MARKET SUPPLEMENT PROGRAM

Report of the Market Supplement Review Committee

Occupational Therapist

FINAL

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(Annual Review)
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OBJECTIVE

The objective of the Market Supplement Program is to ensure that the Saskatchewan Healthcare Employers can attract and retain the employees required to provide appropriate health care services to the people of Saskatchewan.

This Program is designed to address specific skill shortages by use of a temporary market supplement, to attract and/or retain qualified employees. The Program is also designed to ensure that temporary market supplements respond to valid labour market criteria, to address recruitment and/or retention pressures.

A market supplement will be an acceptable option only if:

- workplace initiatives have not addressed the skill shortage;
- labour market data supports a supplement; and,
- recruitment/retention is a problem, is affecting service delivery, and is well documented.

OVERVIEW

The Market Supplement Review Committee (MSRC) reviewed updated documentation submitted in the annual review process regarding the market supplement for the Occupational Therapist classification. Occupational Therapists are members of the Health Sciences Association of Saskatchewan (HSAS). The initial market supplement report was released by the Market Supplement Review Committee on August 6, 2002 and implemented on October 16, 2002.

HSAS and SAHO are parties to a collective bargaining agreement (CBA) with a term of April 1, 2018 – March 31, 2024. The Provincial Market Supplement Program language can be found in Letter of Understanding #12 – Provincial Market Supplement Program and Letter of Understanding #13 – Determination of Market Supplement Rates, on pages 168 and 170 of the SAHO/HSAS CBA.

Role of an Occupational Therapist:

> *Occupational Therapists work collaboratively to enhance clients'/patients' abilities within the environments and communities in which they live and work. Using a holistic and client centered-approach, they facilitate improved functional outcomes in areas of self care, productivity and leisure for persons with physical, mental, social or developmental impairments. They may also participate in research, education, evaluation and consultation.*

Qualifications:

> *Occupational Therapists require a degree or master's degree in Science in Occupational Therapy.*
>
> *There are 14 universities in Canada that offer Occupational Therapy programs. In western Canada, there are Occupational Therapy programs at University of British Columbia, University of Alberta and the University of Manitoba.*
>
> *A new Occupational Therapy program will launch at the University of Saskatchewan in Fall 2026, enabling candidates to be trained within the province. The program will be accepting 40 students annually.*

ANALYSIS

The MSRC discussed the Labour Market Criteria as required by the Market Supplement Program framework.

VACANCY RATE ANALYSIS: *(Respondents were requested to provide information about the frequency and timing of vacancy occurrences {i.e. seasonal vacancies, do the vacancies always follow an event, etc.}; and to identify trends that may affect recruitment/retention efforts.)*

Table 1: Occupational Therapists including Senior – Vacant Permanent Positions (November 2025)

Number of Permanent Budgeted Positions		Number of Vacant Permanent Positions		% Vacancy	
Full-Time	Part-Time	Full-Time	Part-Time	Full-Time	Part-Time
212	66	31	11	14.62 %	16.67 %

Both full-time and part-time vacancies are currently assessed as moderate, defined as vacancies representing less than 20% of existing staff. This rating indicates that positions may be more difficult to fill and may require longer than standard recruitment timelines, typically in the range of three to six months.

This represents an improvement from 2025, when vacancies were assessed as significant, defined as vacancy rates of up to 30% of existing staff. At that time, vacancy rates were 27.44% for full-time positions and 28.13% for part-time positions.

SERVICE DELIVERY IMPACTS: *(Respondents were asked to provide information that addresses current service delivery impacts resulting from staff shortages; potential staff short term service delivery impacts; potential long term service delivery impacts; and options for alternative service delivery models.)*

All areas of the province indicated that their service delivery issues were significant in that the department can only provide a basic level of service, there may be significant gaps in service and that problems persist and waiting lists are prevalent and growing. Quality and quantity of service has declined, may impact other services or impact direct patient care.

Some of the service delivery impacts are attributable to temporary staff absences, including maternity/parental leave, sick leave, and vacation leave. These situations do not constitute permanent vacancies, as the incumbents continue to hold their positions, and the resulting temporary vacancies are not compensation related. However, such absences do create operational pressures and contribute, in part, to respondents rating the service delivery impacts as significant.

Strategies identified to address service delivery pressures include:

- Leveraging support from other networks, as available.
- Regularly reprioritizing waitlists.
- Optimizing the utilization of other classifications, where appropriate.
- Ensuring Occupational Therapy Assistants and Physical Therapy Assistants are working to their full scope of practice.
- Providing training for Registered Nurses to complete assessments, where appropriate.
- Utilizing overtime.
- Engaging contract workers.

- Implementing temporary performance of higher duties assignments, as required.
- Increasing Rehabilitation Coordinator support for non-clinical responsibilities to enable clinical staff to focus on direct patient care.
- Establishing a working group to identify efficiency opportunities and advance a more integrated, team-based model of care.

