conditions and diabetes often affect how people manage daily routines, take part in work and stay connected to others. Occupational therapists help people navigate these challenges – supporting self-management, function and wellbeing.

- More detail is available in the [Health Survey for England](#).

Scotland's [Population Health Framework 2025–2035](#) focuses on preventing ill-health and improving access to care in the community. Occupational therapists are already working in schools, housing and mental health teams – helping people stay well and reducing health inequalities.

Cancer, cardiovascular disease, chronic respiratory conditions and dementia are the leading causes of ill health in Scotland. These conditions contribute to disability, early death and deepening health inequalities and occupational therapists help people manage their impact, maintain routines and take part in daily life.

- More detail is available in the [Scottish Burden of Disease study](#).

In **Northern Ireland**, the Department of Health's [Reset Plan](#) commits to a neighbourhood-centred system that brings care closer to home. Occupational therapy is a vital part of that shift – offering practical, person-centred support that helps people live well in their communities.

The four most common causes of ill health in **Northern Ireland** – cardiovascular disease, mental health disorders, respiratory conditions and diabetes – can be strongly impacted by lifestyle and socioeconomic factors. These conditions often affect people's ability to manage daily life and occupational therapists play a key role in helping people self-manage, improve function and quality of life.

- More detail is available in the [Raw Disease Prevalence in Northern Ireland](#).

The **Welsh** Government's [A healthier Wales plan](#) sets out a strong commitment to community-based care. Occupational therapists are already helping make that a reality – supporting people earlier, reducing the need for hospital care and improving outcomes across health and social care.

Nearly half of adults in Wales live with at least one chronic condition and the number with four or more is expected to double by 2035. Conditions like cardiovascular disease, diabetes, mental health issues and obesity often affect how people manage daily life. Occupational therapists help people navigate these challenges – supporting function, self-management and wellbeing.

- More detail is available in the Senedd Cymru [Health and Social Care Committee Report](#).

Occupational therapy in action

You can use these messages to show how occupational therapy makes a difference across a range of key settings – from schools and hospitals to GP surgeries and workplaces.

You can use these as a guide to help you build messages that reflect your own practice and how you make an impact through prevention and early intervention.

In schools: helping every child thrive

Occupational therapists help create more inclusive and accessible school environments so all children can learn, thrive and enjoy school life. By working in partnership with schools, they can identify children's needs early and provide timely support to stop difficulties from escalating. This proactive approach helps every child access learning and reach their potential – as children and as adults.

In one school, occupational therapists noticed that some neurodivergent children were struggling to eat because the dining room felt overwhelming. They worked with school staff, including lunchtime supervisors, to explore how sensory differences affect eating. Small changes, like adding a tablecloth to reduce noise, made a big difference. More children now eat lunch with their friends and have the energy to stay focused for afternoon lessons.

What occupational therapists told us (from [2023 survey of children's occupational therapists](#)):

- 74% said changes in school staffing prevented children and young people benefitting from occupational therapy.
- 65% said the cost-of-living crisis was making it difficult for children and young people to access OT.
- 30% said they couldn't provide equipment and adaptations that children and young people need, when they need it.

In acute care: preventing readmissions and easing pressure

Occupational therapists in hospitals play a vital role in helping people recover and return home safely. When they're involved early, they can prevent readmissions by making sure people have the right support in place – from care packages to therapy teams and rapid response services. Their input reduces pressure on other parts of the NHS and social care and helps people avoid long-term care.

Occupational therapists are also making a difference in emergency departments. In Blackpool Victoria Hospital, a pilot project showed that when occupational therapists were part of the triage team, 71% of patients they assessed didn't need to be admitted. By looking beyond medical needs and focusing on people's daily lives, cognition and wellbeing, they helped people get home safely and avoid further hospital stays.

In work settings: supporting people to stay in or return to work

Occupational therapists help people stay in or return to work by focusing on rehabilitation and support. They identify barriers that stop someone from working and offer practical strategies to overcome them. Because work is so important for health and wellbeing, getting the right help early can prevent the physical, mental and social difficulties linked to unemployment. By offering this support early, occupational therapists reduce people's risk of being excluded from work and help them find and stay in employment.

In regional Condition Management Programmes, occupational therapists work alongside other clinicians to support people with long-term health conditions. Sessions focus on problem-solving, pacing and adapting daily routines and in one programme, 70% of participants were still in work six months later.

In Wakefield, vocational rehabilitation services include workplace visits, tailored return-to-work plans and close liaison with employers. This approach eased pressure on GPs and helped 94% of patients on long-term sick leave return to work.

In Lothian, occupational therapists support employees with complex health needs, including those in small and medium enterprises. They use job-task analysis and fatigue management to help people meet job demands without worsening their health. Over 90% of absent employees returned to work and all those still working stayed in post.

In national occupational health services, occupational therapists are brought in for complex cases where specialist functional assessments are needed. Their reports help shape safe, fair and workable solutions from phased returns to ergonomic adaptations.

What the data shows (from [Statista](#) and [ONS](#))

- An estimated 2.78 million people in the UK weren't working due to ongoing health problems between March and June 2025. Mental health and musculoskeletal conditions are the most common causes.
- People aged 50 and over are most affected, but there's been a sharp rise in under-35s out of work due to long-term health issues.
- Employment rates also show a clear gap: only 53% of disabled people are in work, compared to 81% of non-disabled people.

In primary care: offering early support and reducing pressure

Occupational therapists in primary care help people manage everyday challenges linked to long-term conditions, mental health, fatigue, frailty and more. They focus on prevention and self-management, offering practical support that helps people stay well and avoid crisis. By getting involved early, occupational therapists reduce pressure on GPs and hospitals and improve people's quality of life.

Across the UK, occupational therapists in GP practices are using their skills in new and innovative ways from running memory clinics and supporting people back into work, to offering therapy instead of painkillers.

In NHS Ayrshire and Arran, occupational therapists work in GP surgeries as part of multidisciplinary teams. They support people with physical and mental health difficulties, helping them access early intervention and avoid further decline. As a result, referrals became more relevant, patients needed fewer GP appointments and fewer people were referred to secondary services. Patients also reported high levels of satisfaction with the support they received.

In Nottingham West, mental health occupational therapists were introduced into GP surgeries as first-contact clinicians. People could see them directly without needing a GP referral, which meant faster access to care and more time freed up for GPs. The team offered practical, personalised support through group therapy and one-to-one sessions, helping people talk openly about their mental health and find strategies that worked for them.

In Rugby, occupational therapists created a pain management service across 12 GP practices. They supported people with conditions like fibromyalgia and rheumatoid arthritis using non-drug

approaches such as activity analysis, motivational interviewing and cognitive behavioural therapy. The service helped people set personal goals and manage the impact of pain on daily life. Most patients achieved their goals and said the support helped them feel more in control, both physically and emotionally.

What the data shows

- 40% of GP appointments are for mental health – occupational therapists can assess and advise people early, reducing pressure on GPs.