

March 12, 2025

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Acting Director
National Institutes of Health (NIH)

RE: Strategic Plan for Disability Health Research

The American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) appreciates the opportunity to comment on the draft framework for the Strategic Plan for Disability Health Research. AOTA is the national professional association representing the interests of more than 230,000 occupational therapists, occupational therapy assistants, students of occupational therapy and OT researchers. The science-driven, evidence-based practice of occupational therapy enables people of all ages including people with disabilities to live life to its fullest by promoting participation in daily occupations or activities. In so doing, growth, development, and overall functional abilities are enhanced, and the effects associated with illness, injuries, and disability are minimized.

Disability research including occupational therapy research is foundational to advancing medical knowledge, improving patient outcomes, and ensuring that millions of Americans with disabilities live healthy and independent lives. OT research in this area often focuses on people who are living with spinal cord and brain injuries, stroke, intellectual and developmental disabilities, musculoskeletal and neurological conditions, and chronic conditions affecting body systems, mobility, cognition, and overall function and well-being.

Occupational therapy research is centered around improving a person's ability to participate in activities of daily living in the home and community, and as such is ideal for addressing the often unique challenges faced by people with disabilities. Successful OT interventions enable people to live in their homes within the community and minimize risks that can result in costly ER visits, hospitalizations and institutionalizations. Desired outcomes include improved health, function and quality of life; return to education and work; and engagement and participation in the community which all lower morbidity and mortality while lowering dependency costs (caregiving, loss of work) and health care expenditures.

Given the aging population and the alarming rise in rates of chronic illness, robust NIH support of disability research is critical to achieving the goals of the Make America Healthy Again initiative. AOTA urges NIH to implement a strategic plan that will improve efficiency and drive innovation while maintaining its focus on results-driven disability research to deliver cutting-edge advancements to improve the lives of all Americans.

Sincerely,



Andrew Bopp
Senior Legislative Representative