

Practice Hours

Prepared July 2025

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1. Background

This practice guideline has been developed to support applicants and registrants of the Alberta College of Occupational Therapists (ACOT) in understanding the requirements related to practice hours when attaining and maintaining their practice permits.

This guideline describes:

- practice hours and what qualifies as a practice hour,
- the number of practice hours required to attain and maintain a practice permit,
- the requirements if the applicant or registrant does not attain the required number of hours, and
- the requirements for reporting practice hours to ACOT (the College).

The guidance offered in this practice guideline elaborates on the expectations reflected in the ACOT [*Standards of Practice*](#) (SoP), [*Code of Ethics*](#) (CoE) and the [*Competencies for Occupational Therapists in Canada*](#) (2021/2024) (See [Appendix A](#) for the full listing of related clauses) and outlined in the *Health Professions Act* (HPA) and the *Occupational Therapists Profession Regulation* (OTPR). See [Appendix B](#) for the list of relevant legislation.

Descriptions of the words **bolded** in this guideline can be found in the glossaries of the ACOT *Standards of Practice* and *Code of Ethics*.

2. What are Practice Hours?

Practice hours, also sometimes referred to as currency hours, are the paid and unpaid hours that a registered¹ occupational therapist (OT) is engaged in the practice of occupational therapy.

The practice of occupational therapy is defined in the *Health Professions Act*, Schedule 15, section 3. It states that in their practice, occupational therapists do one or more of the following:

- (a) in collaboration with their clients, develop and implement programs to meet everyday needs in self care, leisure and productivity,*
- (b) assess, analyze, modify and adapt the activities in which their clients engage to optimize health and functional independence,*
- (c) interact with individuals and groups as clinicians, consultants, researchers, educators and administrators, and*
- (d) provide restricted activities authorized by the regulations.*

Practice hours are used to demonstrate competence in the profession for individuals who are seeking registration and for registrants renewing their practice permit.

3. What Qualifies as a Practice Hour?

Practice hours include the paid and unpaid hours an applicant or registrant has engaged in:

- the practice of occupational therapy completed while using the title of occupational therapist as detailed in Schedule 15 of the HPA and as per the definition of **occupational therapy services** in ACOT's *Standards of Practice*,
- professional development activities directly related to the practice of occupational therapy,

¹ Some jurisdictions do not have a regulatory body that registers OTs or regulates occupational therapy practice in the jurisdiction. However, when practicing occupational therapy in a jurisdiction that requires registration, the OT must be registered with the relevant regulatory body for the related practice hours to be accepted.

- volunteer work completed while using the title of Occupational Therapist and complying with ACOT's *Standards of Practice* and *Code of Ethics* (e.g. documenting **client** consent, assessment results and treatment plan and ensuring the secure retention of client records; volunteering for non-clinical OT work such as participating in committees, editorial, research or course development activities directly related to OT), or
- work to support an infectious disease response (e.g. screening, contact tracing, redeployment duties, etc.).

Practice hours do not include:

- hours/days taken for vacation, sick time, medical or personal appointments, medical leave, or short- or long-term disability leave,
- professional development activities that are not clearly related to the practice of occupational therapy, or
- occupational therapy services provided by support personnel or OT students under the supervision of the OT without the OT present.

4. Practice Hours and OTs in Non-Clinical Roles

Some OTs work in roles (e.g., educators, managers and directors, consultants and researchers) or engage in advisory or committee work that does not involve providing OT services directly to patients or individual clients. However, some or all of their work may still relate to the practice of occupational therapy (or the processes used by occupational therapists) and may be counted towards their practice hours.

For example, a registered OT working as a manager or director is tasked with determining the effectiveness of a healthcare program. In doing so, they engage in a process of assessing, analyzing and possibly modifying the program to optimize the health service(s) provided in the program. Even if the health service does not include occupational therapy services, the process of assessing, analyzing and modifying the program directly relates to the practice of an occupational therapist and the hours engaged in this process could be counted towards their practice hours.

