

18 March 2019

Committee Secretary  
Education, Employment and Small Business Committee  
Parliament House  
George Street  
Brisbane QLD 4000

By email: [eesbc@parliament.qld.gov.au](mailto:eesbc@parliament.qld.gov.au)

Dear Sir/Madam

Occupational Therapy Australia (OTA) welcomes this opportunity to comment on the Health and Wellbeing Queensland Bill 2019.

OTA is the professional association and peak representative body for occupational therapists in Australia. As of December 2018, there were approximately 4,200 registered occupational therapists working across the government, non-government, private and community sectors in Queensland.

The World Federation of Occupational Therapy (WFOT) defines occupational therapy as a client-centred health profession concerned with promoting health and well-being through occupation. The primary goal of occupational therapy is to enable people to participate in the activities of everyday life.

Occupational therapists recognise the importance of social participation and of one's ability to engage in meaningful and purposeful occupations, and the link this has to health and wellbeing. They work with vulnerable members of the community, including those who experience challenges engaging in healthy behaviours. These include those living with physical disabilities, chronic illness, mental health conditions, and groups from disadvantaged backgrounds such as the homeless and/or socioeconomically disadvantaged.

Occupational therapists provide services such as physical and mental health therapy, vocational rehabilitation, assistive equipment prescription, home and work modifications and chronic disease management, as well as key disability supports and services. They also have a major role in workplace health, through the direct management of workers with injury and illness/chronic disease, and in the prevention of illness and injury in the workplace through ergonomic and workplace assessment and interventions.

In short, occupational therapists can be viewed as experts in the science of living who enable clients to reach their individual potential.

Many OTA members in Queensland have expertise in the promotion of health, including researchers examining factors impacting physical activity and healthy eating for people with diabetes, children with coordination disorders, or children's active travel to school.

Occupational therapy is a key profession in our nation's effort to improve the health and wellbeing of all demographics. By enabling social participation and maximising all forms of access to services and resources, occupational therapy can promote well-being and positively impact the long-term health of our communities.

OTA would expect the Chief Executive Officer and Board members of Health and Wellbeing Queensland to have high level understanding of the drivers of health and wellbeing, and an appreciation of the complexity of the challenges to these in our community. This will enable effective decision making in relation to key public health initiatives and the appropriate allocation of necessarily limited resources.

With a diverse range of service providers competing for these resources, and making claims as to their impact on public health and wellbeing, it is critical that Health and Wellbeing Queensland has in place a framework to ensure services and initiatives supported are grounded in evidence and are delivered by health professionals who have the recognised qualifications, skills, and means to provide these services effectively.

Collaboration among these service providers will be essential to achieving positive health outcomes. Occupational therapists have a key role to play in this collaboration as they often play a case management role, driving the efficient delivery of multi-disciplinary care and the assessment of service outcomes.

The function of Health and Wellbeing Queensland should be to improve the health and wellbeing of the people of Queensland. OTA recognises the expertise of those working in the fields of population health and health promotion, and strongly supports the use of evidence-based initiatives.

Community health and well-being is complex and will require a high order of strategic planning to ensure best practice activities. OTA also recognises the recent shift in the focus of health promotion to the creation and design of opportunities for individuals and the community to choose healthier options and behaviours. Again, occupational therapists have core skills in the recognition and design of environmental factors which maximise access to healthy activity and function. This professional expertise represents a valuable resource in the strategic planning stage of community access to services.

OTA would encourage Health and Wellbeing Queensland to look at the work undertaken in other jurisdictions of Australia and in other countries. This would provide insight into strategies of proven success that would be worth considering in Queensland as well as being an opportunity for long term national harmonisation of successful health and wellbeing initiatives.

OTA believes that services need to be targeted at both whole populations and those vulnerable communities with limited opportunities to engage in the occupations of everyday life that most take for granted. A large body of evidence suggests that such occupational injustice and inequities significantly impact on health and wellbeing. Vulnerable communities include, but are not limited to, the homeless, refugee and asylum-seekers, individuals living with chronic mental health conditions, first Australians, and people in lower socio-economic cohorts.

OTA would be pleased to establish a consultative group of members who have particular experience and skills in the area of health and wellbeing who would be pleased to liaise with and advise Health and Wellbeing Queensland.

OTA thanks the committee for this opportunity to comment on the Health and Wellbeing Queensland Bill 2019. We are happy for our submission to be published on the committee's website, and to provide further information on any of the issues raised should this be required.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John Trent', is written over a light grey circular background.

John Trent  
Queensland Divisional Manager