



Occupational Therapy Association of South Africa

2026/07/28

Dear OTASA Members

RE: PERIODIC UPDATE ON STRATEGIC WORK OF THE ASSOCIATION

The past six months presented opportunities and challenges that required joint effort and focused energy to advocate for occupational therapy in various policy discussions, health funder engagements, and member queries. OTASA has achieved success in some of the activities and still requires more effort in key strategic areas.

The OTASA Executive Committee, standing committees, and task teams advanced targeted advocacy, mediation, and stakeholder-positioning work to strengthen the role of occupational therapy in clinical care, rehabilitation, health funding, and work reintegration. This work has focused on elevating the profession with key local, regional, and international decision-makers, including:

- The World Federation of Occupational Therapists (WFOT) and the Occupational Therapy Africa Regional Group (OTARG)
- The Board of Healthcare Funders (BHF), the Council for Medical Schemes (CMS), and health funders
- Government leaders and programme managers

Organizational strategy and membership

Consultative process to review the OTASA strategic plan 2022 -2027 has begun; it will provide a sound basis for the new vision and strategic focus. The OTASA Council has strategic review sessions that look at priorities, achievements, and advocacy focus areas. This process will be moved forward through engagement of communities of practice, provincial branches, sectors, as well as clients who utilize OT services and other relevant stakeholders. All members of the OT profession will have an opportunity to engage in crafting the strategic plan 2028 -2032.

Member Support

The Executive Committee further acknowledged the financial impact on members and has

worked on the membership packages that will provide much-needed support and relief. Whilst the Executive has analyzed the current set of circumstances, the consultation process will determine what members value, want to see in the packages, and what payment methods will be sustainable.

Member guidance and assistance have been provided to numerous occupational therapists regarding audits, COIDA-related queries, general private-practice management, ethical queries, and coding and billing matters. Most of the queries were resolved; OTASA has approached the Council of Medical Schemes to mediate on matters that could not be resolved with various medical aids.

Affordable webinars were accessed by over 85% of OTASA members over the first 6 months, addressing ethics, business practice, and profession-specific topics across the OT fields of practice. There is a significant increase in non-members who are accessing these webinars. OTASA encourages all OTs to have their therapy CPD programmes accredited by OTASA. Your association has ensured that access to CPD is cost-effective and equally accessible in rural communities and cities. Assert this professional identity in your workspaces to achieve the recognition you desire.

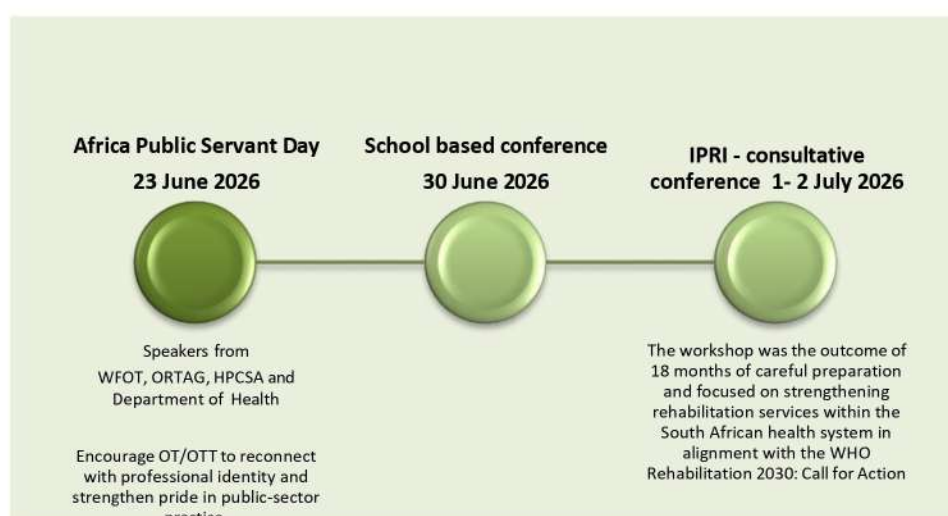


Fig 1: Strategic member engagement

The **school-based conference** for both the private and public sectors took place on 30 June. It was attended by over 169 professionals, parents and teachers. The increase in the quality and character of this conference has EXCO approving two conferences later in the year, i.e., Mental Health and Medico-legal.

