

**ACOTRO**

ASSOCIATION OF CANADIAN OCCUPATIONAL  
THERAPY REGULATORY ORGANIZATIONS



**ACORE**

ASSOCIATION CANADIENNE DES ORGANISMES  
DE RÉGLEMENTATION EN ERGOTHÉRAPIE

## 2020 Annual Report



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## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

People have an impressive ability to adapt to environments and learn new ways of doing things. Occupational therapists (OTs) know that well. Adaptation was ACOTRO's challenge, too—as it was for all of us—during a pandemic year.

COVID-19 interrupted us in some respects, but it did not stop us. We continued to meet as usual, albeit virtually. One silver lining, perhaps, is that the platform for these meetings forced us to be very focused and productive.

CORECOM was one initiative that continued to have a high priority this year. CORECOM is an effort to develop a single set of core competencies for all OTs in Canada. We are working on it with the Association of Canadian Occupational Therapy University Programs (ACOTUP) and the Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists (CAOT). (See more on this initiative later in this report.)

One area where the pandemic caused us to switch gears quickly was SEAS, the Substantial Equivalency Assessment System. SEAS harmonizes the process across the country for assessing internationally educated OTs (IEOTs). Previously, the Competency Assessment (CA) portion of the process was face to face, which became impossible during a pandemic.

When the outbreak began, we started planning immediately for virtual assessments. We were up and running with all of our assessments even before the end of the year. Although there is a bit of backlog of assessments now, we expect to catch up soon. Thank you to our SEAS staff for their diligence in ensuring that the modified process continues to be something of which we can be proud. Once the pandemic ends, we will likely continue with virtual CAs. Applicants can complete them wherever they are in the world, which will lead to long-term efficiencies.

Throughout the year, we collaborated with our stakeholders on a few other key efforts. We worked in tandem with our educator partners to produce shared messages and support throughout the pandemic. That allowed processes for student OTs to proceed in the best way possible and in a way that continued to safeguard the public.

ACOTRO also worked with our member regulators to support the delivery of virtual occupational therapy services across jurisdictions. If an OT worked in one jurisdiction and had to follow up with a client in another, we enabled a temporary registration with the normal fee waived. That helped to support safe and timely care.

This was an unprecedented year, and I am glad that our Board works so well together to share ideas and support one another to ensure excellence in occupational therapy regulation.

I want to thank ACOTRO's staff and our Board for their commitment, energy, and ideas throughout 2020. While this was a challenging year, we stayed focused on providing the leadership needed for effective regulation and strong public protection.

**Elinor Larney**  
**President, ACOTRO**  
**Registrar, College of Occupational Therapists of Ontario**

## WHO WE ARE

The Association of Canadian Occupational Therapy Regulatory Organizations—or ACOTRO—is the national organization of occupational therapy regulators in Canada. Our goal is to promote consistency and excellence in regulating occupational therapy across Canada.

ACOTRO’s 10 provincial members protect the public by regulating the practice of occupational therapy in their respective provinces. We also provide guidance to OTs seeking information on how to register in Canada.

Through ACOTRO, regulators collaborate to promote the best regulatory practices, enhance public accountability, build consistency across the country, and support each other in our efforts to respond to changes in occupational therapy practice and regulation.

We bring leadership to our profession by

- advancing best practices in occupational therapy regulation,
- developing and promoting a national strategy for consistent regulatory practices,
- promoting interprovincial and international mobility among OTs, and
- strengthening national and international networking and information-sharing.

In practical terms, this means that we work together to streamline processes, advocate, and facilitate change in the regulatory environment.

ACOTRO also administers the assessment process for IEOs. This process assesses the extent to which an OT’s education obtained internationally is substantially equivalent to the education and competencies obtained by OTs educated in Canada.

The ACOTRO Board is appointed by the occupational therapy regulatory organization in each province (see Figure 1). Therefore, each Canadian province has one representative on the ACOTRO Board.

**Figure 1: ACOTRO Member Organizations**





## HISTORY

ACOTRO was established in 1989 and incorporated in 2011. The following sections detail our vision, mission, and values.

