The American Physical Therapy Association strongly urges Congress to enact the Allied Health Workforce Diversity Act (H.R. 3637/S. 2747). This bipartisan legislation would provide scholarships and stipends to accredited higher education programs to recruit qualified individuals who are from underrepresented backgrounds, including students from racial and ethnic minorities, persons with disabilities, and students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds in the professions of physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech-language pathology, and audiology. H.R. 3637 was introduced by Reps. Bobby Rush, D-Ill., and Cathy McMorris Rodgers, R-Wash. S. 2747 was introduced by Sens. Robert Casey, D-Pa., and Lisa Murkowski, R-Alaska.

BACKGROUND

Minorities are significantly underrepresented in the health professional workforce, according to a 2017 report by the Health Resources and Service Administration. Achieving greater diversity will produce a more culturally competent workforce and improve access to high-quality care for medically underserved populations.

According to a United States Government Accountability Office study, a more diverse health care workforce is important because:

- minority groups disproportionately live in areas with health care provider shortages,
- patients who receive care from members of their own racial and ethnic background tend to have better outcomes, and
- members of racial and ethnic minority groups are more likely to practice in shortage areas.

The Allied Health Workforce Diversity Act is modeled after the Title VIII Nursing Workforce Development program that has successfully increased the percentage of racial and ethnic minorities pursuing careers in nursing. This bill would provide scholarships and stipends to approved higher education programs for the professions of physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech-language pathology, and audiology. The grant program would help strengthen and expand the comprehensive use of evidence-based strategies shown to increase the recruitment, enrollment, retention, and graduation of students from underrepresented and disadvantaged backgrounds. These strategies include outreach to the community, creating or expanding mentorship and tutoring programs, and providing scholarships and stipends to students. By providing colleges and universities funding to attract and retain students from underrepresented and disadvantaged backgrounds, this legislation would boost the number of minorities in the health profession workforce and correct the underrepresentation in these fields.

The contents of H.R. 3637 were added to the Educating Medical Professionals and Optimizing Workforce Efficiency and Readiness (EMPOWER) for Health Act (H.R. 2781) that was approved by the House of Representatives in October 2019.

ENDORsing ORGANIZATIONS

This legislation is supported by the following organizations:

- The American Physical Therapy Association
- The American Academy of Physical Therapy
- The American Occupational Therapy Association
- The American Speech-Language-Hearing Association
- The American Academy of Audiology
- The Association of University Centers on Disability
- The Association of Schools Advancing Health Professions.

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 two-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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Co-sponsor H.R. 3637/S. 2747 Today!

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