

Arizona Health Workforce Profile: Occupational Therapists

The purpose of this brief is to understand the distribution of the Occupational Therapy workforce in Arizona's 15 counties and compare the distribution between rural and non-rural areas.

BACKGROUND

- “In its simplest terms, occupational therapists and occupational therapy assistants help people across the lifespan participate in the things they want and need to do through the therapeutic use of everyday activities (occupations).”¹
- Arizona statute defines occupational therapy as “the use of therapeutic activities or modalities to promote engagement in activities with individuals who are limited by physical or cognitive injury or illness, psychosocial dysfunction, developmental or learning disabilities, sensory processing or modulation deficits or the aging process in order to achieve optimum functional performance, maximize independence, prevent disability and maintain health.”³
- The median annual pay in 2020 was \$81,280 and the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) estimates the job outlook for occupational therapists (the projected change in employment between 2019 and 2029) is 16%, which is greater than average growth outlook at 4%.⁵



POPULATION SERVED

Occupational Therapists assist people across the lifespan and those experiencing a disability, chronic health condition, or recovering from an accident like a fall or a health event like a stroke.²

WORK SETTINGS

Occupational Therapists work in clinics, hospitals, nursing homes, for home health services, and in schools.⁴



NEED

- Research by Lin et al. (2015) estimates that Arizona will have among the largest shortages of OTs by 2030. Arizona is experiencing population growth and an increase in the aging population. Health care providers like OTs that assist people to “age in place” meet an essential need.⁶
- Other research models estimate that at a national level, the supply of occupational therapists will meet demand by 2030, however national models do not take into account local or regional variation.⁷






EDUCATION AND LICENSING

- Master's level education is required for entry into the field. To be licensed as an OT in Arizona, you must be a graduate from an accredited occupational therapy program (including fieldwork), pass the licensing examination, and complete the license application and fees.
- Arizona does have a process for Universal License Recognition for occupational therapists who are licensed and in good standing in other states.⁸



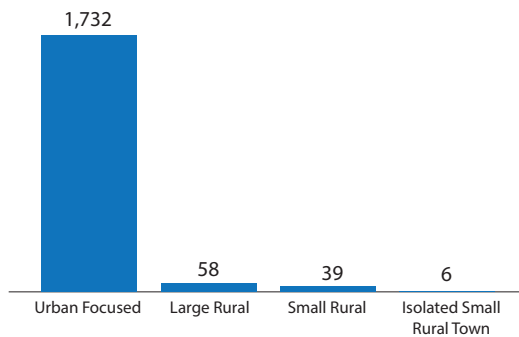
FINDINGS

- Using population data from the U.S. Census American Community Survey 2019 we find that the distribution of occupational therapists mirrors the population distribution in Arizona, with 94% of the workforce located in urban settings.
- While 10% of the population in Arizona lives in non-urban and rural areas, only 5.3% of occupational therapists are located in non-urban and rural areas.

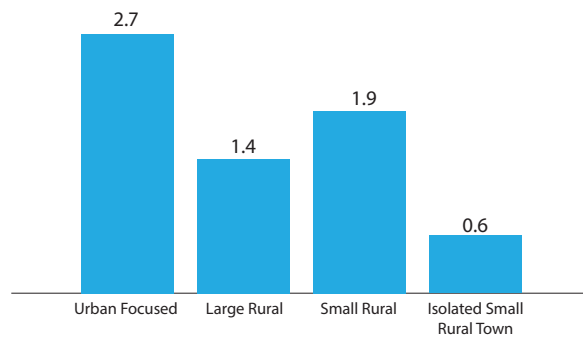
	 Arizona	 Urban	 Large Rural	 Small Rural	 Isolated Small Rural
Population (%)	7,052,789	6,335,980 (90)	412,134 (6)	205,616 (3)	99,059 (1)
Total Number (%)	1,835	1,732 (94)	58 (3)	39 (2)	6 (0.3)
Ratio per 10,000	2.6	2.7	1.4	1.9	0.6

► **94%** of occupational therapists work in urban areas where there are 2.7 OTs per 10,000 population.

Total OTs



OTs per 10,000 Population



- In Arizona there are 2.6 OTs per 10,000 compared to an estimated 3.8 OTs per 10,000 nationally.⁹
- Arizona counties are grouped into tables below based on the National Center for Health Statistics (NCHS) urban-rural classification for counties. We make two changes to the NCHS classification to group Pima with the large and Pinal county with the medium size counties.
- Looking at counties, the majority of OTs are located in Maricopa and Pima counties. However, some more rural and less populated counties have a higher ratio of OTs per 10,000 than Pima county, including Coconino and Yavapai counties.

Large Counties (metro)

	% State Pop.	Total OTs	OTs Per 10,000
Maricopa	61.6	1,365	3.1
Pima	14.4	211	2.1

Medium Counties (sm. metro)

	% State Pop.	Total OTs	OTs Per 10,000
Cochise	1.8	17	1.3
Coconino	2.0	44	3.2
Mohave	2.9	29	1.4
Pinal	6.0	35	0.8
Yavapai	3.3	64	2.8
Yuma	3.0	23	1.1

Small Counties (lrg. /sm. rural)

	% State Pop.	Total OTs	OTs Per 10,000
Apache	1.0	12	1.6
Gila	0.7	8	1.6
Graham	0.6	6	1.5
Greenlee	0.1	1	1.1
La Paz	0.3	1	0.5
Navajo	1.6	17	1.5
Santa Cruz	0.7	3	0.6



METHODS & DATA

This brief relies on National Plan and Provider Enumeration System (NPPES, 2021) data to understand the distribution of the occupational therapy workforce. The county categorization is based on the National Center for Health Statistics (NHSC) urban-rural classification for counties. We make two changes to the NHSC classification and that is to group Pima county with large counties, and Pinal county with the medium size counties. Large indicates the large central metro and medium metro counties (NHSC = 1, 3); Medium indicates the small metro counties (NHSC=4) and the large fringe metro county, and small indicates the large and small rural counties (NHSC 5,6).

References

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8. "Arizona Board of Occupational Therapy Examiners." (N.D.) Accessed July 9, 2021. <https://ot.az.gov/>.
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