



2021-2022 Public Policy Priorities

More Movement, Better Health

Choose PT

Millions of cases of COVID-19 and hundreds of thousands of resulting deaths in the United States have spotlighted challenges to our nation's health care system. Individuals with diabetes, obesity, and other chronic conditions, and those living in congregate settings, were affirmed to be at higher risk for severe cases of the disease. Physical therapists and other health care providers experienced dire financial consequences as non-COVID-19-related health treatments were postponed. And to add insult to injury, Medicare cut payment to more than 30 health care providers, including physical therapists, which started Jan. 1, 2021.

Not to be forgotten amid the COVID-19 national health emergency, approximately 130 Americans die every day from opioid overdoses, many of whom started using opioids to treat musculoskeletal pain.

Physical therapists bring solutions to patients, providers, communities, and health systems. Physical therapists are movement experts who improve 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.

Here's what the data show:

Physical therapy is essential for many in their recovery from COVID-19. COVID-19 can strike anyone, and its effects range from being undetectable to requiring mechanical ventilation. When people are hospitalized and are just beginning to recover from the most severe effects of the novel coronavirus, physical therapists are helping. And physical therapy will continue to be needed by some long after they leave the hospital.

Physical therapy is effective in reducing pain. For example, a growing body of evidence for physical therapist treatment of low back pain includes a [2018 study published in Health Services Research](#) that shows that using it as a first-line approach not only saves money but also dramatically reduces the chance of receiving a prescription for dangerous opioids.

Physical activity prevents disease. For example, people who regularly walk 8,000 steps a day are significantly less likely to die from cardiovascular disease, cancer, or any cause than those who take 4,000 steps or fewer, according to a [March 2020 study published in JAMA](#).

Physical therapists treat people where they are. Physical therapists 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. About 90 commercial payers and Medicare have allowed physical therapist services to be delivered via telehealth during the COVID-19 public health emergency.

The physical therapy profession has much to contribute to the health of society. The following public policy agenda represents the American Physical Therapy Association's recommended solutions to health care issues that impact all Americans. To learn more about these issues or to contact APTA staff specializing in federal legislation and regulatory issues, visit [apta.org/advocacy](https://www.apta.org/advocacy). To learn more about physical therapy, visit [choosept.com](https://www.choosept.com).

APTA Public Policy Goals

APTA urges Congress and the Administration to:

- Improve patient outcomes by eliminating barriers to health care services.
- 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.
- Improve patient outcomes and patient satisfaction by improving health services delivery.
- Prioritize research and clinical innovation to advance the science, effectiveness, and efficacy of physical therapist evaluation and management to optimize patient health, well-being, and recovery.



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 stakeholders to:

1. Ensure appropriate payment for physical therapist services in the Medicare Physician Fee Schedule.
2. Guarantee access to a comprehensive health benefit package for all Americans, with no arbitrary limits placed on people with preexisting conditions.
3. Advance policies that address current and future needs for rehabilitation services, including physical therapy, for individuals affected by COVID-19 and other acute and chronic conditions.
4. Expand the definition of primary care services providers to include physical therapists.
5. Expand opportunities in public programs for direct access to physical therapist services.
6. Increase the health provider workforce in rural and medically underserved areas by adding physical therapists to federal student loan repayment programs.
7. Advance policies to increase transparency to patients regarding costs of health care services and financial interests in the delivery of health care services.
8. Advance payment, coverage, and broadband and technology infrastructure policies that will increase patient access to rehabilitation services delivered via digital health and telehealth.
9. Reduce patient out-of-pocket costs for nonpharmacological pain prevention, treatment, and management services, including physical therapy.
10. Advance policies to recognize the role of physical therapist assistants in the delivery of quality health care.
11. Enact legislation to allow physical therapists to privately contract 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 funding for prevention and wellness services in public health insurance programs and coverage for prevention and wellness services in commercial insurance programs.
2. Increase funding for the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act state grant programs so that eligible children receive the supports they need to learn and thrive.
3. Preserve and protect services provided under Medicaid and Medicare.
4. Advance policies to increase knowledge about physical therapist services for individuals of all ages who live with pain, activity limitations, and/or participation restrictions.
5. Support programs that increase physical activity and exercise among all individuals.
6. Advance policies that support diversity and inclusion in the physical therapy workforce including passage of the Allied Health Workforce Diversity Act.

Value-Based Care and Practice

APTA urges Congress and the Administration to improve patient outcomes and patient satisfaction by improving health services delivery. To this end, APTA will advocate with federal policymakers and collaborate with stakeholders to:

1. Facilitate and support the development of demonstration projects to validate public and private insurance-based alternative payment models that increase administrative efficiency, promote effective patient outcomes, and expand interprofessional collaboration among health care providers, including physical therapists.
2. Advance policies that reduce administrative burden across all public and commercial insurance programs.
3. Advance financial and operational incentives for the physical therapy profession regarding the use, certification, and interoperability of electronic health records and other health information technology.

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 patient health, well-being, and recovery. To this end, APTA will advocate with federal policymakers and collaborate with stakeholders to:

1. Increase funding for prevention and rehabilitation research across federal agencies.
2. Increase funding for health services research that includes physical therapist services as part of solutions to advance desired outcomes in population health.
3. Secure partnerships with public and private insurance providers to drive the delivery of high-quality, cost-effective rehabilitation services as measured by the Physical Therapy Outcomes Registry.



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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