



## Research Priority: Functional Cognition

Functional cognition is a priority area across the lifespan and for many health conditions and developmental disabilities. There is great need to develop measures and effective interventions for functional cognition.

- Cognition is a mechanism that supports or limits full participation in meaningful life activities, a factor that compromises health and well-being for many conditions, and a current research priority in the strategic plans of many funding agencies.<sup>1</sup>
- There are over 16 million Americans who are living with cognitive impairment. Public health surveillance was recently added as part of the CDC's Healthy Brain Initiative to better understand the prevalence and implications of cognitive impairments on the daily life of individuals and their caregivers.<sup>1</sup>
- Functional cognition refers to the thinking and processing skills that are used to accomplish everyday activities in clinical and community living environments.<sup>2</sup>
- Impairments in functional cognition may be evident in many health conditions, including Alzheimer's disease, Parkinson disease, multiple sclerosis, traumatic brain injury, stroke, spinal cord injury, psychiatric illnesses, cancer, and diabetes.<sup>2</sup>
- Functional cognition may influence safety, caregiver burden, and resource utilization as well as performance in everyday activities.<sup>2</sup>

### Urgent Need

Functional cognition has been identified as

- a critical issue for promoting health and well-being for many conditions and populations
- an area in which evidence-based measures and interventions are needed
- an area that is perfectly suited for more involvement by the unique skills of occupational therapy

### The OT Lens

Occupational therapy focuses on those mechanisms of cognition that are inherent in "doing everyday activities." *Performance* based measures and interventions are needed to address functional cognition, the real world competencies for performing complex everyday activities.

In the area of functional cognition, current knowledge, research training, measures and interventions are inadequate for addressing participation and health issues. AOTF is committed to the development of a scientific network and body of evidence-based knowledge to achieve effective and efficient advances in occupational therapy science for the area of functional cognition in home, clinical, and community settings.

### Opportunity to Affect Progress

There are a few occupational therapy scientists who are building knowledge related to functional cognition. However, there is not a coordinated network for occupational therapy research in this area, nor sufficient resources to train more occupational therapy researchers and practitioners. We believe a significant investment is needed in order to address functional cognition across the lifespan in order to have better outcomes and improve quality of life.

1. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2016). Healthy aging. Retrieved from [http://www.cdc.gov/aging/pdf/cognitive\\_impairment/cogimp\\_poilicy\\_final.pdf](http://www.cdc.gov/aging/pdf/cognitive_impairment/cogimp_poilicy_final.pdf)  
<http://www.cdc.gov/aging/pdf/2013-healthy-brain-initiative.pdf>  
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2. American Occupational Therapy Association. (2015). Role of occupational therapy in assessing functional cognition. Retrieved from <http://www.aota.org/advocacy-policy/federal-reg-affairs/resources/role-ot-assessing-functional-cognition.aspx>