The OTASA hosted the **Africa Public Service Day 2026** webinar, which reinforced the profession's shared commitment to leadership, ethics, and meaningful service within South Africa's public sector. In her opening address, Ms Manenzhe highlighted the value occupational therapists bring to the health system through clinical expertise, resilience, innovation, and sustained dedication despite ongoing challenges related to resources,

training, and recognition. The theme, *“Professionalizing the Public Service to Build Trust and Restore Confidence in Government,”* framed the event as an opportunity to reconnect with professional identity and strengthen pride in public-sector practice.

Contributions from Mr. Richard Ledgerd of the World Federation of Occupational Therapists and Dr Munyaradzi Chimara of the Occupational Therapy Africa Regional Group reinforced the connection between South African occupational therapy practice and global developments in rehabilitation, disability inclusion, quality improvement, and ethical care. Their reflections highlighted the profession’s contribution to disability management, rehabilitation, and improved service delivery, while encouraging practitioners to recognize the impact of their daily work.

Messages of support from Prof Naidoo of the HPCSA further affirmed occupational therapy’s essential role in public service transformation. Ms. Naazneen Ebrahim, occupational therapist and CEO of Tara Hospital, shared leadership insights from her public-sector journey and highlighted the strength and potential within the profession. Across the programme, the overarching message was one of unity, pride, and renewed commitment, with a clear call for occupational therapists to continue leading with integrity, confidence, and excellence within the public service.

OTASA product development process includes protocols, discussion documents, position papers needed for advocacy, and standards creation. The national briefing and consultation process on the standard operating procedures and protocols project has started.

Various teams contributed to the development, conclusion, and review of these documents.

- An Actuarist was consulted regarding RVUs and the way forward.
- A national mental health task team was established to support the development of occupational therapy mental health packages of care.
- Additional website resources have been developed and uploaded.
- One-page documents on occupational therapy in various fields of practice are being developed for the website to support ward-round discussions and professional advocacy.

Stakeholder Engagements, Conferences and Sector Developments

OTASA has actively represented the profession in sector forums, indabas, conferences, and meetings focused on medical schemes, health reform, value-based care, and rehabilitation.



Fig 2: Engagements with health funders

Health Funder Engagements

OTASA has engaged and supported occupational therapists in practice under the leadership of Vice President Private Practice -Jaclyn Craig and VP President Ina Grobblers, and the sub-committees under the private practice portfolio, i.e., Coding and Procedural Standing Committee chaired by Sheldene Reynolds, and the COID Task Team chaired by Jessica Dent and the newly appointed Private Practice Standing Committee, Anne -Marie Smith.

- Medscheme was held on 10 June regarding mental health benefits and value-based care.
- PHISC meetings were attended on 20 - 21 May and 23 July 2026.
- Input was provided to GEMS on product development.
- GEMS on product development, mental health and key strategic matters.
- The biannual GEMS strategic meeting was held on 24 June and the 31st of July 2026.
- FEM and RMA.

Council for Medical Schemes investigation and PMB ruling

The challenges raised by OTASA members have been escalated to the relevant authorities, and the Council for Medical Schemes is conducting a thorough investigation into the matters raised by OTASA on behalf of its members. Occupational therapy has become a focus area for many health funders, and OTASA is engaging with funders to strengthen understanding of occupational therapy and provide information that supports better decision-making.

The Council for Medical Schemes has ruled that occupational therapy provided outside hospital is covered under Prescribed Minimum Benefits, and occupational therapy practitioners should use this ruling as a reference in engagements with health funders.

