POSITION

The American Physical Therapy Association strongly supports the Protecting Student Athletes from Concussions Act (H.R. 5611/S. 2600). This legislation encourages the development of concussion management guidelines that will strengthen the procedures involving the prevention, identification, and treatment of concussions in elementary and secondary schools. This legislation was introduced in the U.S. House by Rep. Mark DeSaulnier (D-CA) and Rep. Stauber (R-MN) on January 15, 2020, and in the U.S. Senate by Sen. Richard Durbin (D-IL) on October 15, 2019.

BACKGROUND

Concussions in student athletes are a growing public health problem that demands immediate attention. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention states that in 2017, nearly 2.5 million high school students reported having at least one concussion related to sports or physical activity over the span of a year, and an estimated 1 million students reported having two or more concussions during the same time frame. The rising statistics have been accompanied by an unparalleled increase in public awareness regarding the issue of concussion management. Legislative and policy efforts at the state and local level on concussion management have been highly inconsistent. This inconsistency can be a detriment to the quality of care and considerations necessary for the complexity of concussion injuries within active student athletes.

CONCUSSION MANAGEMENT

The management of a concussion involves a continuum of care, which includes prevention, detection, rehabilitation, and return to participation in activity. APTA believes that concussions should be evaluated and managed by a multidisciplinary team of licensed health care providers that includes a physical therapist. Concussions are complex injuries that can have diverse effects on the individual. As such, the management of concussions does not completely fall within the expertise of any single health care discipline, but instead benefits from the expertise of several different disciplines including, but not limited to, physical therapy, neurology, neuropsychology, and athletic training.

Physical therapists provide a unique contribution to the concussion care management team, particularly in the areas of balance and vestibular evaluation and rehabilitation. Multidisciplinary collaboration is essential in evaluating the appropriateness for a safe return to play. The decision for a student athlete to return to activity can often become convoluted without a structured protocol that considers the health needs of the student athlete first and foremost.

H.R. 5611/S. 2600 would make return-to-activity decisions easier by ensuring school districts have concussion management plans that educate students, parents, and school personnel about how to recognize and respond to concussions. This legislation would also provide student athletes and communities with information about how to prevent and manage concussions, while also assisting in their safe return to academic and athletic performance.

WIDELY SUPPORTED


For more information on APTA priorities, visit APTA’s policy center at http://policy.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 therapist 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 therapist 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 AND LICENSURE
All PTs must receive a degree from an accredited physical therapist program before taking and passing a national licensure exam that permits them to practice. Since 2015, all accredited programs award the doctor of physical therapy degree. State licensure is required in each state in which a PT 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 is a national organization representing more than 100,000 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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Cosponsor H.R. 5611/S. 2600 Today!
For additional information, contact the American Physical Therapy Association’s Government Affairs Department at 703/706-8533 or advocacy@apta.org.