

Comments on Eunice Kennedy Shriver National Institute of Child Health and Human Development's Scientific Vision Workshop on Environment

The **American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA)** represents over 140,000 occupational therapy practitioners and students. As the national association representing occupational therapy, a profession dedicated to maximizing independence and function for people across the lifespan, AOTA appreciates this opportunity to submit comments to guide NICHD's vision for future research on the environment.

AOTA commends NICHD for considering environment broadly. Although the paper mentioned people with disabilities early in the paper, in the context of negative effects of the environment, surprisingly little was said about how the environment could improve the health and functional performance of individuals with disabilities. The authors of the paper cite that NICHD's focus includes reproductive health, pregnancy, and child health but neglect to cite another important part of NICHD's mission, to **"ensure the health, productivity, independence, and well-being of all people through optimal rehabilitation"**.

The International Classification of Functioning, Disability, and Health (ICF) Model may be useful to guide future research (World Health Organization, 2002) about the interplay between environment and health and performance of individuals. According to the **ICF Model**, we need a method of classifying environmental factors in order to analyze the impact of social and physical environments on functional performance.

In occupational therapy, we view environment as a variable, which can be either a positive or negative influence on performance and health. Therapeutic interventions by occupational therapy practitioners include environmental modifications, which include the elimination of **environmental barriers** or the creation of **environmental facilitators**. Much research is needed to guide rehabilitation providers regarding which environmental interventions (e.g., assistive technology, adaptive equipment) should be used for individuals with disabilities. We need to investigate the effectiveness of tailored home modification programs, community programs using universal design principles (e.g., accessible parks, playgrounds, and transportation), and workplace modifications to improve the **productivity and independence** of individuals with disabilities.

Thank you for considering our comments.

References

World Health Organization. (2002). Towards a Common Language for Functioning, Disability, and Health, from <http://www.who.int/classifications/icf/training/icfbeginnersguide.pdf>

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