

## **American Therapeutic Recreation Association**

**Issue Area:** Recreational Opportunities

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Recreation therapists generally provide treatment services and recreational activities to individuals with disabilities or illnesses. They help to reduce symptoms like depression, stress, and anxiety while maintaining the physical, mental, and emotional well-being of people. Because the older adult population is growing, recreation therapists will be in greater need in the labor force. This direct result shows how the mere growth of the older adult population can be an economic generator by creating new jobs. Recreation therapists work in good conditions and are usually paid a decent and at times above median income. Although there are many examples of how the growing older adult population will create jobs in many areas, recreation therapists also improve the lives of older adults and for this reason it is a great example of an aging in place oriented career.

The American Therapeutic Recreation Association (ATRA) is the largest, national membership organization that represents the needs and interests of recreation therapists. ATRA started in 1984 based out of Washington, DC as a small grassroots organization in response to the changing health care industry. ATRA now has grown to include five thousand members with offices across the county. They have established their own foundation, which serves as a charitable agency and is a major funding source of their association. The ATRA represents recreation therapists by focusing on public policy, coverage and reimbursement, diagnostic specialty groups, education, and research. More specifically ATRA members follow a nationally recognized professional standard of practices, code of ethics, and competency guidelines. These standards and codes ensure that all members are able to help people in a professional and ethical manner, which helps to dissolve any inclinations of abuse on their behalf. The ATRA also provides and hosts a mid-year professional issues forum and an annual conference that is hosted in different cities each year.

ATRA Academy is their most important program. Established in 1998, this academy provides quality, competency training and skill based continuing education for recreational therapists. Their academy runs through regional workshops that are carried out continuously throughout the year. Another important part of the association is not a

program, but part of their mission. They help to increase the awareness of recreation therapy as a career. They accomplish this through public awareness campaigns and legislative advocacy. By advocating recreational therapists and providing the ATRA Academy, ATRA helps to generate economic benefits for people through the help of older adults. Because they are able to use and help older adults ethically, they are a great indication of the possibilities of added jobs that can be created from the growing older adult population.

**Related Resources:**

American Therapeutic Recreation Association. <<http://www.atra-tr.org/>>.

“Recreational Therapists.” *Bureau of Labor Statistics.* U.S. Department of Labor. <<http://www.bls.gov/oco/ocos082.htm>>.