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## VISION

Courageous Unified Regulatory Leadership

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## MISSION

Working together for public protection by advancing effective regulation of occupational therapists in Canada

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## VALUES

ACOTRO embraces the following values:

- **Mutual respect:** We recognize all members as equal partners, and we welcome and honour diverse opinions, perspectives, and contributions.
  - **Mentoring and support:** We believe that shared ideas and expertise, reciprocal consultation, and new leader orientation facilitate leadership development and capacity-building.
  - **Trust:** We respect confidences and confidentiality. Decisions are made by consensus, and members speak with one voice publicly.
  - **Excellence:** We use best practices and evidence-based decision-making to support effective leadership and continuous improvement.
  - **Collaboration:** We access collective wisdom by working in partnership with each other and with stakeholders. We create positive relationships and accepting environments that facilitate communication and goal achievement.
  - **Commitment:** We dedicate time and energy to fulfill ACOTRO's goals and objectives. When members cannot fulfill promises, we communicate this and support each other.
  - **Accountability:** We are responsible to each other, to the boards and members of our organizations, and to the public for setting and achieving realistic goals and activities, and for functioning in a transparent manner.
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## GOVERNANCE

All occupational therapy regulatory organizations across Canada belong to ACOTRO and contribute to its activities. The organization is governed by a Board of Directors composed of the registrars or ACOTRO representatives from each of our 10 provincial regulators.

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### ACOTRO MEMBERS 2020

**President: Elinor Larney**

*Registrar, College of Occupational Therapists of Ontario*

**Vice-President: Heather Cutcliffe**

*Registrar, Prince Edward Island College of Occupational Therapists*

**Treasurer: Sharon Eadie**

*Executive Director, College of Occupational Therapists of Manitoba*

**Marianne Baird**

*CEO and Registrar, Alberta College of Occupational Therapists*

**Philippe Boudreau**

*Directeur général et secrétaire, Ordre des ergothérapeutes du Québec*

**Kathy Corbett**

*Registrar and CEO, College of Occupational Therapists of British Columbia*

**Kim Doyle**

*Executive Director, Newfoundland and Labrador Occupational Therapy Board*

**Sherry Just**

*Executive Director, Saskatchewan Society of Occupational Therapists*

**Catherine Pente**

*Registrar, New Brunswick Association of Occupational Therapists*

**Kevin Wong**

*Registrar, College of Occupational Therapists of Nova Scotia*

There is no regulatory organization in Yukon, Nunavut, or the Northwest Territories. OTs in these regions may be registered by regulatory organizations in other provinces.



## **STAFF**

**Susan Domanski**, SEAS Manager

**Suzanne Cunningham**, SEAS Associate

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## **ACTIVITIES IN 2020**

During 2020, ACOTRO members embraced the challenges and opportunities of collaboration brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic. ACOTRO continued to actively engage with stakeholders and work towards implementing and improving processes aligned with current strategic initiatives.

### **Strategic Plan Initiatives**

ACOTRO members collaborated and engaged in discussions to increase the consistency of occupational therapy regulatory processes across Canada. Important topics included CORECOM, the effects of the pandemic, interjurisdictional practice, telepractice, and Truth and Reconciliation.

### **Presentations**

- On May 5, Nigel Lloyd and John O’Sullivan of CamProf presented on the process and status of CORECOM.
- ACOTRO colleagues provided a risk register metrics presentation to fellow Board members on November 16.
- On November 17, representatives from the Canadian Institute of Health Information provided a presentation and welcomed a discussion on current initiatives.
- ACOTRO’s president gave an update on the strategic plan and progress to all the regulatory body presidents and board chairs during a teleconference on November 25.

### **Governance**

Over the past year, the Governance Committee expanded the governance policies to increase ACOTRO’s organizational efficiencies and effectiveness. The Committee also refreshed selected existing policies to ensure consistency and developed a risk management framework.



## CORECOM

ACOTRO, the CAOT, and ACOTUP continued to work on a collaborative initiative to develop a single competency document that will outline entry-to-practice competencies and describe competencies used throughout occupational therapy practice. Table 1 provides details on this initiative.

