

# Development of the International Expert Advisory Panel on Community Health and Transport (I-CHaT) to coordinate research on transport mobility

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Members of the I-CHaT group: Standing L-R: Lana Van Niekerk, Isabel Margot-Cattin, Brenda Vrkljan, Tadhg Stapleton, Lizette Swanepoel, Paul Vaucher, Romain Bertrand (meeting participant). Seated: L-R: Priscilla Harries, Carolyn Unsworth, Barbara Mazer, Isabelle Gélinas (not present: Moon Choi and Ann-Helen Patomella).

During the past 10 years, there has been a major shift in our understanding of the nexus between transportation and health. Health concerns evolved from road safety alone to encompass a broader view of the important relationships between transportation mobility and engagement in out-of-home activities. Occupational therapists have a leading role in this area, reflecting the American Occupational Therapy Association (2014) *Occupational*

*Therapy Practice Framework* that includes driving and community mobility as an important Instrumental Activity of Daily Living. Transportation mobility, including driving, is often an essential 'occupational enabler,' through which older adults can sustain their continued social engagement and interactions with their wider communities (Stav and McGuire, 2012). As part of their role, occupational therapists facilitate consumers to manage the challenges presented by major transitions. A major

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The I-CHaT group (International Expert Advisory Panel on Community Health and Transport)

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transition can be the time when an older adult must relinquish their role as a driver. This transition may have been prompted by a formal assessment of their driving skills. Loss of licensure necessitates the development of new transportation networks to ensure continued connections to the people and places that maintain older people to live happily and successfully at home. There is growing awareness of the role of occupational therapists in the assessment of medical fitness to drive as evidenced by the extensive research literature from Australia, Canada, and the United States, and more recently from Israel, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and Ireland. Moreover, occupational therapists have a significant contribution to make to the wider area of transportation-related concerns and transportation access and mobility planning across the lifespan. The research contributions occupational therapists and colleagues have made in the field of community transport mobility have been showcased in special editions of many occupational therapy journals, most recently in two issues in this journal in 2015 (issues 78(2) and 78(6), guest edited by Priscilla Harries and Carolyn Unsworth) and previously in Canadian (*CJOT* issue 78(2), guest edited by Polgar) and American (*AJOT* issue 64(2), guest edited by Classen) occupational therapy journals, and in *Occupational Therapy in Health Care* (issue 28(2), guest edited by Dickerson).

At an international level, there is a need to set research priorities, coordinate international and interdisciplinary efforts, and provide policy makers and broader stakeholders with expert advice across a range of fields. In December 2016, a group of researchers from across the world gathered in Lausanne, Switzerland. After a symposium, the group brainstormed and shared their views on the upcoming needs and priorities related to “health, social participation, and transportation in later life.” A similar gathering had already taken place at Brunel University London a year before, which sparked ideas and established the need to generate an international collaboration. The group felt that, together, coordinating efforts would lead to a better resolution for addressing the increasing demands of transportation options for seniors. The intense two-day collaborative symposium led to the foundation of an international group dedicated to addressing these needs; the International Expert Advisory Panel on Community Health and Transport (I-CHaT).

The priorities set by I-CHaT were classified into three main themes: (a) to improve out-of-home access to

activities, places, and events valued by older adults, (b) to assist with transitioning from driving to non-driving in later life, and (c) to provide guidance and guidelines to help set policies, legislation, and education in the field. This multidisciplinary group has set an agenda and a goal for a collaborative project where the focus will be to develop an internet-based platform for active communication. The University of Applied Sciences Western Switzerland (HES-SO) will coordinate the group and the South African members will take the lead during the World Federation of Occupational Therapy Congress in 2018. In the future, we plan to extend the membership to include other researchers interested in the area, and look forward to welcoming colleagues to join the group.

Across the wide range of occupation-focused specialist fields, our multidisciplinary research partnerships and ventures to translate findings into practice can transform the lives of consumers and our communities. Initiatives that transcend boundaries, such as I-CHaT, reveal the important societal role that occupational therapists can play when it comes to considering transportation mobility needs with an aging population. I-CHaT believes this international, multidisciplinary coordination of efforts will lead to innovations that improve transport mobility for older people everywhere.

### Research ethics

Research approval was not required for this editorial. Informed consent was not relevant to this editorial.

### Declaration of conflicting interests

The authors make up the I-CHaT group, in which this editorial reports, and confirm that there is no further conflict of interests.

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