



# APTA Public Policy Priorities

The Public Policy Agenda for the Physical Therapy Profession

## 2025-2026

# Empowering Health Care: Physical therapy's vital role in addressing America's health care challenges.

Physical therapists are critical to the health care system. They play a unique role in society in prevention, wellness, fitness, health promotion, and management of disease and disability for individuals across the age span — helping individuals improve overall health and prevent the need for avoidable health care services. Having greater access to physical therapist services is integral to addressing some of the historic challenges being faced in our health care system.

Unfortunately, while the physical therapy profession is uniquely positioned to help our country respond to these challenges and more, PTs face barriers to providing needed care. The profession is experiencing workforce shortages in rural and underserved areas, increased administrative burdens, decreasing patient access, and unsustainable year-over-year cuts to payment under Medicare. For physical therapy to make a difference, PTs must be empowered to provide the care that's needed right now.

Here's why:

**Physical therapists bring solutions.** Physical therapists are movement experts who improve the quality of life through hands-on care, patient education, and prescribed movement. Physical therapists can identify, diagnose, and treat movement problems. Greater access to physical therapist services is part of the solution to many of our nation's health and wellness challenges.

**Physical therapists and physical therapist assistants treat people where they are.** Physical therapists and physical therapist assistants provide care to people across the lifespan and in many settings, including hospitals, private practices, outpatient clinics, homes, schools, sports teams and fitness facilities, the U.S. armed forces, veterans' facilities, work settings, and nursing homes. In addition, telehealth allowances under Medicare during the public health emergency and temporarily extended by Congress have proven that physical therapist services can effectively reach an even wider patient population.

The physical therapy profession is poised to help transform the health of society, and the American Physical Therapy Association's public policy agenda is about leveraging the power of the profession to provide solutions to health care issues that impact all Americans.

Through our priorities, APTA looks forward to engaging with policymakers to advance policies that improve access and care for the patients we serve.

# APTA Public Policy Goals

## Patient Access and Care

APTA urges Congress and the administration to improve patient outcomes by eliminating barriers to health care services.

## Population Health and Social Determinants of Health

APTA urges Congress and the administration to enact policies that empower all people regardless of where they are born, live, learn, work, play, worship, and age to live healthy and independent lives.

## Value-Based Care and Practice

APTA urges Congress and the administration to facilitate and support payment infrastructures that will ensure patients achieve the best outcomes commensurate with the cost of care.

## Research and Clinical Innovation

APTA urges Congress and the administration to prioritize research and clinical innovation to advance the science, effectiveness, and efficacy of physical therapist evaluation and management to optimize the health, well-being, and recovery of individuals, communities, and populations across the lifespan.

### The Economic Value of Physical Therapy in the United States

A Report From the American Physical Therapy Association



September 2023

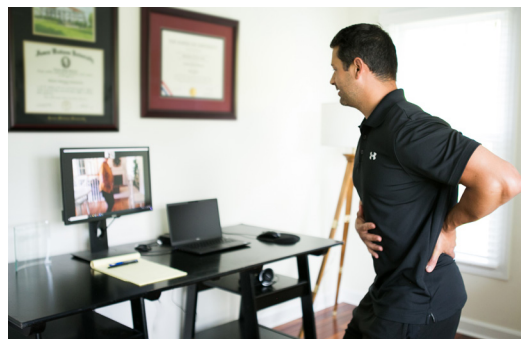


The 2023 American Physical Therapy Association report outlines the cost-effectiveness and economic value of physical therapist services for a broad range of common conditions. “The Economic Value of Physical Therapy in the United States” reinforces the importance of physical therapists and physical therapist assistants in improving patient outcomes and decreasing downstream costs. Policymakers should use this report to inform legislative and regulatory efforts for health care delivery and payment under Medicare, Medicaid, and commercial payers. Review the findings at [ValueofPT.com](https://www.valueofpt.com).

# Patient Access and Care

**The American Physical Therapy Association urges Congress and the administration to improve patient outcomes by eliminating barriers to health care services. To this end, APTA will advocate with federal policymakers and collaborate with stakeholders to:**

- 1.** Ensure appropriate payment, mitigate payment cuts for physical therapist services, and advance payment reform under the Medicare Physician Fee Schedule and other private and public programs.
- 2.** Improve patient access by expanding the definition of primary care to include physical therapists as entry-point providers in private and public programs.
- 3.** Improve patient choice by enacting legislation to allow physical therapists to contract privately with Medicare beneficiaries (i.e., opt out).
- 4.** Advance policies that ensure access to physical therapist services for individuals affected by public health emergencies and sequelae, such as long COVID and opioid use disorder.
- 5.** Enhance patient access to and the effectiveness of physical therapist services by utilizing digital health technologies, such as telehealth and artificial intelligence, along with the necessary supporting infrastructure.