**Table 1: 2020 CORECOM Accomplishments**

The year 2020 saw tremendous activity on the development of national competencies for occupational therapy.	2020 était une formidable année d'activité pour le développement des compétences nationales en ergothérapie.
ACOTRO was pleased to be working with the Association of Occupational Therapy University Programs (ACOTUP) and the Canadian Association of Occupational Therapists (CAOT) to move this project forward in spite of the global pandemic.	L'ACORE a eu le plaisir de travailler avec l'Association canadienne des programmes universitaires en ergothérapie (ACPUE) et l'Association canadienne des ergothérapeutes (ACE) pour faire avancer ce projet malgré la pandémie mondiale.
This CORECOM project, which is funded in part by the Government of Canada's Foreign Credential Recognition Program, will be the first set of competencies to be used by educators of occupational therapists, for the national certification exam to assess entry-to-practice competencies, and by the regulators to assess and monitor practice expectations for internationally educated occupational therapists upon entry and all occupational therapists throughout their career.	Ce projet de CANCOM, financé par le Programme de reconnaissance des titres de compétences étrangers du gouvernement du Canada, sera le premier ensemble de compétences à être utilisé par les éducateurs des ergothérapeutes, pour l'examen de certification nationale afin d'évaluer les compétences d'accès à la profession, et pour les organismes de réglementation pour évaluer et suivre de près les attentes de la pratique des ergothérapeutes formés à l'étranger une fois qu'ils sont au Canada ainsi que pour tout ergothérapeute le long de sa carrière.
A lot of progress was made in 2020 despite our need to move all of our work together to a virtual platform instead of in-person meetings.	Nous avons fait beaucoup de progrès en 2020 malgré la nécessité de nous réorganiser pour travailler virtuellement au lieu de nous réunir en personne.
While our project was delayed a few months due to the pandemic, the Steering Committee worked well together to make this project happen despite representation from across multiple time zones.	Bien que notre projet ait subi un délai de plusieurs mois à cause de la pandémie, le Comité de Pilotage a bien collaboré pour que ce projet se réalise malgré les multiples fuseaux horaires où se trouvaient ses membres.
Our first draft was informed by a group of dedicated and talented occupational therapists from across Canada—a group of thoughtful and diverse occupational therapists who helped us understand cultural competence and the need for this competency to be strengthened in the	Notre première ébauche était basée sur le travail d'un groupe d'ergothérapeutes dévoués et talentueux à travers tout le Canada ; un groupe d'ergothérapeutes réfléchis et divers qui nous a aidé à mieux comprendre la compétence culturelle et le besoin de la renforcer dans notre





document; the members of the boards of ACOTRO, ACOTUP, and CAOT; and key stakeholders.	document; les membres des conseils d'administration ACORE, ACPUE, et ACE ; et les parties prenantes.
We received a lot of valuable feedback, and working with our consultants, were proud to produce a final draft document ready for national consultation in early 2021.	Nous avons reçu beaucoup de commentaires constructifs et, en travaillant avec nos consultants, nous avons produit une version préliminaire finale prête pour une consultation nationale début 2021.
The goal of the project is to have the final competencies in both French and English available by fall 2021.	L'objectif du projet est de pouvoir présenter les compétences finales, aussi bien en Français qu'en Anglais, d'ici l'automne 2021.
While all members of the Steering Committee were hard working and committed, Kathy Corbett and Philippe Boudreau of ACOTRO were invaluable.	Tous les membres du Comité de Pilotage ont travaillé de manière consciencieuse et dédiée, l'apport de Kathy Corbett and Philippe Boudreau de l'ACORE a été inestimable.

### **National Exam Oversight**

To fulfill part of the regulatory role in overseeing activities used to assess entry-to-practice requirements, one ACOTRO representative attends the Certification Exam Committee business meetings of the CAOT and ensures that the exam report is distributed to all ACOTRO members.

The Exam Oversight Committee, first established in 2017, is made up of a representative from each regulatory organization, CAOT's director of standards, a CAOT Board member, and members of the Certification Exam Committee. The Exam Oversight Committee met four times this year by teleconference to discuss and approve guidelines and policies related to the exam and its administration. A provincial regulator (member of ACOTRO) chairs this committee.

Due to the pandemic, the two annual sittings of the National Occupational Therapy Certification Examination were postponed this year by the exam provider (CAOT) until September 2020 and January 2021. The January 2021 exam was online with virtual proctoring. In future, the exam will be computer based. The Exam Oversight Committee reviewed and approved the necessary policies to facilitate this transition.



## **SEAS: Substantial Equivalency Assessment System**

SEAS is the first step in the assessment process for all IEOTs applying to register anywhere in Canada outside of Quebec.<sup>1</sup> SEAS is a program operated by ACOTRO and used by 9 of the 10 occupational therapy regulators to confirm that an applicant in a specific province meets substantial equivalence, and as such, is eligible to apply for registration or licensure in that jurisdiction. SEAS assesses the extent to which an IEOT's education and competencies are substantially equivalent to those of Canadian-educated OTs. Its components address both qualification recognition and competence verification:

- Academic Credential Assessment;
- Profession-Specific Credential Assessment;
- Competency Assessment (CA);
- Jurisprudence Knowledge Assessment Test (JKAT); and
- Language Readiness Assessment.

