
Occupational Therapy Recognized in Federal Behavioral Health Programs

Actions by Congress and Federal Agencies have recognized the importance of occupational therapy as part of recovery oriented, quality community mental health services.

Medicare Partial Hospitalization

In 2013, the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) included Occupational Therapy as a core component of quality mental health by requiring that occupational therapy services be offered at any community mental health center that wishes to bill under Medicare partial hospitalization under the new Conditions of Participation (COP). These COPs require that all clients receiving services at community mental health centers billing for Medicare partial hospitalization services, be evaluated for occupational therapy services, and if needed, have OT services included in their plan of care.. These COPs can be found at: <http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2013-10-29/pdf/2013-24056.pdf>

Medicare Coverage for Occupational Therapy

Medicare includes occupational therapy among the list of services it may cover to support behavioral health and wellness, under the fee-for-service benefit. Under Medicare Part B, occupational therapy practitioners bill the standard occupational therapy CPT® codes for these services. <https://www.cms.gov/files/document/medicare-mental-health.pdf>

Congress includes occupational therapy in the Behavioral Health Workforce Education Training Grant (BHWET) Program

In 2016, Congress reauthorized the Behavioral Health Workforce Education Training Grant (BHWET) program. The reauthorization of the BHWET program made occupational therapy education programs eligible to receive grant funding to establish mental health specific fieldworks. As of 2017, HRSA included occupational therapy education programs in the competition for these grants.

Suggested staffing for Certified Community Behavioral Health Centers (CCBHC)

In 2015, the Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) included occupational therapist in the staffing suggestions for new Certified Community Behavioral Health Centers (CCBHC). Occupational therapists are listed in Section 1.b.2 in the CCBHC criteria, along with other mental health professionals. The criteria can be found at: http://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/grants/pdf/sm-16-001_0.pdf . Occupational therapy practitioners are currently providing services in many CCBHCs.

Health Resources Service Administration (HRSA) recognition

The Health Resources Service Administration (HRSA) is the federal agency that oversees programs to support the healthcare workforce. Beginning in 2018, HRSA has included occupational therapy among the professions described as making up the behavioral health workforce in its annual budget.

Department of Veterans Affairs

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) provides occupational therapy services to Veterans and Service members for “prevention and intervention of mental health problems to increase emphasis on recovery and function directed toward participation in daily life occupations.” <https://www.rehab.va.gov/factsheet/OT-Mental-Health-FactSheet.pdf>