Support Passage of Legislation to Improve Access to Non-Pharmacological Treatments for Pain

According to the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, in 2016 drug overdoses killed 63,632 people in the U.S., and 66% of those overdoses involve an opioid. One challenge in developing legislation to help combat this opioid crisis is assuring continued access to appropriate pain management treatments and services for people with acute and chronic pain. Occupational therapy (OT) services are an important part of the non-pharmacological, integrated-treatment for pain.

Treatment of pain is complex and multi-dimensional. OT focuses on helping individuals participate in desired daily activities that would otherwise be limited because of pain. OT can help clients re-engage in meaningful and necessary daily activities, thus helping to break the cycle of pain leading to decreased activity that in turn increases the perception of pain. They do this through the use of education, functional goal setting, and training, thus reducing the need for opioids or other potentially harmful approaches to managing chronic or severe pain. Occupational therapy intervention techniques include proactive pain control, pacing of activities, safe body mechanics and ergonomic assessments, muscle tension reduction training, and proactive problem solving to address chronic pain.

The American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) supports the passage of comprehensive legislation to address the current opioid crisis in America. With multiple bills being considered in both the House and the Senate, we want to highlight our support for legislative language that promotes evidence-based, integrated, non-pharmacological approaches to treating both acute and chronic pain.

Such language includes:

- **Promoting Best practices in Acute Care**: AOTA supports the development of “best practices” for pain management in acute care settings. Such “best practices” should include non-pharmacological treatments and be inclusive of all services provided in acute care settings, such as occupational therapy. *(Combating Opioid Abuse for Care in Hospitals [COACH] Act [HR 5774]; both versions of Substance Use-Disorder Prevention that Promotes Opioid Recovery and Treatment [SUPPORT] Act [HR 6]*)

- **Promoting Access to Non-pharmacological treatments**: AOTA supports the expanded use of evidence-based, non-opioid treatments across Medicare, including examination of current barriers to coverage and payment for these services. *(Dr. Todd Graham Pain Management, Treatment, and Recovery Act [HR 6110] and House version of the SUPPORT Act)*

- **Promoting Access to Services Under Medicaid**: AOTA supports legislation to help maximize adoption of Medicaid coverage for non-opioid treatment and management of pain, including evidence-based, non-pharmacological therapies such as occupational therapy. Occupational therapy is an optional Medicaid benefit for adults, but required under Early and Periodic Screening, Diagnostic and Treatment (EPSDT) benefits. *(Senate version of the SUPPORT Act)*

- **Training Health Professionals**: AOTA believes training grants aimed at educating health professionals in pain management should include non-pharmacologic treatments, including integrated evidence-based pain management services. *(Senate version of the SUPPORT ACT)*

We ask you to support passage of legislation that promotes access to non-pharmacological pain management services included in the House and Senate versions of the SUPPORT Act (HR 6), especially those originally included in the COACH ACT (HR 5774), and the Dr. Todd Graham Pain Management, Treatment, and Recovery Act (HR 6110). Additionally, we encourage Congress to pass comprehensive legislation to address the opioids crisis by the end of this year.