SEAS is funded through applicant fees. Reporting to the ACOTRO Board, the SEAS Oversight Committee is responsible for managing the program.

### ***2020 Program Highlights***

The number of IEOT applicants in 2020 remained relatively steady at 110 compared with 113 in 2019, with applicant numbers just under the 10 per month forecast for the program.

**Moving to Remote Delivery of CA:** The pandemic significantly impacted the SEAS program. Following the decision in mid-March 2020 to cancel all scheduled CAs, the only in-person assessment component of SEAS, COVID-19 contingency planning was put in place. As the pandemic progressed, it became clear that returning to in-person administration would not be feasible. The CA was transitioned to remote delivery and was launched on November 16, just eight months after the cancellation of the assessments originally scheduled in March.

The move to successful remote delivery of the CA was the focus of the SEAS operations and oversight team for most of 2020. Activities included the selection and testing of a secure delivery platform and proctoring services. Psychometric support for the planning, implementation, and evaluation of the shift to remote delivery was put in place. All SEAS assessors received training on the delivery of the assessment in the remote environment. An applicant guidebook and orientation sessions helped applicants learn about the virtual delivery format and requirements.

**Enterprise Systems Project:** SEAS staff, with the assistance of a project consultant, initiated a project to secure a new online registration and payment system that can better manage the application process. This project got underway on November 1, 2020 and is expected to be concluded in 2021.

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<sup>1</sup> As a full member of ACOTRO, Quebec's regulatory organization, Ordre des ergothérapeutes du Québec, has fully endorsed SEAS and participated in its development. However, Quebec employs its own assessment system for the evaluation of IEOTs registering to practise in that province, according to the specific regulations and competencies set out by the Ordre des ergothérapeutes du Québec. There is no regulation of OTs in the territories.

**JKAT:** The resource links on the JKAT documents including the test forms and learning module were updated. Copy edits were also cross-checked in the French version.

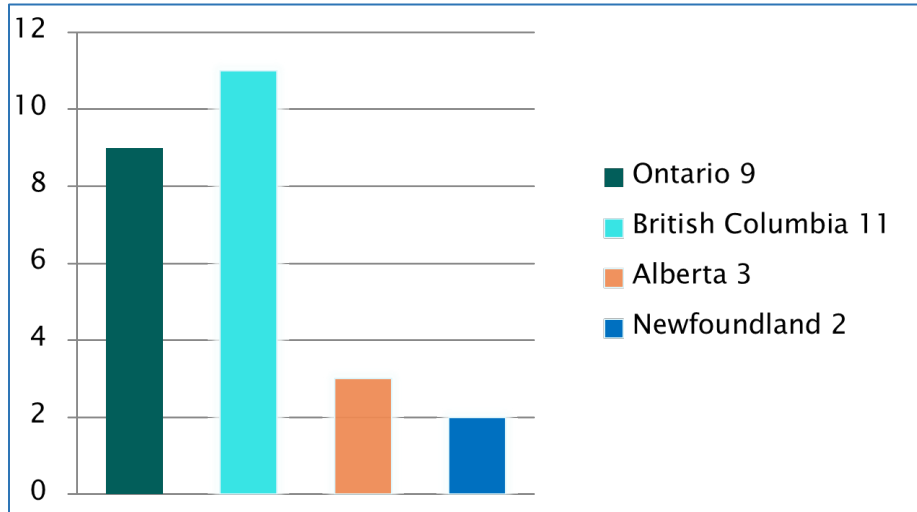
**Gap-Filling Project:** With funding from the BC Ministry of Jobs, Trade and Technology, the College of Occupational Therapists of British Columbia is leading a project to enhance decision-making processes when gaps are identified and address the need for expanding gap-filling options. The project is aimed at creating a “right-touch” approach when knowledge and skill gaps need to be filled before an IEOT can proceed to registration or licensure. The project is nearing completion, and results are expected by April 2021.

**Annual SEAS Update for Canadian Occupational Therapy Regulators:** The Annual SEAS Update webinar was held on September 29 to provide provincial occupational therapy regulators and their registration committees and staff with an update on the program. This update focused on the shift to remote delivery of the CA and the plan for monitoring the impact of this change.

