

Working in Driver and Passenger Assessment and Rehabilitation
POSITION STATEMENT 2016

The issues to be discussed include the relationship between driving, meaningful occupation and health, the health and safety risks, areas of practice; expectations of post graduate education, relationship with other health professionals, and implementation of the occupational therapy process. I presume this statement is deleted once the position statement is finalized?

Commented [CH1]: Of driving with cognitive, physical or psychological impairments?

Purpose of position statement

The purpose of this position statement is to inform the occupational therapy profession, key stakeholders and consumers of occupational therapy services, of the Occupational Therapy New Zealand Whakaora Ngangahau Aotearoa (OTNZ WNA) position in relation to driver and passenger assessment and rehabilitation.

Occupational therapy is defined as:

'a client-centred health profession concerned with promoting health and well-being through occupation. The primary goal of occupational therapy is to enable people to participate in the activities of everyday life. Occupational therapists achieve this outcome by working with people and communities to enhance their ability to engage in the occupations they want to, need to, or are expected to do, or by modifying the occupation or the environment to better support their occupational engagement' (World Federation of Occupational Therapy, 2011).

The position taken by OTNZ WNA is that, for their own safety and that of others, it is important that all drivers are competent to drive, have their vehicle correctly set-up, and drive within their limits. The Association also recognizes the importance of older drivers maintaining competence to drive.

An understanding of the relationship among the person, occupation, and environment uniquely positions occupational therapists to provide valued and evidence-based services that promote driving as an occupation.

An occupational perspective of driving

The occupation of driving is highly valued by many members of our community. It involves a complex set of tasks requiring integration of visual, cognitive and psychomotor skills. The driving environment consists of multiple hazards including other vehicles, pedestrians, fluctuating light and varying road surfaces. Consequently a driver must pay attention to a wide range of information and make a number of complex judgments in a relatively short time. The simultaneous operation of a vehicle and traffic participation requires adequate psychomotor competence of over-learned tasks and a great deal of flexibility and executive processing in order to cope with even non-complex traffic situations. Therefore driving never becomes completely habitual or routine.

Participation in driving may be influenced by:

- accident, injury, illness or congenital or other health conditions resulting in short-term or long-term physical, neurological, cognitive/perceptual or sensory impairments
- psychiatric disorders

Commented [CH2]: To encompass epilepsy and other neurological conditions

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- sleep disorders and fatigue
- drug use
- factors associated with ageing (e.g. deteriorating vision)
- a mismatch between the driver's physical characteristics and the set-up of the car
- the nature of the driving environment (e.g. distractions, rural roads, traffic density, darkness, bad weather)
- lack of information about or availability of transport alternatives.

The relationship between driving, meaningful occupation and health

The World Health Organization (WHO) categorizes driving as a human function of daily activities and community participation (WHO, 2002). For the majority of older New Zealanders, the private car is the main means of transport (Ministry of Transport, 2014), which indicates that driving is an occupation integral to people's daily living and maintaining independence and quality of life (Ministry of Social Development, 2013; Wood, Anstey, Kerr, Lacherez, & Lord, 2008). There is general acceptance that driving promotes community mobility and maintenance of social networks, which are positive indicators of health (Hawley, 2001).

There is increasing evidence of a correlation between driving retirement and depression and other physical deterioration (Marottoli et al., 1997; Ragland, 2005; Siren, Hakamies-Blomqvist, & Lindeman, 2004). Amongst older people, ceasing to drive, and the associated losses, are also associated with poorer physical functioning and performance, general health decline (Edwards, 2009), social isolation (Mezuk, 2008), and early death (Edwards, 2009).

Safety

Occupational therapists are well aware of the impact road crashes have on New Zealanders' lives – the people injured, their caregivers, families of those killed, health professionals and emergency services workers who deal with the aftermath of a crash. We need to be confident, with so much at stake, that all the drivers on our roads are medically fit to control their vehicle, see other road users, make accurate speed and distance judgements, and react safely to a potentially hazardous situation.

Seniors are the fastest growing segment of the driving population and older driver morbidity and mortality is on the rise. In Aotearoa New Zealand, the largest period of growth in the older population is predicted to occur from 2011-2037 as the "baby boomers" move into the 65+ age group (Statistics New Zealand, 2004). By 2036, it is estimated that 1.2 million New Zealanders will be 65+, representing one quarter of the population (currently it is one seventh) (Statistics New Zealand). Over this time it is estimated that road-related fatalities and injuries among this age group will increase by 71% due to the combination of an ageing population, growth in road traffic, and growth in the number of workers over 65 years (Frith, 2012).

Occupational therapists have an ethical responsibility, through the evaluation process, to identify impairments in occupational performance that may pose driving risks and to inform clients (and caregivers or significant others, if applicable), even when they do not have a legal responsibility to report them to the New Zealand Transport Agency (NZTA).

Driver rehabilitation services and occupational therapy in Aotearoa New Zealand

Community mobility is a generalist skill set of occupational therapy practice. All occupational therapists understand the occupation of driving a vehicle as an instrumental activity of daily living enabling community mobility.

Driver and Passenger Assessor Occupational Therapists work with driving instructors, other health team members and relevant licensing authorities to assess and optimise an individual's capacity to drive independently and safely. Driver and Passenger Assessor Occupational Therapists are recognized as playing an important role in reducing risk and promoting safety.