5. Practice Hour Requirements for ACOT Applicants

The practice hour requirements to attain registration and a practice permit are outlined in the *Occupational Therapists Profession Regulation* (OTPR).

Applicants who have graduated from an occupational therapy program approved by ACOT Council, completed 1000 hours of supervised clinical education within the approved program, and successfully completed the National Occupational Therapy Certification Examination (NOTCE), all within the 2 years immediately preceding the date their application is submitted to the Registrar, are not required to complete or submit practice hours as part of their application, if they do not have any.

For applicants to the general register who graduated from an approved occupational therapy program more than 2 years prior to the date of application submission, the individual is required to provide sufficient proof of practice hours to ACOT that demonstrate the individual has been engaged in the practice of occupational therapy for not fewer than:

- 400 hours within the past year,
- 800 hours within the past 2 years,
- 1200 hours within the past 3 years, or
- 1550 hours within the past 5 years.

Practice hours are reported relative to the date the application is received by the Registrar. Applicants, including Internationally Educated Occupational Therapists, may provide proof of sufficient practice hours in the form of an employer letter. If the applicant does not meet the practice hour requirements listed above, the applicant may be required to complete a re-entry program or to otherwise demonstrate to the satisfaction of the Registrar that the applicant is currently competent to practice as an occupational therapist.

6. Practice Hour Requirements for Practice Permit Renewal

The practice hour requirements for a registrant to renew their practice permit with ACOT are outlined in the *Occupational Therapists Profession Regulation* (OTPR). ACOT registrants seeking to renew their practice permit must meet the requirements established in section 40 of the HPA as well as the requirement to have engaged in the practice of occupational therapy for not fewer than:

- 400 hours within the past registration year,
- 800 hours within the past 2 consecutive registration years,
- 1200 hours within the past 3 consecutive registration years, or
- 1550 hours within the past 5 consecutive registration years.

Practice hours are reported relative to the end date of the application for renewal period. Alternatively, if the registrant does not meet the above requirement for practice hours, they may still meet the renewal requirements if, within the 2 years immediately preceding the application for renewal, they have successfully completed a re-entry program in occupational therapy approved by ACOT Council.

Registrants are strongly encouraged to contact ACOT in a timely manner if they have any questions or concerns about their ability to achieve the required practice hours for their practice permit renewal.

7. Reporting Practice Hours

Applicants report their practice hours as part of the application process and as directed by the Registrar. For more information on reporting practice hours during the application or registration process, visit the ACOT website [Registration](#) page or contact info@acot.ca and an ACOT Registration Coordinator can provide further guidance.

OTs currently registered with ACOT report their practice hours annually at the time of practice permit renewal between January 1 and February 28/29. Hours are reported in the secure online registrant portal accessible from the ACOT website. Registrants are required to enter all practice hours accumulated within the current registration year:

- related to each Alberta employer (including occupational therapy related professional development hours and any hours worked virtually/remotely in another jurisdiction that did not require registration in that jurisdiction),
- worked in another jurisdiction virtually or in person in:
 - a province other than Alberta that required registration to practice in that jurisdiction
 - a country that requires registration in their jurisdiction, or in a country that does not have a regulatory body,
- volunteer work, and
- pro bono work.

Therefore, it is important for registrants to intentionally track their qualifying practice hours throughout the year in a manner that will allow them to report the hours during the annual renewal process, according to each category listed above.

The complete process for reporting practice hours is detailed in ACOT's *Step by Step Renewal Guide* available on the ACOT website Registration page.

