

TRANSFORMING HEALTH CARE

The public policy priorities of the
American Physical Therapy Association
2017-2018



American Physical Therapy Association™

<http://policy.apta.org>



The US health care system must meet the “triple aim” of improving population health, improving the patient’s experience of care, and lowering costs.

The American Physical Therapy Association (APTA) believes that physical therapists and physical therapist assistants—by nature of the individualized, cost-effective, evidence-based services they provide to keep people healthy, fit, and mobile—will be central to this important effort.

This document provides a brief overview of APTA’s public policy priorities: the challenges and policy solutions to help meet the triple aim of health care.

Critical Challenges You Can Help Us Address

There are **6 important issues** we urge you to address through policy to improve health care:

- Americans face **barriers to care** that can increase health care costs, reduce choice, and impede delivery.
- Americans face multiple **public health epidemics** that are increasing health care costs and burdening the economy at large.
- **New models of care** do not maximize potential success, because current laws do not recognize the vital role of nonphysician providers in their design and development.
- **Economic barriers** and overregulation challenge the ability of physical therapist businesses to survive.
- Patients, especially in underserved areas, are being negatively impacted by a **shortage of health care providers** who can serve as an entry point to care.
- Lack of advancement in research, clinical innovation, and use of realtime data **impedes care delivery** to Americans with disability and chronic disease.

Read on to learn how you can help resolve these issues for a better, more collaborative, patient-focused health care system.

CHALLENGE:

Americans face **barriers to care** that can increase health care costs, reduce choice, and impede delivery.

SOLUTION:

Reduce or eliminate unwarranted barriers to access to care by supporting the following policy solutions:

- Repeal the outpatient therapy cap under Medicare.
- Advance policies that would prevent referral for profit and physician ownership of physical therapist services.
- Support efforts to combat high patient cost-sharing or copays for physical therapist services.
- Enact legislation to secure improved patient access to physical therapist services under Medicare.
- Achieve coverage of and payment for telehealth-delivered physical therapist services.
- Advocate for appropriate patient access to needed equipment, supportive devices, and supplies.
- Advocate for the recognition and payment of physical therapist assistant services under TRICARE.

CHALLENGE:

Americans face multiple **public health epidemics** that are increasing health care costs and burdening the economy at large.

SOLUTION:

Improve the health of Americans through increased access to cost-effective nonsurgical and nonpharmacological solutions, such as physical therapist services, by supporting the following policy solutions:

- Advance the role of physical therapists in prevention and population health initiatives to combat health crises such as opioid addiction, concussions, and obesity.
- Advocate for the role of physical therapists in chronic care management, including appropriate and consistent coverage of skilled maintenance therapy services.
- Support funding and improved patient access to physical therapist services for programs that serve individuals with disabilities and at-risk populations, such as IDEA and Medicaid.



CHALLENGE:

New models of care do not maximize potential success, because current laws do not recognize the vital role of nonphysician providers in their design and development.

SOLUTION:

Optimize the use of physical therapists as an appropriate point of entry in innovative and collaborative care models, as well as in bundled and episodic payment systems, by supporting the following policy solutions:

- Advocate for the creation and testing of alternative payment models under the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Innovation that have physical therapists in a primary role.
- Support efforts to bolster the participation of physical therapists in alternative payment models such as accountable care organizations, bundled payment models, and patient-centered medical homes.

CHALLENGE:

Economic barriers and overregulation challenge the ability of physical therapist businesses to survive.

SOLUTION:

Support business environments that enable physical therapists to show their value to the health care system, by supporting the following policy solutions:

- Streamline contractor medical review under Medicare for physical therapy services, and ensure that physical therapists are not unduly penalized in audit and medical review activities.
- Enact legislation to allow physical therapists to opt out of Medicare and privately contract with Medicare beneficiaries.
- Address onerous laws and regulations such as the multiple procedure payment reduction.

CHALLENGE:

Patients, especially in underserved areas, are being negatively impacted by a **shortage of health care providers** who can serve as an entry point to care.

SOLUTION:

Support programs that will empower physical therapists to fill the gap.

- Enact legislation to add physical therapists to federal student loan repayment programs.
- Support efforts to recruit and retain physical therapists and physical therapist assistants within the Department of Defense and Veterans Administration.

CHALLENGE:

Lack of advancement in research, clinical innovation, and use of realtime data **impedes care delivery** to Americans with disability and chronic disease.

SOLUTION:

Advance research and clinical innovation development by supporting the following policy solutions:

- Advocate for increased funding for and recognition of rehabilitation research within the National Institutes of Health and other federal agencies.
- Recognize the Physical Therapy Outcomes Registry as a qualified clinical data registry.
- Create and adopt functional outcome measures that show the value of physical therapy in Medicare quality programs such as value-based purchasing.
- Support efforts that facilitate the use, certification, and interoperability of electronic health records for the physical therapy profession.



Physical therapists are movement experts who treat people of all ages and abilities, helping them improve and maintain function and quality of life. Physical therapists receive a clinical doctorate degree (DPT) before taking a national physical therapy licensure exam. Physical therapists are licensed in all US jurisdictions. Physical therapist assistants work under the direction and supervision of a physical therapist, must complete a 2-year associate's degree, and are licensed or certified in all US jurisdictions.



Learn more at APTA's Policy Center:
<http://policy.apta.org>

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The American Physical Therapy Association represents more than 95,000 physical therapists, physical therapist assistants, and students of physical therapy nationwide. Learn more about the types of conditions physical therapists can treat, and find a physical therapist in your area, by visiting www.MoveForwardPT.com.