



2023 Occupational Therapy Legislative Day February 2, 2023 Georgia Capitol

Please make plans to attend this year's Occupational Therapy Legislative Day.

This is your opportunity to advocate for issues that support occupational therapy practice in Georgia and educate legislators about our profession.

Occupational Therapy Legislative Day is on 2/2/2023 from 9:00 AM to 11:30 AM.
Participants will meet in Room 112 at the Georgia State Capitol.

Prior to 2023 Legislative Day, participants are encouraged to find out their district and the name of their legislators.

Kindly follow this link or scan the QR code below to find out your legislator's names for both the Upper (Senator) and Lower (Representative) House):

https://openstates.org/find_your_legislator/

You will be asked to enter your address so you can find your district number and the link to find the contact information and email address.

Come be a part of this fun and exciting day of advocacy and networking. See you in Atlanta!

Here's more information on directions and parking.

Directions to the Georgia State Capitol

From the South:

Take I-75/85 North to Exit 245 (Capitol Avenue).

At the bottom of the exit ramp, continue straight through the stop sign.

At the first traffic light, turn left onto Hank Aaron Drive.

The Capitol will be approximately one mile down on the left.

From the North:

Take I-75/85 South to Exit 248A (Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive).

Bear right onto Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive.

The Capitol will be on the left.

From the East:

Take I-20 West to Exit 58A (Capitol Avenue).

Turn right on Capitol Avenue.

The Capitol will be approximately one mile down on the left.

From the West:

Take I-20 East to Exit 56B (Windsor St./Spring St./Stadium).

At the third light, turn left onto Central Avenue.

Go to Mitchell Street and turn right.

The Capitol will be two blocks down on the left.

Parking

Buses and 15-passenger or larger vans are allowed to park on the west side of Washington Street in front of the Capitol on most week days. Capitol events or security threats may make this space unavailable. In those cases, buses will be rerouted by Capitol security.

Public parking is available in several locations surrounding the Capitol. Parking fees vary by lot. Certain lots may be closed due to the legislative session.

The following lots are always open to the public if spaces are available:

- Steve Polk Plaza Parking is located on M.L. King, Jr., Drive, one block from the Capitol
- A surface lot is located on Memorial Drive, one block from the Capitol
- Underground Parking: A parking garage is located on the north side of Martin Luther King, Jr. Drive, two blocks from the Capitol





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OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY ISSUES

Here are the 2 main issues that we would like to focus on:
Both of them relate in one way or another to the healthcare work force shortage in Georgia.

Pediatric therapy clinics throughout the state report difficulties recruiting OTs to fill vacant positions. Hiring has been difficult for Metro Atlanta clinics and those in the rural areas. There is also a huge competition for new graduates among hospitals, skilled nursing facilities, outpatient adult, ABA clinics, and schools.

According to the US Bureau of Labor and Statistics, employment of occupational therapists at the national level is projected to grow 14 percent from 2021 to 2031, which is much faster than the average for all occupations.

In Georgia, that number is more than doubled at a 30% growth rate. Although that is good for the profession in the long term, this compounds the increasing need for occupational therapy providers, especially in the pediatric setting.

Request for Medicaid Reimbursement Rate Increase

There has been an increasing demand for early intervention therapy services since families have started emerging from lockdowns in 2020 and resuming well-child visits. We are seeing a wave of new referrals for children with developmental delays that are born shortly before and during the COVID-19. This is a nationwide phenomenon that is definitely seen here in Georgia.

The need for early intervention therapy is greater than ever and these identified shortages in therapy providers for children with disabilities are particularly harmful because delays in services impact the severity of a child's developmental delay.

It has been a long time since the reimbursement rates for CIS therapy codes have been updated. Inflation and increased gas prices now as compared to when the rates have been last updated has to be considered.

The Therapy Trialliance (composed of liaisons and lobbyists from GOTA, GSHA, and APTA-Georgia) have been doing the preparations in seeking an increase in reimbursement rates for therapy services to children under the Medicaid CIS program. They have been working closely with the Department of Community Health (DCH) to access data on utilization of various CPTs to enable DCH to make projections of future utilization. From that data, the Trialliance would be better positioned to know how much money to seek to increase reimbursement rates. They have already received the data needed and requesting specific program utilization information to determine which are under CIS and BCW.

The Trialliance is also working with the Department of Public Health to obtain data to support increased funding for the Babies Can't Wait program, both for increased rates and travel costs.

Reimbursement of Occupational Therapy Assistant Services under the Children's Intervention Services Program

Occupational Therapy Assistants (OTAs) are licensed professionals who undergo **2 years** of full-time study and include instruction in subjects such as psychology, biology, and pediatric health. In addition to taking coursework, occupational therapy assistants must complete at least 16 weeks of fieldwork to gain hands-on work experience. Their job is to provide therapy services to patients following an evaluation and pursuant to a plan of care provided by a supervising occupational therapist.

Why do we need Medicaid to cover OTA services under the CIS program in Georgia?

- OTAs are trained to treat children receiving OT services, but due to CIS-Medicaid restrictions, we are losing Georgia-educated OTA's who can fill part of the huge need for pediatric therapy services to bordering states who allow for coverage of OTA services.
- Medicaid already covers OTA services to students with special needs in Children's Intervention Schools Services (CISS) Program but NOT in the CIS program.
- Since 2018, Medicaid covers Applied Behavior Analysis (ABA) services provided largely by Registered Behavioral Technicians (RBTs) to children under the Autism benefit. Georgia only requires RBTs to have a high school degree and a 40-hour online course in order to provide services to children and adults with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) with minimal supervision from the BCBA. OTA education and training is comparatively more robust and longer than RBTs. Our children deserve services from highly trained and licensed practitioners.

Note that Medicaid coverage of OT services can be accomplished by a change in Department of Community Health (DCH) policy without legislation.

GOTA asks that our senators and representatives let DCH know of the need for an increase in CIS Medicaid reimbursement and the coverage of OTA services to address the above needs.

References:

<https://www.careeronestop.org/Toolkit/StateAndLocal/ProjectedEmployment.aspx?soccode=291122%20&location=Georgia>

<https://www.usatoday.com/in-depth/news/education/2022/06/09/pandemic-babies-now-toddlers-delayed-development-heres-why/9660318002/>