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Occupational therapists have an important, proactive role in enabling and extending a client's community ability by delivering assessment and intervention services, which can focus on novice driver training, cognitive and motor skill remediation, compensatory driving strategies and planning for driving retirement (CAOT, 2009)

OTNZ WNA recognizes specialist driver assessment and training as an advanced area of practice. Driver Assessor Occupational Therapists complete a comprehensive assessment of clients to ascertain their functional status, ability to drive safely and their ability to participate in driver rehabilitation and re-training (Korner-Bitensky et al, 2006, p316). This assessment process commonly includes both an off-road and on-road assessment (Korner-Bitensky et al, 2010, p317), with behind the wheel assessment being the gold standard for driving evaluation (Dickerson et al, 2014). The on-road assessment component is conducted in collaboration with professional driving instructors as per occupational therapy practice skills and abilities (Unsworth, 2007).

Policy and environmental context

Funding policies and legislation applicable to transport for driving and passenger assessments involve multiple agencies such as the New Zealand Transport Agency, Accident Compensation Commission, New Zealand Lottery Grants Board Disabilities Subcommittee and the Equipment Management Service.

Assessing safety to drive is a three-fold process – medical fitness, functional ability and licensing. Professions such as optometry and neuropsychology provide focal, in depth elements of assessment, while general practitioners are obligated to report unsafe medical fitness to drive (NZTA, 2009). However only Driver Assessor Occupational Therapists encompass driving holistically and are able to provide comprehensive off-road (in the clinic) and on-road (in a vehicle) assessment.

Decisions regarding driving should be based upon not only medical fitness but functional abilities that are related to the capacity for safe driving.

Credentials for driving and passenger assessors

All registered occupational therapists in Aotearoa New Zealand have the knowledge and skills to deliver some driver evaluation and rehabilitation services. A three-tier expertise framework is considered best practice involving the following components: generalist health professional training, advanced occupational therapy training, and advanced-specialised occupational therapy training (Korner-Bitensky, Toal-Sullivan & von Zweck, 2007; Otago Polytechnic, 2004).

It is important for all occupational therapists to address community mobility and driving across the life span and in different practice settings. Therefore, it is recognised that the occupational therapy generalist has a skill set that enables addressing the subskills of driving, such as range of motion and fine and gross motor function. An occupational therapist involved in driver assessment may review more detailed aspects of driving, such as visual scanning and the use of adaptive equipment. Experienced occupational therapy driving and passenger assessors deliver in-depth pre-driving assessments and on-road evaluations with a registered driving instructor (Davis, 2003).

OTNZ WNA recognizes driver and passenger assessment and training as an advanced area of practice. Assessing and rehabilitation or training of drivers with disabilities, age-related health declines or acquired impairments at this level are performed by occupational therapists with experience in this field. Currently there are no certification options available within New Zealand to allow occupational therapists to gain advanced qualifications in driver evaluation, vehicle modification, and motor and perceptual remediation. Experienced occupational therapists are expected to support and mentor colleagues new to practicing in the area of driver and passenger assessments.

OTNZ WNA endorses the WFOT (2014) recommendation for the following structure as requisite for driving assessment or as *aspirational* goals where frameworks do not yet exist. The following points outline the particular skills and qualities for current and future development or aims of practitioners involved in independent practice as a driving and passenger assessor.

1. The candidate must be a registered occupational therapist
2. Experience of at least three years with at least half of these years in the area of driving assessment practice
3. Post professional qualification, for example:
 - an occupational therapy master's degree, or
 - generic masters and additional approved hours or points of occupational therapy content (from further education courses)
4. Structured clinical supervision program that includes defined education as a supervisor, supervised practice and experience supervising others
5. Professional profile and conveying competencies (knowledge, skills and attitude):
 - Written such as professional or scientific articles
 - Presentations at conference / congress
 - Workplace innovations and initiatives; professional development

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Occupational therapists working in the area of driver and passenger assessment and rehabilitation may be employed in a variety of settings including (but not limited to):

- Private Practice
- District Health Boards
- Non-governmental organisations

Occupational justice

Research indicates that return to driving post-injury is strongly influenced by a client's significant others' opinions as to his or her fitness to drive (Coleman, Rapport, Ergh, Ricker, & Mills, 2002). This finding supports occupational therapy's role in advocating for the client and educating the family when driving is a reasonable client-identified goal. OTNZ WNA recognizes that there are often unspoken psychosocial issues related to one's sense of autonomy and self-determination that are associated with issues related to driving and community mobility (McGuire & Davis, 2012).

OTNZ WNA recognizes the imperative to broaden the focus from driving rehabilitation toward a more comprehensive consideration of community mobility at individual, community, and societal levels.

Recommendations for the ongoing development of driver rehabilitation services in Aotearoa NZ

Occupational therapists engaged in driving and passenger assessment and rehabilitation services will:

1. Engage and collaborate with a wide range of stakeholders such as consumer groups, traffic planning agencies, nongovernmental organizations and health and human service research organizations to inform and influence policy and research activities related to driver safety and driver rehabilitation services.
2. Seek opportunities to work with relevant stakeholders on initiatives to promote the role of occupational therapy in driver rehabilitation and driver safety.
3. Explore opportunities for support and partnership for the expansion of a continuum of driver safety services including fitness to drive screening, driver rehabilitation and vehicle modification, and planning for driving retirement.
4. Promote access to research-based evidence to support driver rehabilitation services.
5. Promote the development and use of consensus protocols related to driver rehabilitation
6. Promote learning opportunities to maintain and strengthen capacity of occupational therapists in a three-tier expertise framework: generalist health professional training, advanced occupational therapy training, and advanced-specialised occupational therapy training.
7. Promote the development and dissemination of evidence-based resources, such as fact sheets and brochures to communicate the role of occupational therapy for driver rehabilitation, driver safety and driving retirement among all stakeholders.

It is intended that this position statement is read in conjunction with the New Zealand Occupational Therapy Board Competencies for Registration and Continuing Practice (2015) and Code of Ethics for Occupational Therapists (2015).

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