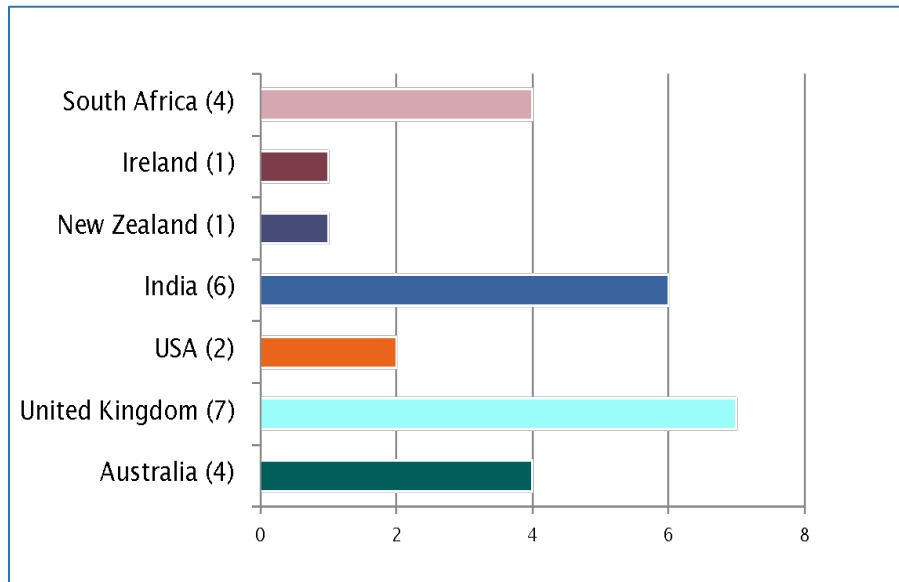
#### ***SEAS Applicant Statistics for January 1 to December 31, 2020***

As mentioned, the pandemic resulted in the cancellation of the in-person CAs scheduled from mid-March 2020 onward. With the launch of the remote delivery of the CA on November 16, the timelines for completion of SEAS were affected. The number of IEOTs completing SEAS in 2020 was 25 (Figure 2), down significantly from 92 in the previous year. A plan for fairly addressing the backlog of cancelled assessments as quickly as possible was implemented. Figure 3 lists the countries where the 25 IEOTs completed their occupational therapy education. Applicant numbers remained steady for 2020 (see Figure 4).

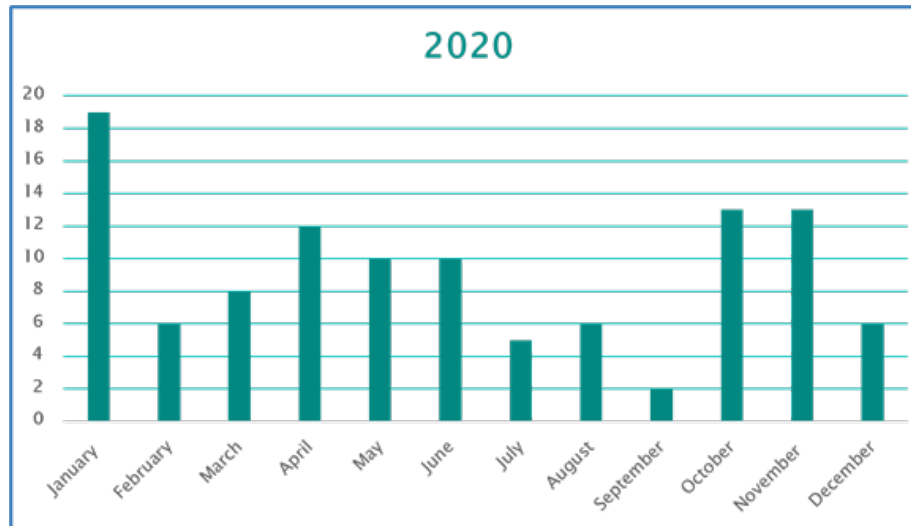
**Figure 2:** Number of Applicants Completing SEAS in 2020 and Intended Province of Practice



**Figure 3:** Country of Occupational Therapy Education for Applicants Completing SEAS in 2020



**Figure 4:** Number of New SEAS Applicants per Month in 2020



### OT Canada Reflection Day 2020

The OT Canada Reflection Day once again focused on the vision of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) Report.

The pandemic prevented participants from meeting in person. Nevertheless, meetings went ahead in late May, several weeks after the originally scheduled date, which would have been just prior to the virtual CAOT conference.