8. Questions and Answers

- I work in private practice. What can I include when reporting practice hours and how do I report them?
 - OTs are required to list their private practice as their employer with ACOT. What qualifies as a practice hour applies to any OT regardless of the employment model and regardless of whether the OT was paid for or billed for the time. For example, private practice OTs count occupational therapy related professional development hours or hours spent engaged in supervising OT students or provisional OTs, even when they have not been reimbursed for those hours. When entering practice hours during the renewal period, the private practice OT adds their qualifying practice hours in relation to their private practice employer listing in ACOT's online system.
 - If you need your Private Practice added to your profile, please contact info@acot.ca for assistance.
- When reporting my practice hours to ACOT in the online system, how do I report hours related to professional development if I have more than one employer?
 - Any professional development (PD) hours related to your practice as an OT are reported along with the practice hours worked per employer.
 - If you have more than one employer, report the PD practice hours with the most relevant employer. This may mean that you report some professional development hours with one employer and some with another. For example, an OT who works for a senior's living program and has their own private practice takes courses that relate to both practice areas. The OT completed a capacity assessment course to complete assessments at the senior's living program. Therefore, she reports the hours for that course with her practice hours for the senior's living employer. The OT also completed a course on cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) on her own time and plans to apply her learning mostly to her private practice work. Therefore, she would report the CBT professional development hours with her private practice employer.

- I am currently unemployed but have accumulated professional development hours related to OT practice that I would like to report as practice hours. How do I report these hours in the online system during the practice permit renewal process?
 - Unemployed registrants can capture practice hours related to professional development in the volunteer or pro bono practice hours reporting section when completing their practice permit renewal between January 1 and February 28/29.
- Can I use my Yoga instructor training hours towards my OT practice hours? I use what I learned about yoga breathing and relaxation poses with my OT clients who have goals related to stress management.
 - Only the training hours that are directly related to the techniques you will use in your OT practice can be counted towards your practice hours. This means you would not count all the hours spent in the Yoga instructor training course; rather, you would count only the hours spent learning about the yoga breathing and relaxation techniques that you plan to use in the context of providing occupational therapy services with your client(s).
- Can I count the time completing my master's in education as practice hours?
 - To determine how best to capture your practice hours for formal university/college education directly or indirectly related to occupational therapy, contact the Registrar to discuss your unique situation at registrar@acot.ca.
- I made a mistake in the number of practice hours reported when I renewed my practice permit. How do I make the correction?
 - Email your request to info@acot.ca and they will assist with making the correction to your ACOT record.

Appendix A – Relevant Clauses and Indicators in ACOT’s Standards of Practice, Code of Ethics and the Competencies for Occupational Therapists in Canada

While registrants must adhere to all ACOT *Standards of Practice* and *Code of Ethics*, some of the practice standards and ethical requirements most relevant to this guideline are listed below.

ACOT Standards of Practice

Standard	Applicable Section(s)
A. Accountability and Professional Responsibility	<p><i>1. Maintains current registration with the Alberta College of Occupational Therapists (ACOT) in accordance with the requirements outlined in the Health Professions Act (HPA), the Occupational Therapists Profession Regulation (OTPR), ACOT bylaws and applicable registration policies...</i></p> <p><i>2. Is knowledgeable of and practices in accordance with legislation relevant to their practice situation and ACOT's Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics.</i></p>

ACOT Code of Ethics

Code	Ethical Responsibility
D. Responsibilities to the Public and the Profession	<p><i>Registrants have an ethical responsibility to:</i></p> <p><i>3. Act transparently and with integrity in all professional and business activities (e.g., fees and billing, contracts or terms of agreement with clients or contracting organizations, advertising of professional services, use of social media or other online platforms, response to any real or perceived conflicts of interest, etc.)</i></p>

Domain E: Professional Responsibility (p.16)

Occupational therapists are responsible for safe, ethical, and effective practice. They maintain high standards of professionalism and work in the best interests of clients and society. The competent occupational therapist is expected to...

E1.1 Respect the laws, codes of ethics, rules and regulations that govern occupational therapy.

Appendix B – Relevant Legislation

Registrants are required to be knowledgeable of and practice in accordance with legislation relevant to their practice situation. Below is a list of legislation relevant to the topic of practice hours.

- *Health Professions Act, RSA 2000, c H-7*
- *Occupational Therapists Profession Regulation, Alta Reg 217/2006*