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## Occupational Therapy in Mental Health Act

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- Occupational therapy is a skilled health, wellness and rehabilitation service dedicated to the maximization of performance and function.
  - Occupational therapists are health care professionals whose education addresses the social, emotional, psychological and physical aspects of interaction between an individual and their environment.
  - Occupational therapy emphasizes the provision of supports and services that enable a person to carry out their everyday activities, so that they can be productive, independent, engaged, and safe in the environments in which they live, learn, work, and play.
  - Within mental health, occupational therapy utilizes this unique perspective to provide client-centered, occupation-based interventions that enable individuals with a mental illness to maximize their potential and lead productive, full lives.
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### REQUEST:

**Support the Occupational Therapy in Mental Health Act (HR 1037) which will add Occupational Therapists to the federal definition Of “Behavioral and Mental Health Professional” under the National Health Services Corps.**

**What is the Requested Statutory Language?** Modify 42 Section 254d – National Health Services Corps to read:

(E)(i) The term “behavioral and mental health professionals” means health service psychologists, licensed clinical social workers, licensed professional counselors, marriage and family therapists, psychiatric nurse specialists [**strike “and”**], psychiatrists, **and occupational therapists**.

**What Is The Impact Of This Language?** The National Health Services Corps (NHSC) appears to be the only place in the U.S. Public Health Service Act where the terms “behavioral and mental health professionals” are specifically defined. Adopting the language proposed above would have two practical health policy consequences.

- 1.) Occupational therapists would be newly eligible to participate in the NHSC Scholarship and Loan Repayment Programs. If OTs receive assistance from either of these programs to finance graduate training, they would be required – upon graduation -- to provide services in practices or facilities located in “health professional shortage areas” [so-called HPSAs] for a minimum period of five (5) years. HPSAs are typically located in rural and low income urban areas.
- 2.) The methodologies employed by the Health Resources and Services Administration ([HRSA] to designate HPSAs would have to be amended to account for occupational therapists in the relevant geographic areas.

**Additionally, the NHSC definition is used by many states and other federal programs to circumscribe qualified mental health professionals. Inclusion of occupational therapy will provide greater access to the functional benefits of occupational therapy services for people with behavioral and mental health conditions.** While inclusion in the NHSC would be limited to occupational therapists, employment opportunities in community mental health centers and similar facilities and setting would be increased for occupational therapy assistants as well so that their skills and expertise could also benefit the public mental health system more effectively.

**Does The AOTA Amendment Generate A CBO Score?** The NHSC is a federal discretionary program that receives funding through the Labor/HHS Appropriations Bill. Therefore, it seems reasonable to assume that the amendment described above would not generate a Congressional Budget Office (CBO) score... **because it would not trigger additional NHSC, Medicare or Medicaid spending.**