These were the objectives for Reflection Day:

1. To develop an understanding of historical, political, and moral systems of inequality, and what they have to do with health equity, occupational therapy, and ourselves, including
  - a. the relationship of positions of privilege and oppression to systems of inequality
  - b. the value of intersectionality in helping us think about action on health inequities, and
  - c. principles of practising critical allyship for guiding action within occupational therapy
2. To identify actions for creating ethical space for systemic change by
  - a. examining how systems of racism and colonization affect occupational therapy organizations using an ethical space lens,
  - b. understanding how a systemic change model can be helpful in coconstructing anti-racist and decolonizing approaches in occupational therapy, and
  - c. identifying circles of influence for individuals and organizations within systemic change
3. To outline our commitments and actions as individual organizations (ACOTRO, ACOTUP, Alliance of Canadian Occupational Therapy Provincial Associations, CAOT, and Canadian Occupational



Therapy Foundation [COTF]) and as a collective, using coconstruction, to address the TRC Calls to Action.

Once again, Reflection Day was graciously facilitated by occupational therapists Angie Phenix and Kaarina Valavaara, with the support of Elder Albert McLeod, Gayle Restall, and Janna MacLachlan. They worked with over 25 representatives from each of the five national occupational therapy organizations in Canada.

### **Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action**

The ACOTRO Board's strategic priorities include influencing systemic change. Hence, ACOTRO has created the goal of establishing principles and strategies to integrate Indigenous cultural safety into the organization, influence regulatory organizations, engage with stakeholders, and determine a potential regulatory impact on occupational therapy practice.

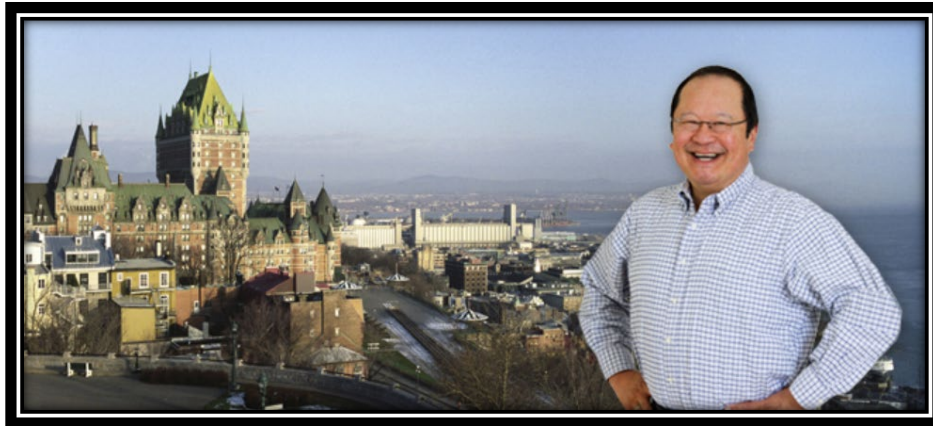
Key objectives in the ACOTRO Strategic Plan include the following:

- reviewing and revising regulatory processes to support Indigenous cultural safety and humility;
- participating in efforts regarding TRC recommendations and Calls to Action, recognizing that learning is essential to understanding the truth of the Indigenous experience and that education about the consequences of potential actions is paramount;
- influencing occupational therapy practice;
- providing regulatory leadership and perspectives to assist OTs in working with other partners;
- revisiting the Calls to Action to confirm alignment of ACOTRO priorities; and
- integrating Indigenous cultural safety and humility into the CORECOM initiative.

Activities undertaken in 2020 included

- reviewing potential initiatives that can be undertaken at the personal, Board, and organizational levels;
- participating in Reflection Day;
- exploring ACOTRO's potential involvement with the CAOT TRC Task Force; and
- participating in the OT Position Statement on Diversity (this work is just beginning).

ACOTRO members recognize that demonstrating our commitment to Indigenous cultural safety and humility is a journey—one that needs attention to continuous learning, reflection, and deliberate steps to improve integration of culturally safe practices within occupational therapy regulation. Our activities planned for 2021 will ensure we stay focused on that journey. Some of these planned efforts include attending an education session with other health regulators scheduled for February 2021; considering the Canadian Institute of Health Information *Proposed Standards for Race-Based and Indigenous Identity Data Collection and Health Reporting in Canada* as we begin work to reform the OT Database Manual; incorporating Essential Competencies related to supporting culturally safe practice; and undertaking more work with the other national organizations as the profession broadens the work of the CAOT TRC Task Force.



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