

OTAC Position Statement: Pelvic Health



Vision Statement:

A world where all people participate in meaningful activities to optimize their life experience.

Mission Statement:

OTAC is the collective voice that serves, promotes, and supports the profession of occupational therapy and its practitioners.



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Why Support the Role of OTPs in Pelvic Health? The Occupational Therapy Association of California (OTAC) recognizes the pervasive impact of pelvic floor dysfunction on all areas of occupational engagement, for people of all genders, across the lifespan. Furthermore, many studies identify occupational therapy as a cost-effective solution for addressing changing health system needs (AOTA, 2020b; Lockwood & Porter, 2022; Rexe et al., 2013). For this reason, OTAC supports the role of occupational therapy practitioners (OTPs) in the assessment, treatment, management, and prevention of pelvic floor dysfunction.

What Is Pelvic Health? Pelvic health (PH) refers to optimal functioning of the bladder, bowel, reproductive organs, and related musculature, ligaments, and connective tissue. Pelvic floor health may be defined as, “the physical and functional integrity of the pelvic floor unit through the life stages of an individual . . . permitting optimal quality of life through its multifunctional role and where the individual possesses or has access to knowledge, which empowers the ability to prevent or manage dysfunction” (Pierce et al., 2015, p.999). Pelvic floor dysfunction may encompass a range of health conditions, including pelvic pain, urinary and/or fecal incontinence, pelvic organ prolapse, dyspareunia, and sexual dysfunction (Wu et al., 2014).

Why Is Pelvic Health Important? Pelvic health has both direct and indirect impacts on every aspect of occupational performance and engagement identified within the domain of our profession as outlined in the 4th edition of the Occupational Therapy Practice Framework (OTPF-4) (AOTA, 2020c). Not only does pelvic health play a role in activities of daily living (ADL) such as toileting, functional mobility, and sexual activity, but also in an individual’s participation in play, leisure, and social activities from infancy through adulthood. The American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) Code of Ethics explicitly identifies the profession’s role in preserving people’s dignity, of which pelvic health is a critical component (AOTA, 2020a).

Why Are OTPs Uniquely Qualified? Occupational therapy professionals trained in pelvic health are uniquely qualified and positioned to provide essential services to individuals across the lifespan to improve function and overall quality of life. With comprehensive training in the biopsychosocial approach, OTPs offer a distinct perspective to support daily habits and routines affected by pelvic health dysfunction, addressing the multidimensional impact of pelvic health across home, school, work, and community environments. Given the strong psychosocial foundation within the profession of occupational therapy, OTPs contribute invaluable care in this area, especially to clients who have experienced trauma as well as those managing their mental and emotional well-being.

OTP Pelvic Health Assessment and Intervention. OTPs who have received proper training are able to perform both external and internal assessment and treatment of the pelvic floor musculature as applicable to support occupational performance. Pelvic health assessments may include external and internal assessments of muscular tone, strength, and coordination, as well as visual assessments of anatomy, posture, and functional activities. OTPs offering external or internal assessment of pelvic anatomy must prioritize client-centeredness and respect for client autonomy, ensuring each client engages in active collaboration and consent with the OTP throughout the evaluation and intervention plan.

Pelvic health interventions may include, but are not limited to therapeutic activities and exercises, habit training, manual therapy, and neuromuscular re-education, as well as recommendations and fittings for assistive devices and adaptive equipment to facilitate completion of ADL. OTAC supports the use of physical agent modalities, such as biofeedback, by OTPs with documented training and competency in accordance with state regulations.

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OTP Integrity and Competence in Providing Pelvic Floor Therapy. The AOTA Code of Ethics clearly outlines the profession’s core value of truth, which includes maintaining professional competence and only providing services that are within each practitioner’s level of competence (AOTA, 2020a). Integrity and competence are also outlined as core values of OTAC. Pelvic floor therapy should only be provided by OTPs who have received proper education and training in pelvic floor anatomy, dysfunction, and evidence-based treatment approaches. Training may be obtained through required or elective coursework within academic programs, continuing education courses, or mentorship with experienced practitioners. Licensed occupational therapists, occupational therapy assistants, and supervised students should know, understand, and adhere to the California Occupational Therapy Practice Act and only act within their degree of knowledge, skills, and ability to provide pelvic health intervention.

OTP Scope of Practice. It is firmly within OTPs’ scope to address pelvic floor dysfunction to promote independence, enhance quality of life, and optimize occupational participation and performance across diverse segments of the population. OTAC affirms OTPs’ pivotal role in pelvic health and supports OTPs’ critical position to provide the care that is both needed and deserved in this area.

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