TURNOVER RATES: *(Respondents were asked to provide local analysis of reasons for leaving and trends that may be emerging. They were also asked to provide annual turnover {loss of employees to other competitor employers} ratio to the existing staff complement {budgeted positions} in the given occupation.)*

Where it was known over the past 12 months, the following turnover was reported:

- Number of employees who retired from this classification – 2
- Number of employees who failed their probation/trial period – 0
- Number of employees who left due to family/domestic reasons – 5
- Number of employes who left the organization for reasons not wage related – 3
- Number of employees who left the organization for increased salary – 2

Respondents identified several contributing factors to turnover trends, including retirements; transitions to private practice for greater flexibility and increased earning potential; pursuit of improved work–life balance; and departures related to workload concerns or reduced caseloads.

RECRUITMENT ISSUE ANALYSIS: *(Respondents were asked to provide information such as length of recruitment times; training investments; licensing issues; supply and demand issues, etc.; as well as information that would identify trends that may affect recruitment and/or retention efforts.)*

All areas of the province indicated that their recruitment efforts were significant, meaning that qualified professionals and new graduates are in great demand by employers who are willing to pay significant recruiting bonuses or, to contract the service if required. Educational institutions have/are trying to increase the number of educational seats.

It was noted that the University of Saskatchewan will launch a program with 40 seats in the Fall of 2026. Once graduates complete the program, this is expected to significantly improve the availability of qualified candidates and support recruitment efforts for this classification.

In addition, significant recruitment incentives are being offered. Over the past year, incentives have increased from $10,000 to $20,000 in northern and rural areas, and from $5,000 to $15,000 in urban areas in exchange for a three-year return for service commitment.

Additional recruitment initiatives include:

- Participation in career fairs and recruitment events both within and outside the province.
- Targeted external advertising and promotional campaigns, including social media outreach and career spotlights.
- Advertising on the Health Careers website.
- Offering practicum placements to students with the intent to support recruitment upon graduation (subject to staffing capacity).
- Offering relocation assistance.
- Application of northern allowances in accordance with the collective agreement.
- Offering alternate home base arrangements, where operationally feasible.

- Leveraging word-of-mouth recruitment strategies.
- Maintaining ongoing job postings to ensure sustained visibility of opportunities.
- Providing access to educational and professional development opportunities.
- Adjusting work schedules, where operational needs permit, to enhance flexibility for employees.

SALARY MARKET CONDITIONS: *(Respondents were asked to identify situations where their salary levels are lower than other employers that they would expect to recruit employees from, or other employers that recruit their employees. This may be local, provincial, regional, national or international, depending on the occupation group and traditional recruitment relationships. Cost of living considerations may or may not be appropriate to factor into market salary comparisons.)*

Table 2: Occupational Therapist - Salary Market Conditions

Province	Job Title	Effective Date	Maximum Rate of Pay (April 1, 2023)
British Columbia	Occupational Therapist (Grade I to II Phase-In)	April 1, 2023	$50.67
Alberta	Occupational Therapist I	April 1, 2023	$51.80
Saskatchewan	Occupational Therapist - Degree	April 1, 2023	$46.770
Manitoba	Occupational Therapist	April 1, 2023	$43.380
Western Canadian Average (2023)			**$48.155**

Saskatchewan Rate	$ 46.770
Western Canadian Average	$ 48.155
Sask from Average ($)	$ (1.39)
Sask from Average (%)	97.12%

Notes:

- Saskatchewan rates are below the Western Canadian Average
- The 2025 report incorrectly used the Occupational Therapist Degree Senior rate of pay when calculating the Western Canadian average. This has been corrected to reflect the Occupational Therapist Degree rate of pay.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION:

- SAHO and the Health Sciences Association of Saskatchewan are currently negotiating a new collective agreement as their previous agreement expired on March 31, 2024.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering the labour market criteria under the provincial framework, the MSRC makes the following conclusions:

- The vacancy rate for full-time positions is 14.62% and for part-time positions is 16.67%, which is an improvement over the prior year.
- Service impacts are significant across the entire province. Some of the service delivery impacts felt are due to temporary vacancies, rather than permanent vacancies and are unrelated to compensation issues.
- Turnover trends noted were related to retirements and work life balance.
- Recruitment incentives for this classification have been increased over the past 12 months.

- A new Occupational Therapy program, offering 40 seats, will be available in Fall 2026 at the University of Saskatchewan.
- Salary market conditions indicate Saskatchewan rates are slightly below the Western Canadian average.

The Committee has completed its annual review of this classification in accordance with the SAHO/HSAS collective agreement. As negotiations on the Committee's 2025 recommendation have not yet occurred, the Committee is unable to evaluate current market conditions as part of this review. Until the market supplement for 2025 is implemented, there is no way to assess its impact on this classification going forward. Therefore, the Committee **reaffirms its support for the 2025 report's recommendation to increase the market supplement** but is not in a position to provide any recommendation for the 2026 report.