

**AUT**

A FUTURE IN  
**OCCUPATIONAL  
THERAPY**



## WHAT IS OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY?

One of the most creative of the health professions, occupational therapists work with people who face challenges in their ability to do every day 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.

This could include helping children with disabilities participate in school or social activities, supporting a person's rehabilitation back to work and home after illness or injury, or helping someone regain confidence and independence after a difficult mental health experience.

Population health is another area in which occupational therapists may work. Population health focuses on improving the health of groups of people (not the individual), encouraging participation in occupation to improve, maintain and restore health.

If you have a strong interest in the way the body functions, 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 aging 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.
- There is growth in specialist areas such as employment placement, driving, assessment, mental health, paediatrics, community development, lifestyle management and research.
- 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'.
- 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.
- 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.
- 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.

## 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:

### **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.



## 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/whanau 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 district health boards (DHBs)	\$46,500 minimum
Occupational therapists with up to six years' experience	\$65,500+
Advanced occupational therapists	\$69,000 - \$95,500
Occupational therapists working in private practice	\$45,000 - \$110,000

Source: Careers NZ/District Health Boards/PSA, Allied, Public Health and Technical: Multi Employer Collective Agreement 28 October 2011 to 30 April 2014.

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

## THE AUT ADVANTAGE

AUT is the only university offering degree and postgraduate qualifications in occupational therapy in New Zealand. Otago Polytechnic in Dunedin also offers a degree in occupational therapy.

## FURTHER STUDY OPTIONS

Further study in occupational therapy is available at postgraduate certificate, diploma, master's and doctoral level. 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 Lardizabal Jatulan

Recovery Support Worker, Allan Duffy Recovery Centre

Bachelor of Health Science in Occupational Therapy

"I help clients with acute mental health needs assimilate back into the community. It's very rewarding to be a part of the client's recovery. This role gives me a lot of opportunity to experience working with clients with acute mental health, developing the skills I will need to specialise as a mental health professional.

We specialise in a wide variety of training including social skills and life skills such as managing self-care activities (hygiene, cooking), job search, budgeting and communication. I also do vocational rehabilitation which is about developing clients' coping skills to help manage their symptoms. I also do care coordination so they can access the different services that can support their recovery.

This role aligned with a lot of the things that are meaningful to me, such as connecting with people, creating a positive impact in the community and finding a stable job in the health sector. My degree equipped me with the necessary tools to be able to observe, assess and make informed decisions based on sound clinical reasoning."

### EMPLOYER COMMENT

"Rob was the perfect applicant – his personality, experience and qualification made it an easy choice to hire him at Recovery Solutions.

The best occupational therapists in mental health are those who are adaptable; those who can think out of the box and use their knowledge of assessments and interventions in creative ways for the benefit of those they work alongside.

Working in mental health can be a steep learning curve but Rob has been able to use the skills he learned at AUT to adapt his practice for different situations and reflect on ways of working best in this particular environment."

**Jared Schulz**

Team Leader, Recovery Solutions

## USEFUL WEBSITES

Occupational Therapy New Zealand  
– Whakaora Ngangahau Aotearoa  
[www.nzaot.com](http://www.nzaot.com)

Occupational Therapy Board of New Zealand  
– Kaihaumanu Turoro o Aotearoa  
[www.otboard.org.nz](http://www.otboard.org.nz)

For the most up-to-date information on occupational therapy study, visit our website:  
[www.aut.ac.nz/ot](http://www.aut.ac.nz/ot)

You can also contact the AUT Student Centre team for help and advice:

**0800 AUT UNI (0800 288 864)**  
**email: [studentcentre@aut.ac.nz](mailto:studentcentre@aut.ac.nz)**

### CITY CAMPUS

55 Wellesley Street East, Auckland Central

### NORTH CAMPUS

90 Akoranga Drive, Northcote, Auckland

### SOUTH CAMPUS

640 Great South Road, Manukau, Auckland

### AUT MILLENNIUM

17 Antares Place, Mairangi Bay, Auckland

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