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Being at the Political Table: Building a National Professional Profile through Focussed Representation

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Introduction: Ensuring that occupational therapy as a professional body serves the needs of some of society's most vulnerable and disadvantaged groups requires engaging with decision making and funding bodies respectively. As a Peak Professional Body such engagement, or being "at the table", where policy decisions are made, needs to be underpinned by clear positions on a range of occupational issues faced by people.

Objectives: In this presentation, the strategies utilised by Occupational Therapy Australia in enhancing it's representation within, and responsiveness to, political agendas focussed on the inclusion and participation of "at risk" groups in society, is presented. Specifically, the development of Occupational Therapy Australia's Position Statements is discussed using that on Occupational Deprivation as a case study.

Methods: Based on cycles of stakeholder consultation and expert input, OTA developed a set of Position Statements which articulate the profession's philosophical, conceptual and practical responses to a range of occupational issues in society. A Human Rights agenda underpins the Position Statements.

Practice Implications: The Position Statements work at two levels. At a "grass roots" level, occupational therapists working with vulnerable groups can draw upon the Position Statements to validate their input professionally. At a national level, OTA utilises the Position Statements to respond to politicised processes such as government enquiries/calls for policy input.

Conclusion: Occupational therapy makes an important contribution within diverse communities around the globe. Articulating and representing our unique philosophy centred on enhancing opportunities for participation and inclusion through occupation is crucial to realising this contribution.