

**AUT**

A FUTURE IN  
**OCCUPATIONAL  
THERAPY**



## WHAT IS OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY?

One of the most creative of the health professions, occupational therapists (nga kaiwhakaora ngangahau) work with people who face challenges in their capacity and capability to do everyday things because of injury, illness or life circumstances. Occupational therapists take a holistic approach to assessment and treatment of people of all ages, helping them access more fulfilling and independent lives.

It is a varied and diverse role. An occupational therapist (OT) could be working with children with disabilities to participate in school or social activities by helping them improve their motor or social skills or ensuring they can access the built environment.

Supporting a person's rehabilitation back home after illness or injury is another common occupational therapist role. This would require focusing on the person's participation in self-care or leisure activities, such as showering, managing their home, or participating in their local community.

Occupational therapists are also an integral part of the mental health sector, helping people with mental health issues regain the confidence to return to work – through planning, skills development, and liaison with potential employers.

Population health is another area in which occupational therapists may work. Population health focuses on improving the health of groups of people, encouraging participation in occupation to improve, maintain and restore health.

If you have a strong interest in the ways that people interact with the environment, are an active listener and practical problem solver, and enjoy engaging, motivating and advocating for people to regain their physical and mental health, then occupational therapy may be a great career for you.



## OUTLOOK AND TRENDS

Our ageing population, an increased focus by Government on the value of work, and a growing acknowledgement of the difference rehabilitation can make to recovering from injury or gaining independence with physical disabilities or mental health issues are creating a demand for occupational therapists.

**Philosophical shift** – An increasing number of occupational therapists work in private practice and primary/population health as the philosophy of the profession shifts from ‘treatment’ to ‘prevention’.

**Specialisations growing** – There is growth in specialist areas such as employment placement, driving, assessment, mental health, paediatrics, community development, lifestyle management and research.

**Desire for independence in living** – Elderly people need access to occupational therapy to remain independent and active. People with long term conditions are also accessing occupational therapy to find ways to better manage their lives in their own homes.

**Occupational therapists needed everywhere** – A lot of occupational therapy employment opportunities are found in non-government and community organisations. There is also increased potential for occupational therapists to set up their own business once they gain experience.

**Thinking outside the square to gain experience** – Early in their careers occupational therapy graduates may have to gain the experience wanted by employers by taking jobs outside main cities, or working for organisations that have not traditionally employed occupational therapists, such as primary health providers, GP practices, youth or health promotion agencies.

### **Private occupational therapy practices**

You work within a general practice employed by an experienced occupational therapist. You work with clients of all ages, completing occupational/functional assessments, to enable people to get back to doing what they need or want to do, at home, in the community or in the workplace. The job includes work-based and home visits and may involve a health and safety role.

### **Public health service**

You are employed by a District Health Board in an acute or community-based context working in hospitals, primary health care clinics and community clinics. You could be helping someone manage their daily life while recovering from an acute injury or illness, supporting their rehabilitation and recovery through occupation, and/or enabling people to get back to doing what they need or want to do, at home, in the community, or in the workplace.

### **Private hospitals and rest homes**

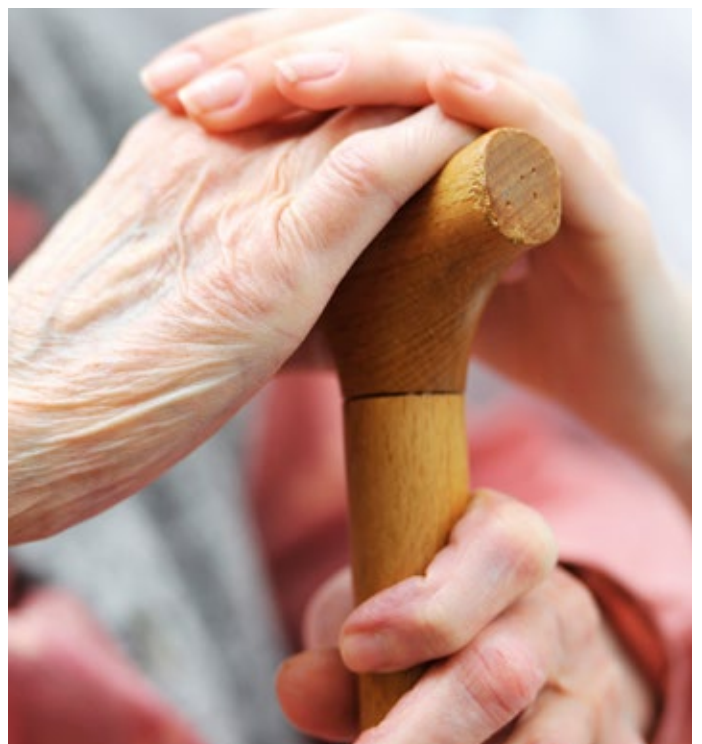
Similar to public health roles but you are employed by a private provider.

