

# Physical Therapist Workforce and Patient Access Act of 2023 (H.R. 4829)



## Position

The American Physical Therapy Association supports the Physical Therapist Workforce and Patient Access Act of 2023 (H.R. 4829). This bipartisan legislation would include physical therapists in the National Health Service Corps Loan Repayment Program. In addition, the legislation would expand patient access to essential physical therapist services for children and adults who receive care at rural health clinics and Federally Qualified Health Centers, also known as community health centers or CHCs.

H.R. 4829 was introduced by Reps. Diana DeGette, D-Colo., and Kelly Armstrong, R-N.D.

## Background

The NHSC Loan Repayment Program, administered by the Health Resources and Services Administration, is a federal program designed to recruit certain medical providers to work in rural and underserved areas, known as Health Professional Shortage Areas, or HPSAs. The program has successfully retained many of its providers to continue to serve in regions of the country that need it most. Based on data from the Congressional Research Service, HPSAs greatly benefit from the NHSC program as approximately 80% of NHSC providers continue to practice in the HPSA for a year after their service commitment and about half remain in the HPSA for 10 years.

Participation in the program is limited to physicians, physician assistants, dentists, nurse practitioners, nurse midwives, and behavioral and mental health providers. Currently, there is no physical rehabilitation component within the NHSC, which could greatly complement the existing program and promote health across the continuum of care. 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, diabetes, stroke, long COVID, obesity, and other chronic diseases and conditions. Physical therapists also can impact an individual's quality of life and ability to work in his or her community.

Most participants in the NHSC provide care in CHCs. According to the National Association of Community Health Centers, CHCs provide health care to more than 30 million patients, 90% of whom are low-income. However,

CHCs are currently restricted in how physical therapist services are provided and reimbursed. This legislation would address this problem by allowing physical therapists to provide care to patients in CHCs and bill Medicare and Medicaid for the benefits covered by their plans. The bill would not mandate that CHCs furnish physical therapy, but rather presents CHCs with the necessary flexibility to offer physical therapist services to children and adults who may require such services.

## Addressing the Opioid Crisis and Long COVID

Most importantly, this bill would help our nation's health care system address the opioid crisis and long COVID. There is a growing realization that opioid-centric solutions for dealing with pain, at best, mask patients' physical problems and delay or impede recovery and, at worst, may prove to be dangerous or even fatal. The bill would ensure that patients in rural and underserved areas have access to nonpharmacological options for the prevention, treatment, and management of pain.

PTs also treat patients with long COVID for musculoskeletal conditions such as fatigue, weakness, and muscle or joint pain. Physical therapy can improve strength, stamina, and quality of life for patients with long COVID symptoms.

We urge Congress to support the Physical Therapist Workforce and Patient Access Act. Physical therapist services are an essential component of the multidisciplinary undertaking that will be required to improve patient access and outcomes in medically underserved areas. Adding PTs to the NHSC Loan Repayment Program and providing CHCs flexibilities and options as to how they provide physical therapy will be critical in addressing health care workforce shortages, battling the opioid epidemic, and treating long COVID.

This legislation is endorsed by APTA, the National Rural Health Association, and the National Association of Community Health Centers.

[Congressional Research Service: The National Health Service Corps, Jan 4, 2022.](#)

[National Association of Community Health Centers: America's Health Centers, August 2022.](#)

# Facts About Physical Therapists and Physical Therapist Assistants



## Who We Are

Physical therapists are movement experts who help to optimize people's physical function, movement, performance, health, quality of life, and well-being. Physical therapists evaluate, diagnose, and manage movement conditions for individuals, and they also provide contributions to public health services aimed at improving population health and the human experience. Physical therapist assistants are educated and licensed or certified clinicians who provide care under the direction and supervision of a licensed physical therapist. PTs and PTAs care for people of all ages and abilities.

## What We Do

After performing an evaluation and making a diagnosis, physical therapists create and implement personalized plans based on best available evidence to help their patients improve mobility, manage pain and other chronic conditions, recover from injury, and prevent future injury and chronic disease. PTs and PTAs empower people to be active participants in their care and well-being. They practice collaboratively with other health professionals to ensure the best clinical outcomes.

## Where We Practice

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

## Education and Licensure

As of 2016, all PTs must receive a doctor of physical therapy degree from an accredited physical therapist education program before taking and passing a national licensure exam that permits them to practice. Licensure is required in each state (or other jurisdiction, including the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands) in which a PT practices. PTAs must complete a two-year associate's degree from an accredited physical therapist assistant program and pass a national exam. State licensure or certification is required in each state (or jurisdiction) in which a PTA works.

## 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 of physical therapy nationwide. Our mission is to build a community that advances the profession of physical therapy to improve the health of society.



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