



# APTA Public Policy Priorities

The Public Policy Agenda for the Physical Therapy Profession

2023-2024

# America's health care system faces historic challenges. The physical therapy profession can take them on.

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, shrinking patient access, and unsustainable year-over-year cuts 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 Services, veterans' facilities, work settings, and nursing homes. And telehealth allowances under Medicare during the public health emergency 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 that ensures 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.



# Patient Access and Care

**APTA 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 interested parties to:**

- 1.** Ensure appropriate payment, mitigate cuts for physical therapist services, and advance payment reform under the Medicare Physician Fee Schedule.
- 2.** Advance policies that ensure access to physical therapist services for individuals affected by public health emergencies, including COVID-19 and opioid use disorder.
- 3.** Expand the definition of primary care to include physical therapists as entry-point providers.
- 4.** Expand direct access, coverage, and fair payment for physical therapist services in all private and public programs.
- 5.** Advance payment, coverage, and broadband and technology infrastructure policies that will increase patient access to physical therapist services delivered via digital health, including telehealth.
- 6.** Support public and private payer policies that limit the impact of cost-sharing on access to care.
- 7.** Advance policies to recognize the role of physical therapist assistants in the delivery of quality health care.
- 8.** Enact legislation to allow physical therapists to contract privately with Medicare beneficiaries.



# 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.** Support increased access to prevention and wellness services in public and private health insurance programs.
- 2.** Increase funding for state grant programs under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act so that eligible children receive the supports they need to learn and thrive.
- 3.** Preserve and expand services available to high-risk and underserved populations through public and private health insurance programs including removing barriers to access.
- 4.** Support programs that increase physical activity and exercise and prevent injury among all individuals.
- 5.** Advance research and policies that support diversity, equity, and inclusion in the physical therapy workforce to reflect the patient population.
- 6.** Expand the health provider workforce in rural and underserved areas by adding incentives and reducing burden.



# Value-Based Care and Practice

**APTA urges Congress and the administration to facilitate and support payment that ensures patients achieve the best outcomes commensurate with the cost of care. To this end, APTA will advocate with federal policymakers and collaborate with interested parties 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, identify and promote effective patient outcomes, and expand interprofessional collaboration.
- 2.** Advance policies that facilitate access to care and reduce administrative burden (e.g., credentialing, enrollment, authorization) across all public and private insurance programs.
- 3.** Advance financial and operational incentives for physical therapists and other nonphysician providers regarding the use, certification, and interoperability of electronic health records and other health information technology.
- 4.** Support the development of cost measures that identify episodes for which the physical therapist is the primary point of entry and demonstrate the impact of physical therapists on total cost and outcomes 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. To this end, APTA will advocate with federal policymakers and collaborate with interested parties to:**

- 1.** Increase funding for injury prevention and rehabilitation research across federal agencies.
- 2.** Increase funding for health services research and innovative patient-centered outcomes research that includes implementation of physical therapist services.
- 3.** Increase involvement of physical therapists in formal development of outcome, process, and quality measures used by public and private payers.
- 4.** 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.





## 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, hands-on care, and 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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