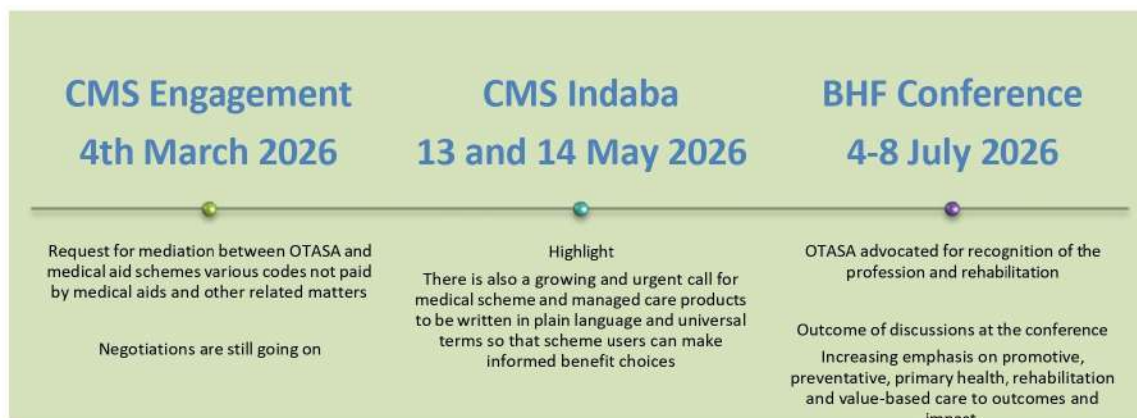


Fig 3: Strategic industry engagements

Council for Medical Schemes Indaba

The Council for Medical Schemes Indaba, held on 13 and 14 May 2026, brought together Prof Chita, President of the HPCSA; Dr Mguqudo, Acting Head of Professional Services at SAMA; Dr Mndaweni, CEO of the Office of Health Standards Compliance; and key strategic role players from the Council for Medical Schemes.

Focus areas included policy, research and monitoring, regulations, legal and benefits management. Key engagements covered GEMS, Discovery Health, Medscheme and Polmed. Robust discussions are taking place in the private sector on governance reforms, value-based healthcare, and the sustainability of the South African medical schemes environment, moving from the Section 59 report into implementation and regulation. The focus remains on industry-wide principles, standardization, and guidelines, aligned with a new draft Charter of the Council for Medical Schemes due for release at the end of 2026.

Fraud, waste, abuse, and error (FWAE) are now being considered through a proposed tribunal process to adjudicate FWAE disputes and forensic audits. There is also a growing and urgent call for medical scheme and managed care products to be written in plain language and universal terms so that scheme users can make informed benefit choices. In February 2025, the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition published draft regulations proposing an interim block exemption for medical schemes and providers to negotiate tariffs, and the Council for Medical Schemes is working to align this with the National Health Act.

Board of Healthcare Funders Conference

Board of Healthcare Funders Conference was held in Cape Town from 4 -8 July 2026. Section 70A of the Compensation for Occupational Injuries and Diseases Act, 1993, as amended by Act 10 of 2022, now requires the Compensation Fund to provide rehabilitation. The Compensation Fund, an individually liable employer, or a licensee must provide facilities, services, and benefits aimed at rehabilitating employees who have sustained occupational injuries or diseases. These benefits are intended to support return to work and reduce further disability, and include clinical, vocational, and social rehabilitation. At the conference,

advocacy by doctors for rehabilitation represented an important shift in thinking.

Doctors and medical schemes are increasingly acknowledging the limitations of the medical model from both funding and outcomes perspectives. The sector is seriously considering multisectoral meetings between schemes, medical associations, and rehabilitation stakeholders, recognizing that multidisciplinary team management is central to the future health of the nation. This is a significant paradigm shift - Pressure is building for co-creation between medical schemes, with increasing emphasis on promotive, preventative, primary health, and value-based care that is rewarded according to outcomes and impact.

Health and well-being are increasingly being discussed as alternatives to hospital admissions and surgeries, and a patient-centered approach, central to the heart of therapy, has gained traction in the medical schemes arena. The WHO Global Committee for Outcome Measures presents an important opportunity for OTASA to secure a place at the table. According to the Special Investigating Unit, private-sector fraud amounted to R30 billion in the last financial year, highlighting the urgent need for stronger controls and accountability. King V is emerging as the integrated reporting framework of choice, signaling a significant shift in governance expectations.