### **Educational facilities**

You are employed by a special needs unit or as teacher support in mainstream classrooms within primary and secondary schools, helping students physically participate in class activities. Alternatively, you could be a Ministry of Education contractor. Some tertiary providers also have occupational therapists on staff, often in student support roles.

### **ACC (Accident Compensation Corporation)**

You are employed as a case manager to assess people's injuries and their ability to cope in the home and the workplace. This requires home and work-based assessments.



## WORK SETTINGS

Occupational therapists are registered health professionals who work across a range of organisations in health and social care, including commercial, non-government and community organisations. This could be Marae, workplaces, prisons, aged care facilities, mental health services, special needs and care facilities. OTs also work in research and education. Common settings include:

## CAREER ROLE EXAMPLES

With experience, occupational therapists can specialise in areas such as paediatrics, geriatrics, mental health, physical disabilities and rehabilitation services (recovery from accidents). A number of OTs move from clinical occupational therapy into roles such as community development officers, rehabilitation advisors, researchers or case managers.

### Community occupational therapist/key worker

Involves coordinating an individual's care in consultation with a health professional team, including psychologists, mental health support workers, and nurses. This requires occupational therapy assessment and intervention skills of people in their home, community or workplace.

### Injury management/rehabilitation occupational therapist

Involves identifying the barriers preventing clients with injuries from returning to their pre-injury work and establishing ways to overcome those barriers. Includes work site assessments, return to work planning and social rehabilitation assessments, including home help, educational needs and housing modifications.

### Graduate rotational hospital occupational therapist

A rotational role involves developing your occupational therapy skills and knowledge within a range of wards and services, while also learning to work within a team of health professionals including (for example) doctors, nurses, social workers, and physiotherapists.

## SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE

Occupational therapists are trained to assess and help day-to-day rehabilitation of people of all ages recovering from illness or injury, encouraging them to engage and be motivated. The competencies required by the Occupational Therapy Board of NZ are:

- Ability to facilitate and enable occupations for people through engaging their needs, preferences and capacities in the context of their environment to optimise ability and functional independence.
- Ability to act, and justify actions, in compliance with ethical, legal, professional and safety requirements.
- Competent in acknowledging and working with the socio-cultural values of the client/tangata whaiora, family/whānau and significant others.
- Highly skilled communicators who establish and maintain effectual therapeutic and working relationships.
- Capable of contributing positively to the client's/tangata whaiora experience and their ability to participate and ensure effective use of resources.
- Professional, collaborative and supportive of service and team goals and colleagues.

## PERSONAL QUALITIES

- Interested in motivating people physically and mentally
- Enjoy working with people of all ages, ethnicities and environments
- Flexible, creative and passionate about people and their health
- Tenacious, assertive and prepared to stand one's ground as a professional
- Practical yet creative client centred problem solver

## SALARY GUIDE

	Salary (per year)
Graduate occupational therapists employed by Auckland District Health Board	\$51,275 (2019) – \$69,222 (by mid-2020)
Occupational therapists up to 5 years' experience	\$52,813 (2019) – \$71,299 (by mid-2020)
Advanced occupational therapists – depending on responsibility and experience.	\$81,492 – \$112,171 (2020 figures)
Occupational therapists working in private practice	\$45,000 – \$110,000

Sources: Careers NZ/District Health Boards/PSA, Allied, Public Health and Technical: Multi Employer Collective Agreement 2018-2020, Trade Me, healthcaresalaryinfo.com

Salary range is indicative of the New Zealand job market at the time of publication (early 2019) and should only be used as a guideline.

## THE AUT ADVANTAGE

AUT is the only university in New Zealand offering a Bachelor of Health Science in Occupational Therapy. Otago Polytechnic in Dunedin and WinTec in Hamilton offer a degree in occupational therapy.

