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# AOTA's Societal Statement on Health Disparities

It is widely recognized that disparities in health status and the availability of health and social services exist in the United States. The Trans-National Institutes of Health (NIH) Work Group on Health Disparities defined the term *health disparities* as “the difference in the incidence, prevalence, morbidity, mortality, and burden of diseases and other adverse health conditions that exist among specific population groups” (NIH, 1999).

As noted by the NIH Work Group, experts assert that “health disparities arise from a complex combination of social and economic factors, the physical environments, cultural beliefs and values, educational level, personal behaviors, and genetic susceptibilities” (NIH, 1999). Occupational therapy is well positioned to intervene with individuals and communities to limit the effects of health disparities on participation in meaningful occupations because of practitioners’ knowledge and skills in evaluating and intervening with persons who face physical, social, emotional, or cultural challenges to participation. Further, the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) supports advocacy to increase access to health services for persons in need, and efforts to lessen or eliminate health disparities are consistent with the Core Values and the Code of Ethics for the profession of occupational therapy (AOTA, 1993, 2005).

## References

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*Adopted by the Representative Assembly 2006C360*

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