



## Tennessee Occupational Therapy Association 2026 Legislative Priorities

### Who We Are: Occupational Therapy Practitioners

Occupational therapists (OTs) and occupational therapy assistants (OTAs) are licensed healthcare professionals who help Tennesseans of all ages and backgrounds live productive, meaningful lives. When we talk about “occupations,” we refer to everyday activities through which people occupy their time and bring meaning and purpose to life. OT practitioners use everyday occupations as therapeutic interventions with individuals, groups, and populations in order to enhance or enable their participation in meaningful activities. Here are some of the ways OT practitioners support individuals throughout the lifespan:

- Working with children with developmental delays and disabilities to facilitate their participation in school, self-care, and play activities
- Providing OT services to adults recovering from stroke, injury, or surgery to help them regain independence
- Providing consultation and direct OT services to allow older adults remain safe and as independent as possible in their homes and communities as they age
- Delivering OT services to individuals with mental health conditions to enable them to develop coping skills and healthy, productive life routines

*OT practitioners address critical healthcare needs and provide vital services, including chronic disease management, fall prevention programming, mental health support, and workforce reentry – helping [reduce hospital readmissions](#), which, in turn, reduces healthcare costs and improves quality of life across Tennessee.*

### Priority #1: Support Independent OT Licensing Board

**The Issue:** Proposed legislation would consolidate health profession licensing boards into administrative functions within the Department of Health. This change threatens professional autonomy and regulatory expertise.

**Our Request:** We respectfully request that occupational therapy be amended out of any consolidation legislation.

- OTs and OTAs deserve a fully independent licensing board with profession-specific expertise and representation.
- We appreciate the Department of Health's support for maintaining an independent OT board.

**Why It Matters:** *An independent board ensures OT-specific standards, protects public safety, and maintains the professional integrity needed to serve Tennessee's diverse healthcare needs.*

### Priority #2: Increase TennCare Reimbursement Rates

**The Issue:** Current TennCare reimbursement rates for occupational therapy services have not kept pace with the cost of providing care, limiting access to essential services for Tennessee's most vulnerable populations.

**Our Request:** We urge legislators to support increased reimbursement rates for occupational therapy services under TennCare.

**Impact of Adequate Reimbursement:**

- Expanded Access: More providers can afford to serve TennCare recipients
- Improved Outcomes: Earlier intervention prevents complications and reduces impacts of disability
- Reduced Overall Spending: Community-based OT services decrease emergency department visits and hospital admissions
- Workforce Stability: Sustainable rates help retain experienced OT practitioners in Tennessee

**Return on Investment:** *Every dollar invested in OT services yields significant savings through reductions in hospitalizations, long-term care needs, nursing home placements, and emergency care utilization.*

## Priority #3: OT in Rural Health Transformation Initiatives

**The Opportunity:** The Tennessee Department of Health has received federal grants to improve rural healthcare access and outcomes across our state.

**OT's Role in Rural Health:**

- Occupational therapy is essential to comprehensive rural healthcare delivery
- OT services help address chronic disease management, aging in place, and pediatric development in underserved communities
- In addition to in-person OT services, telehealth OT can extend specialized services to remote areas with provider shortages.

*We encourage legislators to ensure occupational therapy is integrated into rural health transformation planning and implementation.*

## Priority #4: Oppose House Bill 387 (Firearm Screening Restriction)

**The Issue:** House Bill 387 would prohibit healthcare providers from asking patients about firearm ownership or access, even when clinically relevant to patient safety.

**Why This Matters:**

- **Guns are the leading cause of death for children in the United States**
- Healthcare providers need complete information to assess safety risks when working with vulnerable patients.
- OT practitioners who work with children, individuals with dementia, those with mental health conditions, and others at risk must be able to conduct comprehensive safety assessments.
- This restriction compromises our professional obligation to protect patient health and safety.

***We strongly oppose HB 387 and urge legislators to vote against this bill. Clinical decision-making must remain within the healthcare provider-patient relationship.***

---

*Thank you for your time and consideration of these important issues affecting occupational therapy professionals and the Tennesseans we serve.*

**Tennessee Occupational Therapy Association**

<https://tnota.org>

For more information, please contact: [admin@tnota.org](mailto:admin@tnota.org)