## FURTHER STUDY OPTIONS

Postgraduate certificate, diploma, master's and doctoral level study in occupational therapy is offered through AUT.

Research areas currently offered at AUT include community participation and psychosocial rehabilitation, occupational practice and occupation-based interventions, sensory modulation, evidence informed mental health interventions, child, youth and family participation and older adults.

## PROFESSIONAL ACCREDITATION

Occupational therapists are registered health professionals and must have a current annual practising certificate (APC) from the Occupational Therapy Board of New Zealand (OTBNZ) to practice.



## Roberto Jatulan

Occupational Therapist, Buchanan Rehabilitation Service  
Bachelor of Health Science in Occupational Therapy

### EMPLOYER COMMENT

“The task orientated aspect to the role is obviously important from an OT perspective but relationships are key. Roberto’s passion for people, bubbly personality and ability to make great relationships with clients are key in a health professional role – especially in mental health. Rob also has the important combination of an excellent sense of humour and good clinical reasoning. He wants the best for the people he is working with and advocates strongly for this.

New graduates need to find a point of difference. As a recruiting manager I get lots of CVs. I look at CVs and my eyes light up when I see someone who has a different CV or a unique experience or hobby with transferrable skills. Making yourself memorable (in a positive way) means you stay known to the potential employer.”

**Dianne Bartlett**  
Clinical Team Leader, Buchanan Rehabilitation Centre

I help people who are experiencing mental illness pursue their dreams and aspirations at Buchanan Rehabilitation Service, an integrated inpatient clinical and rehabilitation service for the Auckland and Waitemata District Health Boards.

I find working in mental health is where I have the most opportunity to help people and keep learning myself. It wasn’t an area I thought of working in when I started studying but after my first placement at Mason Clinic, I realised I wanted to work in mental health.

We conduct a lot of functional and standardised assessments for our clients. These assessments help us view our clients as a whole person, and suggest appropriate groups, activities, and interventions that are available for them.

We also help our clients learn strategies – sensory modulation techniques – to cope with symptoms such as anxiety, distress, irritability and low moods. The cool thing about this is the clients can continue using these when they leave.

We also do a lot of liaison work. When a client is in rehab, they often identify occupational goals such as wanting to work again or be able to drive again or study. As OTs we find resources in the community, liaising with organisations and helping clients get referred to these networks.

Being an occupational therapist opens the door to many opportunities and is a career where you feel you are able to contribute to the betterment of other people’s lives.

When I graduated six years ago, I worked at the Allan Duffy Recovery Centre for 18 months as a recovery support worker, then moved into a mental health professional role at Te Ara Takahanga for 2½ years. I moved to Buchanan Rehabilitation Services two years ago.

There’s no greater feeling than being able to empower clients who have been victims of missed opportunities due to their mental illness.”

## USEFUL WEBSITES

### **OTNZ-WNA Occupational Therapy NZ Whakaora Ngangahau Aotearoa**

[www.otnz.co.nz/occupational-therapy/  
occupational-therapy-career/  
frequently-asked-questions/](http://www.otnz.co.nz/occupational-therapy/occupational-therapy-career/frequently-asked-questions/)

### **Occupational Therapy Board of New Zealand – Kaihaumanu Turoro o Aotearoa**

[www.otboard.org.nz](http://www.otboard.org.nz)

## FURTHER INFORMATION

For further information about Occupational Therapy studies and the Bachelor of Health Science, visit: [www.aut.ac.nz/ot](http://www.aut.ac.nz/ot)

### **FUTURE STUDENTS**

Contact the Future Student Advisory team for more information: [www.aut.ac.nz/enquire](http://www.aut.ac.nz/enquire)


[futurstudents@aut.ac.nz](mailto:futurstudents@aut.ac.nz)

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### **CURRENT AUT STUDENTS**

Contact the Student Hub Advisors team for more information: 0800 AUT UNI (0800 288 864)

[www.aut.ac.nz/enquire](http://www.aut.ac.nz/enquire) | [studenthub@aut.ac.nz](mailto:studenthub@aut.ac.nz)

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### **EMPLOYABILITY & CAREERS**

For other Future Career Sheets visit:


[www.aut.ac.nz/careersheets](http://www.aut.ac.nz/careersheets)


For employability and career support, AUT students can book an appointment through <https://elab.aut.ac.nz/>


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The information contained in this career sheet is correct at time of printing, August 2019.

