



Resources for students  
from The American  
Occupational Therapy Association

# Your career in Occupational Therapy

## Workforce Trends in Occupational Therapy

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The demand for occupational therapy services is strong. The U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) projected employment of occupational therapists to increase by 26% and of occupational therapy assistants to increase by 30% or more between 2008 and 2018. This projection is based on the Bureau's assumptions that demographic trends and advances in medical technology will continue to fuel demand for therapy services.

Occupational therapy workforce shortages are appearing in selected markets and sectors. Demand for occupational therapy services in early intervention programs and in schools that enroll children with disabilities who are served under the federal Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004 remains strong. Newly emerging areas of practice for occupational therapy practitioners related to the needs of an aging population are increasing demand for services. These include low-vision rehabilitation; treatment of Alzheimer's disease and other forms of dementia, including caregiver training; older driver safety and rehabilitation; assisted living; and home safety and home modifications to enable "aging in place." In a survey of education program directors, the overwhelming majority (80%+) of the 318 programs reported that more than 80% of occupational therapy and occupational therapy assistant graduates were able to secure jobs within 6 months of graduation. Many of these graduates had secured job offers prior to graduating.

### **Current Workforce**

Based on 2010 survey results from state occupational therapy regulatory boards, the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) estimates the current active occupational therapy workforce to be roughly 137,000 practitioners. This includes approximately 102,500 occupational therapists and 34,500 occupational therapy assistants.

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Recent AOTA surveys indicate that 92% of practitioners are female, more than three quarters (85%) are employed full-time in the profession, and the median level of professional experience is 13 years.

Data from the 2010 AOTA Occupational Therapy Compensation and Workforce Study indicate a median annual income of \$64,722 for occupational therapists and \$44,000 for occupational therapy assistants.

In addition, the Workforce study indicated average entry-level salaries of \$52,000 for occupational therapists and \$34,298 for occupational therapy assistants. Recent indications of plentiful job advertisements and frequent sign-on bonuses suggest that those entry-level salaries continue to rise and that applicants are receiving multiple job offers.

Occupational therapy practitioners work in a wide range of settings including schools, hospitals, skilled nursing facilities, home health, outpatient rehabilitation clinics, psychiatric facilities, and community health programs. School systems, hospitals, and long-term-care facilities are the primary work settings for occupational therapists and occupational therapy assistants.

### Licensure and Regulation

The practice of occupational therapy is regulated in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and Guam. The most common and highest form of regulation is licensure. Licensure is required in 48 of those jurisdictions for occupational therapists and 47 jurisdictions for occupational therapy assistants.

Colorado and Hawaii do not regulate occupational therapy assistants but do regulate occupational therapists (registration law in Hawaii and Colorado). Occupational therapy assistants are regulated by certification law in New York.

If you have specific questions about a career in occupational therapy, please contact [educate@aota.org](mailto:educate@aota.org). Visit [www.aota.org](http://www.aota.org) for more information about the profession and the activities of the American Occupational Therapy Association.



The American Occupational Therapy Association



## The Occupational Therapy Workforce (2010)

### Who They Are...

102,500	Occupational Therapists
34,500	Occupational Therapy Assistants
137,000	Total Practitioner Workforce

### Where They Work...

26.2%	Hospitals
21.6%	Schools
19.9%	Nursing Facilities
9.3%	Outpatient Clinics
5.8%	Home Health
5.2%	Academia
4.8%	Early Intervention
4.3%	Community/Other
2.9%	Mental Health

*(AOTA Occupational Therapy Compensation and Workforce Study, 2010)*

