

The Physical Therapist Student Loan Repayment Eligibility Act of 2011 (H.R. 1426/S. 975)

Position

The American Physical Therapy Association (APTA) strongly supports the *Physical Therapist Student Loan Repayment Eligibility Act of 2011* (H.R. 1426/S. 975), legislation that would authorize physical therapists to participate in the National Health Service Corps Loan Repayment Program. H.R. 1426 was introduced by Representatives Jo Ann Emerson (R-MO) and Mike Ross (D-AR) on April 7, 2011. S. 975 was introduced by Senators Jon Tester (D-MT) and Roger Wicker (R-MS) on May 12, 2011.

Access in Rural and Underserved Areas

The National Health Service Corps (NHSC) addresses the health needs of some seven million underserved individuals across the nation. H.R. 1426/S. 975 would ensure that physical therapists are part of the team providing the comprehensive health care that is the NHSC mission. Rural and urban underserved communities are too often unable to obtain needed health professionals, such as physical therapists, due in part to the significant student loan debt load many health care professionals carry.

Reducing Student Loan Burden

In 2010, the average annual cost of tuition and fees for a physical therapist student attending an in-state public, out-of state public, or private institution was \$13,100, \$25,500, and \$28,800, respectively. According to an APTA survey of recent graduates (1-5 years out of school) the average loan debt related to PT programs was \$83,138 with the total average debt for this group of students being \$96,149. In this same survey, 63% responded “yes” when asked if student loan debt affected their job choice. The NHSC loan repayment program provides up to \$30,000 in loan forgiveness per year for two years of service in an underserved area. This funding could help address the student loan debt of physical therapists who otherwise may not choose to practice in rural or underserved areas where salaries tend to be lower.

Meeting Growing Demand

The U.S. Department of Labor indicates that employment of physical therapists is expected to “grow faster than the average” of all occupations through 2012. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, “...the demand for physical therapists should continue to rise as growth in the number of individuals with disabilities or limited function spurs demand for therapy services.” The aging population and increased prevalence of chronic disease like diabetes increases the demand for physical therapy services. The inclusion of physical therapists in the Loan Repayment Program will help to ensure that these services are available to underserved communities.



American Physical Therapy Association

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Co-sponsor the Physical Therapist Student Loan Repayment Eligibility Act of 2011 (H.R. 1426/S. 975).

For additional information, contact the American Physical Therapy Association's Government Affairs Department at 703/706-8533 or advocacy@apta.org.



Facts About Physical Therapists and Physical Therapist Assistants

Who We Are

Physical therapists (PTs) are health care professionals who diagnose and treat individuals of all ages, from newborns to the very old, who have medical problems or other health related conditions that limit their ability to move and perform functional activities in their daily lives. PTs also work with individuals to prevent the loss of mobility before it occurs by developing fitness- and wellness-oriented programs for healthier and more active lifestyles.

Physical therapist assistants (PTAs) provide selective physical therapy interventions under the direction and supervision of physical therapists.

What We Do

PTs examine each individual and develop a plan of care using treatment techniques to promote the ability to move, reduce pain, restore function, and prevent disability. Under the direction and supervision of the PT, PTAs provide selective physical therapy interventions based on the developed plan of care.

Where We Practice

PTs and PTAs provide care for people in a variety of settings, including outpatient clinics or offices; inpatient rehabilitation facilities; skilled nursing, extended care, or subacute facilities; education or research centers; schools; hospices; industrial, workplace, or other occupational environments; and fitness centers and sports training facilities.

Education & Licensure

All PTs must receive a graduate degree from an accredited physical therapist program before taking a national licensure examination that permits them to practice. The majority of programs offer the doctor of physical therapy (DPT) degree. State licensure is required in each state in which a physical therapist practices. PTAs must complete a 2-year associate's degree and are licensed, certified, or registered in most states.

American Physical Therapy Association

The American Physical Therapy Association (www.apta.org) is a national organization representing more than 77,000 physical therapists, physical therapist assistants, and students nationwide. Its goal is to foster advancements in physical therapist education, practice, and research.

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