



Cultural responsiveness and capability

What the Occupational Therapy Council of Australia Ltd (OTC) is looking for in the Supervised Practice Implementation Plan (SPIP)

The importance of practising in a culturally responsive and safe way is clearly articulated in the current competency standards (Occupational Therapy Board of Australia, 2018) and it is also a requirement for quality health care (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2023). So, OTC assessors need to see evidence that internationally qualified occupational therapists can provide culturally responsive therapy services.

The competency standards place emphasis on the need for us to be culturally responsive with respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, acknowledging the adverse impact of colonisation and its ongoing impact on the health and quality of life of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples (Rudman, Flavell, Harris, & Wright, 2021)

These standards require occupational therapists to develop their cultural capabilities to support the self-determination of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples (Gibson, Butler, Henaway, Dudgeon, Curtin, 2015). Cultural capability is a process of ongoing learning and reflection requiring therapists to understand their own culture and associated biases or blind spots to ensure their communication and actions are open and inclusive (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2023).

To support internationally qualified occupational therapists to develop their cultural capabilities we have collaborated with Indigenous Allied Health Australia (IAHA) to enable access to a three-level training process that supports an increased awareness and understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and inclusive ways of working together in providing quality health care (Indigenous Allied Health Australia).

The table below highlights the nine professional behaviours that have an explicit focus on cultural capabilities, four of which address specifically working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

Table 1: Competency standards and expected behaviours related to cultural capabilities

Competency Standard	Expected behaviours
Professionalism	1.5 Practices in a culturally responsive and culturally safe manner with respect to culturally diverse client groups.
	1.6 Incorporates and responds to historical, political, cultural, societal, environmental and economic factors influencing health, wellbeing and occupations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.
	1.9 Identifies and manages the influence of his/her values and culture on practice.

Knowledge and learning	<p>2.4 Understands and responds to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health philosophies, leadership, research, and practices.</p> <p>2.5 Maintains current knowledge for cultural responsiveness to all groups in the practice setting.</p>
Occupational therapy process and practice	<p>3.5 Selects and implements culturally responsive and safe practice strategies to suit the occupational therapy goals and environment of the client.</p> <p>3.6 Seeks to understand and incorporate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People’s experience of health, wellbeing and occupations encompassing cultural connections.</p>
Communication	<p>4.3 Works ethically with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations to understand and incorporate relevant cultural protocols and communication strategies, with the aim of working to support self-governance in communities.</p> <p>4.4 Uses culturally responsive, safe and relevant communication tools and strategies</p>

Occupational Therapy Board of Australia, 2018

When reviewing an SPIP of an internationally qualified occupational therapist OTC assessors must determine the extent to which proposed actions in the plan provide opportunity to evidence each of the professional behaviors. It is important the actions include the **doing** or application in practice. The highlighted word in each professional behaviour needs to be addressed in the proposed action with consideration of how this will be measured.

Internationally qualified therapists often need support and direction from their supervisor to determine what is feasible within the practice setting and need assistance to connect with Aboriginal health workers and/or communities to discuss and reflect on how they can ensure their practice is culturally responsive. Supervising an internationally qualified therapist is a great opportunity to refresh and expand your own cultural capabilities through exploration of understandings and discussion of the IAHA training.

References

Occupational Therapy Board of Australia. (2018). Australian occupational therapy competency standards. <https://www.occupationaltherapyboard.gov.au/codes-guidelines/competencies.aspx>

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2023). Cultural safety in health care for indigenous Australians: monitoring framework. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW). <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/indigenous-australians/cultural-safety-health-care-framework/contents/summary>

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Gibson, C., Butler, C., Henaway, C., Dudgeon, P. & Curtin, M. (2015) Indigenous peoples and human rights: Some considerations for the occupational therapy profession in Australia, *Australian occupational therapy journal*, 62(3,) 214-18. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1440-1630.12185>

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