

# PHYSICAL THERAPIST WORKFORCE AND PATIENT ACCESS (H.R. 2802/S. 970)

## POSITION

The American Physical Therapy Association (APTA) strongly urges Congress to pass the Physical Therapist Workforce and Patient Access Act of 2019 (H.R. 2802/S. 970). This legislation would allow physical therapists to participate in the National Health Service Corps (NHSC) Loan Repayment Program. The addition of physical therapists to the NHSC Loan Repayment Program will ensure that individuals in rural and underserved areas have access to nonpharmacological options for the prevention, treatment, and management of pain. H.R. 2802 was introduced by Reps Diane DeGette (D-CO) and John Shimkus (R-IL). S. 970 was introduced by Sens John Tester (D-MT), Roger Wicker (R-MS), and Angus King (I-ME). Access in Rural and Underserved Areas

The NHSC addresses the health needs of more than 11.4 million underserved individuals across the nation.<sup>1</sup> Adding physical therapists to the NHSC would ensure that patients in rural and underserved areas have access to the physical therapist services they need. As essential members of the health care team, physical therapists play an important role in the prevention and management of pain; chronic diseases and conditions such as diabetes, stroke, and obesity; and their impact on an individual's quality of life and ability to work in his or her community.

**11.4 million:**  
The number of Americans served by  
the National Health Service Corps

The NHSC has not only served as a pipeline for providers in underserved areas, but has successfully retained many of its providers to continue to serve in the areas of the country that need it most. In 2016, the NHSC had an 88% retention rate for providers within the program to continue to provide greater patient access to care.<sup>2</sup> Currently there is no rehabilitative care component within the NHSC, a piece that could greatly complement the current program to promote health across the continuum of care. In addition, including physical therapists will ensure individuals in rural and underserved areas have access to nonpharmacological

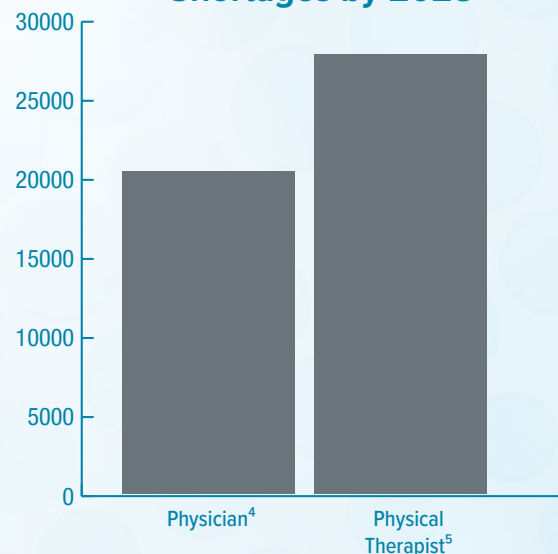
options for the prevention, treatment, and management of pain. Physical therapy is an essential component of the multidisciplinary undertaking that will be required to improve patient outcomes and alter the trajectory of the current opioid crisis.

In addition to the care they provide, physical therapists also can alleviate the demands on other primary care providers by serving as an entry point to the health care system for many individuals with pain, chronic diseases, and conditions, maximizing care to the entire population in NHSC communities.

## MEETING GROWING DEMAND

The US Department of Labor indicates that employment of physical therapists is expected to “grow much faster than the average” of all occupations through 2026.<sup>3</sup> According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), “...demand for physical therapy will come from the aging baby boomers, who are not only staying active later in life, but are more susceptible to health conditions ... that may require physical therapy.” Based on current trends in the physical therapist workforce, the shortage of physical therapists could potentially reach over 26,000 in the United States by 2025, greater than other primary care disciplines recognized by the National Health Service Corps. BLS notes that many physical therapists live in urban and suburban areas, creating maldistribution of physical therapists throughout the country. The inclusion of physical therapists in the NHSC Loan Repayment Program will help to ensure that rehabilitation services and nonpharmacological treatment options are available to underserved communities.

### Projected Primary Care Shortages by 2025



1 HRSA. <https://bhwh.hrsa.gov/loansscholarships/nhsc>

2 HRSA. <https://www.hrsa.gov/sites/default/files/hrsa/about/organization/bureaus/bhwh/reportstocongress/2016-nhsc-rtc.pdf>

3 BLS. <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/physical-therapists.htm>

4 HRSA. <https://bhwh.hrsa.gov/sites/default/files/bhwh/health-workforce-analysis/research/projections/primary-care-national-projections2013-2025.pdf>

5 APTA. <http://www.apta.org/WorkforceData/>

# 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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