

A national survey of the use of digital technology by occupational therapists to support client engagement in everyday activities in Aotearoa New Zealand.

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Digital technologies are transforming healthcare practice by enhancing service accessibility, improving efficiency, and supporting more effective service delivery. Occupational therapists increasingly use tools such as virtual reality, smart home technologies, mobile applications, robotics, and artificial intelligence-supported systems in rehabilitation, with potential to support people with disabilities to engage in activities and participate in their communities. The World Federation of Occupational Therapists (2019) expects occupational therapists globally to develop digital competence in response to healthcare digitalisation. Despite this, little is known about how occupational therapists in Aotearoa New Zealand (NZ) use these technologies in practice. Without this knowledge, the profession cannot identify where occupational therapists' access to and use of digital technology is inconsistent, or which client groups may be missing out on the benefits these tools offer.

This presentation reports findings from a national survey examining the extent and context of digital technology use by occupational therapists in Aotearoa NZ to support client engagement in shopping, cooking, and other daily activities. The survey was distributed nationally through the Occupational Therapy Board of New Zealand, collecting data on participants' demographics, digital technology use in practice, and perceived barriers. The study used descriptive statistics to summarise demographics and technology use patterns, and used chi-square tests and Spearman correlation analyses in SPSS to examine associations between variables.

Findings showed inconsistent digital technology use across settings, with virtual reality used most to support activities of daily living. Financial cost and limited training access were key barriers, indicating a clear need for professional development.

This study provides the first national-level evidence on digital technology use in Aotearoa NZ occupational therapy practice. The findings have implications for workforce preparation, continuing professional development, and policy. The profession needs stronger professional leadership to support the adoption of digital technologies in practice across Aotearoa NZ.

Keywords

Digital technology, occupational therapist, virtual reality, mobile apps

References

World Federation of Occupational Therapists. (2019). *Position statement: Occupational therapy and assistive technology*. <https://wfot.org/resources/occupational-therapy-and-assistive-technology>