



Orthotics & Prosthetics (O&P) Fact Sheet

A concise overview of the O&P profession, patient impact, and economic value

What is O&P?

Orthotics and prosthetics (O&P) is the evaluation, fabrication, and custom fitting of orthopedic braces (orthoses) and artificial limbs (prostheses). These devices restore mobility, improve health outcomes, and enhance quality of life for millions of Americans.

- **Orthoses:** External devices that support weakened or damaged body parts.
 - **Prostheses:** Artificial limbs that restore function and mobility after limb loss.
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Patient Population

The demand for O&P care is growing rapidly due to an aging population and rising rates of diabetes, obesity, vascular disease, cancer, trauma, and congenital limb differences.

- **Orthotic patients** may include individuals with:
 - Neuromuscular or skeletal conditions (cerebral palsy, scoliosis, spina bifida, stroke, multiple sclerosis, spasticity, plagiocephaly).
 - Injuries from sports, repetitive stress, or accidents.
 - Complications from diabetes, such as foot ulcers and deformities.
 - Post-mastectomy patients requiring external breast prostheses.
- **Prosthetic patients** may include individuals with:
 - Limb loss due to diabetes or vascular disease.
 - Trauma (motor vehicle accidents, workplace injuries, military combat).
 - Cancer, infections, or congenital limb differences.

O&P patients represent every age, race, gender, and socioeconomic group but all share a need for specialized, compassionate care.

The O&P Workforce

- **Orthotists & Prosthetists:** Clinicians who assess patients, design and fit devices, and provide long-term follow-up care.
- **Technicians:** Skilled fabricators who craft devices from advanced materials.
- **Assistants & Fitters:** Provide specialized fitting and support under supervision.
- **Researchers & Educators:** Advance evidence-based practice and train the next generation.



O&P professionals are integral members of the rehabilitation team, working alongside physicians, physical therapists, occupational therapists, and other providers.

Cost-Effectiveness of O&P Care

Evidence shows O&P interventions save money for the health care system by reducing secondary health complications, hospital readmissions, and long-term care costs.

- A study from the Dobson DaVanzo & Associates Report (2013) found that Medicare beneficiaries receiving prosthetic or orthotic services had:
 - **Lower or comparable total health care costs** compared to those who did not receive them.
 - **Fewer hospitalizations** and reduced emergency care.
 - **Timely prosthetic care** can lower the risk of falls, secondary injuries, and depression.
 - **Orthotic care** prevents complications such as diabetic foot ulcers, which are costly and life-threatening if untreated.
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Evidence-Based Outcomes: Mobility & Independence

- **Prosthetics restore independence:** 95% of individuals with lower-limb prostheses report improved mobility and quality of life.
- **Orthoses reduce disability:** Orthotic interventions improve gait, reduce pain, and prevent deformities.
- **Children benefit long-term:** Early orthotic/prosthetic intervention supports healthy development, participation in school, and long-term independence.

Bottom line: O&P care enables people to walk, run, work, and live independently by transforming lives and strengthening communities.

Economic & Social Impact

- There are approximately 2 million people living with limb loss in the U.S., and 185,000 new amputations occur each year (CDC).
- Nearly 6.6 million Americans require orthotic care annually.
- O&P supports return to work and economic participation, reducing disability-related costs.
- Veterans represent a significant patient group, with many benefiting from advanced prosthetic technology developed through U.S. innovation.



Explore a Career in O&P

O&P is a growing health care profession that combines patient care, biomechanics, engineering, and technology.

- Pathways to the profession: Master's programs in O&P, residencies, certifications, and continuing education.
- O&P professionals join the **American Academy of Orthotists & Prosthetists** for:
 - Access to cutting-edge, evidence-based research.
 - Continuing education opportunities.
 - A collaborative network of peers and mentors.

Explore career pathways at [whatispop.org](https://www.whatispop.org)

Why O&P Matters

Orthotic and prosthetic care is not optional; it is life-changing health care. These services restore dignity, independence, and participation in society. Supporting O&P ensures:

- Better patient outcomes
- Lower overall health care costs
- A stronger, healthier workforce and community