Occupational therapists play a critical role in helping people of all ages to overcome the effects of disability caused by illness, ageing or accident. Today, an occupational therapist is equipped for new emerging roles such as working with asylum seekers or refugees, town planners, local and international development agencies and psychiatric services.

THE FUTURE OF OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY

The health sector continues to change and grow. Occupational therapists are well placed to take advantage of some of the recent changes in attitudes to health and wellbeing, as well as changes to funding in the health sector. Recent changes to federal and state schemes provide opportunities to health professionals who deliver services which meet physical, social, emotional and environmental needs.

Occupational therapists understand that health and wellbeing is affected by a person’s environment, the things they do, and their state of health. They work with a wide range of people in a number of settings and manage complex and difficult problems.

Occupational therapists are employed in health services, disability and social care services, rehabilitation centres, occupational health services and government departments. Occupational therapists are also in high demand in services to children and families.
The role of an occupational therapist

WORKING WITH AUTISM
Parenting a child who has autism spectrum disorder is complex and may require modifications to the routines of family life. An occupational therapist helps parents find the right combination of activities and environments which allow their child to achieve their goals and for the family to grow and develop. They might recommend a strategy around play with an iPad app which allows the child to complete a challenge in a calm and controlled way.

WORKING WITH STROKE
A serious and unforeseen event like a stroke can have a devastating impact on a person’s ability to fulfil their dreams. If the person’s driver’s license is taken from them, an occupational therapist can help the person develop the skill to manage a car, or find alternate transport arrangements.

WORKING WITH BRAIN INJURY
Occupational therapists work in rehabilitation teams with other health professionals to help their clients find strategies which enable them to live, work and play. An occupational therapist might help a client who has had a brain injury to find and personalise a wheelchair to suit them and their lifestyle.

WORKING WITH MENTAL ILLNESS
Occupational therapists understand that doing meaningful activities is important for health. Meaningful activity includes any activity which is important to the person such as shopping, socialising or exercise. An occupational therapist helps clients explore and find activities which have meaning for them, and then help them engage in that activity.

Career opportunities
Occupational therapists are employed in a variety of settings locally, interstate and overseas including:

- private practice assisting people with disabilities or injuries
- non-government organisations teaching skills and strategies to help people manage their lifestyle
- rehabilitation centres helping people re-develop skills so they can return home safely
- government departments providing assessments and services for people, particularly the elderly.

Bridging the gap in health inequality
Trevor Ritchie
Occupational Therapist, Novita Children’s Services
Trevor Ritchie chose to study occupational therapy because of his own experiences and health issues, and because the core values of occupational therapy – equity, social justice and a holistic approach to health, aligned with his own values.

Trevor made history when he became the first Indigenous occupational therapist in South Australia. “As the first Aboriginal occupational therapist in South Australia I have a passion to lead and support other Indigenous allied health professionals to follow in my footsteps. It’s easy to feel overwhelmed by the enormity of closing the gap in Aboriginal health inequality but I am committed to playing my part”.

Trevor now works as an occupational therapist at Novita Children’s Services and as a health professional, hopes to push for generational change through his personal interactions with Aboriginal clients ensuring they receive the best evidence-based care.

Program information
Bachelor of Occupational Therapy
Duration: 4 years
Location: City East campus

Master of Occupational Therapy (Graduate Entry)
Duration: 2 years
Location: City East campus

unisa.edu.au/study/occupational-therapy