# Population Health and Social Determinants of Health

**APTA urges Congress and the administration to enact policies that empower all people regardless of where they are born, live, learn, work, play, worship, and age to live healthy and independent lives. To this end, APTA will advocate with federal policymakers and collaborate with stakeholders to:**

- 1.** Preserve and expand services and remove barriers in public and private health programs to (a) cover prevention and wellness services and (b) serve high-risk and underserved populations, including those who experience health disparities.
- 2.** Support equitable programs that increase physical activity and exercise, promote community participation, and prevent injury among all individuals.
- 3.** Expand the health provider workforce, including physical therapists and physical therapist assistants, in rural and medically underserved areas by adding incentives and reducing barriers.
- 4.** Increase funding for state grant programs under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act so that eligible individuals and their caregivers receive the supports they need to learn, participate, and thrive.
- 5.** Advance policies, funding, and research that support diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging in the physical therapy workforce to reflect society.
- 6.** Increase equitable and accessible infrastructure and transportation to promote movement-centric communities.



# Value-Based Care and Practice

**APTA urges Congress and the administration to facilitate and support payment infrastructures that ensure patients achieve the best outcomes commensurate with the cost of care. To this end, APTA will advocate with federal policymakers and collaborate with stakeholders to:**

- 1.** Facilitate and support the development of public and private alternative payment models that:
  - Promote physical therapists as an entry point to care.
  - Increase administrative efficiency.
  - Improve access to care.
  - Include meaningful patient-centered outcome measures.
- 2.** Reduce administrative burden (e.g., unreasonable credentialing, plan of care certification, and prior authorization hurdles) across public and private insurance programs to decrease inefficiencies and eliminate delays in care.
- 3.** Support the development of cost measures that identify episodes for which the physical therapist is the primary point of entry and demonstrate the positive impact of physical therapy on total cost and outcomes of care.
- 4.** Advance financial and operational incentives for physical therapists that are consistent with those received by physicians and health care systems to support the adoption of certified electronic health record technology to facilitate health system interoperability for all providers.
- 5.** Secure partnerships with public and private insurance programs to develop and expand innovative, accessible, and high-value models of care that include physical therapist services.



# Research and Clinical Innovation

**APTA urges Congress and the administration to prioritize research and clinical innovation to advance the science, effectiveness, and efficacy of physical therapist evaluation and management to optimize the health, well-being, and recovery of individuals, communities, and populations across the lifespan. To this end, APTA will advocate with federal policymakers and collaborate with interested parties to:**

- 1.** Increase funding for programs and initiatives:
  - For preventive care and rehabilitation research across federal agencies.
  - For health services research and innovative patient-centered outcomes research that include implementation of physical therapist services delivered in person or remotely.
  - To evaluate the cost-effectiveness of physical therapist interventions.
  - For clinical research to support inclusion of underrepresented groups, including those living with a disability.
- 2.** Increase access to and availability of relevant data to support research on population health trends and disparities in care, including:
  - Public payer (e.g., Medicare and Medicaid claims).
  - Population health (e.g., U.S. Census Bureau and American Community Survey).
  - Public health (e.g., Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the Federal Drug Administration).
- 3.** Increase participation of physical therapists in the formal development of outcomes, processes, and quality measures used by public and private payers.






## About PTs and PTAs

Physical therapists and physical therapist assistants help people optimize their quality of life. Physical therapists are movement experts who prescribe exercise, furnish hands-on care, and provide patient education. They play a unique role in society in prevention, wellness, fitness, health promotion, and management of disease and disability for individuals across the age span and in a variety of settings.

They help people rehabilitate from devastating injuries, manage chronic conditions, avoid surgery and prescription drugs, and create healthy habits. Physical therapists' roles include education, direct intervention, research, advocacy, and collaborative consultation.


Physical therapists receive a clinical doctorate degree, the DPT, before taking a national physical therapy licensure exam. Physical therapists are licensed in all U.S. jurisdictions. Physical therapist assistants work under the direction and supervision of a physical therapist, must complete a two-year associate degree, and are licensed or certified in all U.S. jurisdictions.

To learn more about how lives can be transformed by the care of physical therapist and physical therapist assistant teams, visit [ChoosePT.com](https://www.choosept.com).

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