

Occupational Therapy Workforce Grants

Progress update

Engrossed Substitute Senate Bill 5950; Section 215(147); Chapter 376; Laws of 2024

December 1, 2025

Background

In 2024, the Washington Legislature tasked the Health Care Authority (HCA) through Proviso 147 of the state budget with launching an occupational therapy pilot program, providing start-up funds for providers who were interested. Four providers were initially identified, and three moved on to contracting.

In a behavioral health setting, occupational therapists (OTs), provide support and skill-building through assessments and individualized interventions. OTs help individuals improve their ability to engage in meaningful daily activities by addressing physical, cognitive, and psychosocial barriers and promoting recovery and well-being. Interventions include developing coping strategies, establishing routines, recommending adaptive accommodations, and modifying home or community environments.

Occupational therapy internships are split into two stages, Level 1 and Level 2. Level 1 interns shadow and observe over a shorter period and Level 2 interns provide care over a longer period. Delays in contracting led to the internship windows of local universities not aligning with report requirements. HCA needed an extension of the report's due date and requested additional funding to be allocated in 2025 to support an additional year of start-up.

Legislative directive

HCA must submit a preliminary report to the legislature by June 30, 2025. The report should include:

- The number of patients receiving occupational therapy through this initiative.
- The programs in which services were provided.
- The number and type of fieldwork students trained in each participating behavioral health agency program.

HCA's final report is due to the legislature January 1, 2027.

Findings

Each agency is still in the process of hiring and developing staff to support their target communities. Each agency will continue to work toward these goals but will need more time. Passages notes concern with managed care organization (MCO) contracting delays for OT services. This will continue to be monitored, and HCA will support if necessary.

Frontier Behavioral Health (Spokane County): The agency hired five OT Level 1 Fieldwork Intern students from Eastern Washington University (EWU) who trained during this past reporting period and are supporting 49 clients as of November 2025. There are a further three OT Aide Intern students from

Spokane Falls Community College who are in the background and reference check process during the month of September 2025 to start their Level 1 Fieldwork internship by October.

Passages Family Support (Spokane County): The agency completed an agreement with EWU’s OT department to host eight OT interns in Fall 2025, and this is double the usual number of Level 1 OT interns the agency would normally work with. The agency is preparing to host EWU OT Level 2 interns in late fall 2025.

The agency’s OT Technical Assistant (TA) employees shadowed in two of Passages Family Support’s outpatient programs (Intensive Residential Treatment team and Wraparound with Intensive Services), as this is where the highest need for OT has been identified by the agency’s Psychiatric ARNP. The agency’s OT TA stated that the eight individuals she encountered during the shadowing experience indicate the need for a formal OT assessment. The agency has asked their OT TA to wait to begin formal clinical assessment and services until such time when the agency receives executed contract amendments for OT from Wellpoint and Molina. The agency is also waiting for MCO amendments to hire permanent OT staff so that they are authorized to bill for the OT services once those full-time equivalents (FTEs) are in place.

Sound Health (King County): The agency has one full-time occupational therapist dedicating 50% of their time to clinical care as well as 18 Level 1 Fieldwork students trained across multiple Sound Behavioral Health sites in collaboration with academic institution partners. The OT program estimates serving approximately 27 unique clients during the most current reporting cycle. This projection accounts for a balanced caseload of individual and group sessions, with moderate overlap among clients participating in both formats. The program intends to design a comprehensive evaluation framework to measure the implementation, outcomes, and overall impact of the occupational therapy program. This framework will support continuous quality improvement, demonstrate program effectiveness, and inform future development and funding strategies. OT services launched at Keystone and Bel-Red pilot sites.

OT behavioral health grant enrollment and employment count

Provider	Unique patient count	Staff hired (in FTEs)
Frontier Behavioral Health	49	5
Passages Family Support	53	8
Sound Health	27	18
Total	129	31

This chart shows the unique patients served and the staff hired in full-time equivalent. A new round of interns started in September 2025, so the above numbers may not reflect all clients served in September/October 2025.

Budget notes

No additional funding is requested at this time.

Conclusion

Each of the three agencies participating in the OT pilot program are showing success, are engaging with their communities, and have started to build upon their hired clinical staff bases. Each agency continues to report growth to support their OT program and have plans to train more staff by the end of Q4 2025,

which will allow more clients to be served. Reporting is set to continue throughout 2025 and into 2026. Each agency is stating a need for more time to have their pilot programs implemented in full. Updates will be available with further monthly (and in the case of Sound Behavioral Health, quarterly) reports from the agencies moving forward.

Preliminary results indicate a sustained need for occupational therapy in behavioral health settings. Even with the delays that resulted in slow implementation, the agencies have begun to identify the areas of need and clients who could receive service. Longer term reporting and data will assist with providing more accurate projections of need.

Based on the current trajectory, we anticipated these programs will be fully ramped up by end of Q2 2026, with results reported out in September 2026 for the final report due the following January.

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