Interprofessional Rehabilitation Indaba Consultative Conference

The Occupational Therapy Association of South Africa (OTASA) was honoured to be part of the Interprofessional Rehabilitation Indaba's Consultative Workshop to strengthen rehabilitation in the South African health system through an evidence-informed national rehabilitation plan. The hybrid event held on 1 - 2 July 2026 brought together national rehabilitation professional associations, academic leaders, policymakers, clinicians, service users, and other stakeholders. It was an outcome of 18 months of careful preparation and focused on strengthening rehabilitation services within the South African health system in alignment with the WHO Rehabilitation 2030: Call for Action. It also prepared the rehabilitation sector for the implementation of National Health Insurance (NHI) and the move toward Universal Health Coverage (UHC), which will include both the public and private sectors.

Advocacy extends beyond representing the profession; it is about ensuring that every person who requires occupational therapy has equitable access to quality rehabilitation services within the evolving health system. Through active participation in national forums such as this, OTASA continues to advocate for the recognition, integration, strengthening, and financing of occupational therapy within the NHI framework and the broader Universal Health Coverage agenda.

As the recognized professional association for occupational therapy, OTASA is committed to ensuring that occupational therapists are represented where critical health policy and system

decisions are made. OTASA extended an invitation to OT organizations; however, they could not attend due to other commitments, and only INSTOPP was in attendance. Over the two days, delegates engaged in robust discussions across five strategic domains that will guide the development of a National Rehabilitation Plan and position rehabilitation as an essential service within health reform, including NHI:

- Governance, planning, monitoring, and evaluation
- Research for the National Rehabilitation Agenda
- Rehabilitation workforce training and development
- Advocacy and communication
- Rehabilitation practice and service delivery, including referral pathways within primary healthcare.

NHI is no longer a future possibility; it is becoming a reality. Occupational therapy is ready to lead, innovate, and serve within this new era of healthcare.

Upcoming Priorities

The following planned events, follow-up engagements, and action items consolidate the document's future-facing work so members can clearly see what is next.

- A follow-up engagement with an actuary is planned regarding value-based care and RVUs.
- A follow-up engagement with GEMS is planned regarding value-based care and occupational therapy in mental health, hand therapy, and palliative care. A team of occupational therapists will be working with GEMS on mental health.
- The COID Task Team will provide input into the gazette following engagement with FEM, RMA, and the Compensation Fund.

BHF conference discussions require OTASA engagements in the following:

- Developing value-based care calculations and guidance on how these models work.
- Strengthening occupational therapy evidence in the use of the ICF, prevention, promotion, and primary healthcare.
- Creating core therapy packages within value-based care.

OTASA Council meeting and Annual General Meeting

From 19 -21 August 2026, the OTASA Council members will meet to evaluate the strategic direction of the profession and the association, as well as draft the new strategic plan. The Council will consider all the networks that were created and how they have benefited the profession. Explore the untapped opportunities for growth, financial sustainability, and members' experience.

OTASA Congress 2027

OTASA members have requested an in-person congress that allows for networking and

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Executive Committee: AE Manenzhe (President), H Flieringa (Treasurer), Vice Presidents: J Masango, TG Mthembu, I Grobler, J Craig, J McAdam, P de Witt

strengthens the OT identity and voice. The Limpopo OTASA Branch has started preparing for Congress 2027 in Limpopo Province. The theme speaks to the reality of the global crises in different parts of the world, including South Africa: **“Responding to complexity and change.”**

This congress will have both scientific, social, and strong cultural experiences. Polokwane is in the northern part of Limpopo, which hosts safari farms and holiday attractions, including the Kruger National Park. Various committees and stakeholders have been working tirelessly since September 2025. Professionals and international presenters from associations across the world are keen to be present at this congress. The call for abstracts will be made in August 2025; let us make this Congress a success.

I thank all Council members, committees and the operations team who work tirelessly towards better recognition of OTASA members, the occupational therapy profession and the clients who access OT services. May you gain more health, strength and wealth.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Manenzhe' with a date '2026' written below it, enclosed in a light blue rectangular box.

Ms. A Manenzhe
OTASA President