



Occupational therapy in Scotland

A quick guide for MSPs: how occupational therapy is vital for prevention, enables people to live well and is at the core of public service reform in Scotland.

Why OT matters

In Scotland, there are over 3,800 registered occupational therapists. Occupational therapists are health and social care professionals who help people overcome physical, mental or social challenges, so they can take part in the everyday activities that matter to them.

OT is not a niche service. It is part of the practical answer to many of Scotland's biggest challenges: prevention, delayed discharge, community care, child development, fair work, justice and reducing health inequalities.

Occupational therapy has the greatest impact when people get support early and close to home, reducing unnecessary hospital admissions, speeding up recovery and helping people stay safe and well in their communities.



Giving the best start in life

Neonatal

OTs in neonatal services support babies born early, small or unwell. They promote development, feeding, sleep, sensory regulation and parent-infant bonding, helping families build confidence from the earliest days.

Children and young people

OTs support children and young people to achieve their potential by enabling participation in play, learning, self-care and family life. Working with families, nurseries and schools, they address developmental, sensory, physical and emotional barriers, helping children take part in everyday activities and promoting inclusion.



Learning disability

OTs support children, young people and adults with learning disabilities to develop practical skills, establish routines, manage sensory needs and participate more fully at home, in education, at work and in their communities.

Enabling recovery after illness or injury

Acute

In hospitals, OTs assess how someone is managing everyday activities and identify what they need to return home safely. This reduces delays, improves patient flow and supports people to return home with the right support in place.

Rehabilitation

OTs support people to rebuild their lives following illness, injury, surgery or changes in their health. Through personalised rehabilitation, they help people to regain skills, adapt to new circumstances and achieve meaningful goals.

Reablement

Reablement is short-term, goal-focused support, often provided after illness, crisis or hospital discharge. OTs help people regain confidence and improve their ability to carry out everyday activities, which can reduce or delay the need for ongoing care.



Living well closer to home

Local authority

In local authority services, OTs assess need, recommend equipment and adaptations, support housing decisions and ensure people live safely at home. Their input can prevent problems from escalating, reduce pressure on carers and support a home-first approach.

Primary care

OTs in GP and community teams provide early, preventative support close to home. They help people manage long-term conditions, fatigue, pain, mental health challenges and daily routines before problems become more serious.

Palliative care

OTs help people living with life-limiting illness focus on what matters most by managing symptoms, conserving energy and adapting activities and environments to maintain dignity and stay connected to the people and routines that matter.



Building productive lives and stronger communities

Mental health

OTs support people experiencing mental health challenges to rebuild routines, confidence and participation in everyday life. Through meaningful activity and practical support, they promote recovery and wellbeing, helping people reconnect with work, education, relationships and community life.

Vocational rehabilitation

OTs work with people to stay in work, return to work or access employment after illness, injury or disability. They address barriers to work, build confidence and advise on adjustments that benefit both individuals and employers.

Criminal justice

In prison and justice settings, OTs help people develop routines, daily living skills, emotional regulation and healthier patterns of activity. This supports rehabilitation, wellbeing and resettlement back into the community.

What you can do

The case for change is clear. Occupational therapy joins up health, social care, housing, education, justice and employment around what people need to live well. Now is the time to invest.

- Join us to meet with local occupational therapists in your constituency or region.
- Ask questions in the chamber about how occupational therapy services are being invested in and supported.
- Contact your local health board(s) to learn more about how they are investing in occupational therapy.
- Champion OT as part of joined-up public service reform across health, social care, housing, education, justice and work.



Contact katie.macgregor@rcot.co.uk to learn more about how occupational therapy can support your constituents or visit [rcot.co.uk](https://www.rcot.co.uk)

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