



APTA Scientific Research Priorities for the Physical Therapy Profession 2021-2022

Advancing Evidence-Based Practice Through Scientific Research

APTA's Scientific Research Priorities for the Physical Therapy Profession for 2021-2022 are the recommended focus areas for this two-year period within the long-range APTA Research Agenda for Physical Therapy. These priorities are a subset of the APTA Research Agenda resulting from an environmental scan and feedback from various stakeholders within the profession and association. These priorities are designed to advance evidence-based practice through scientific research by being a resource for physical therapy researchers and other researchers within the rehabilitation field, research funding agencies, the APTA community, and other relevant stakeholders.

The Scientific Research Priorities for the Physical Therapy Profession are reassessed every two years to support the long-range APTA Research Agenda for Physical Therapy, which is updated every 10 years. Both the research priorities and the research agenda are created by APTA's Scientific and Practice Affairs Committee, with feedback from various stakeholders, including APTA component presidents, practice chairs, and research chairs; APTA council leaders; the Foundation for Physical Therapy Research Board of Trustees; and the Federation of State Boards of Physical Therapy.

APTA will publish an updated Research Agenda for Physical Therapy in 2022, which will guide the profession for the next decade. APTA first published the Research Agenda in 2000 and revised it in 2011. APTA will publish updated research priorities in 2023.

Background: Development of the Research Priorities and Research Agenda

The Scientific and Practice Affairs Committee began development of the 2022 Research Agenda and the 2021-2022 Scientific Research Priorities in January 2020. The process included an environmental scan, development of a conceptual framework, and the collection of input from stakeholders. The result was six research categories (Basic and Translational Science Research, Clinical Research, Education/Professional Development Research, Population Health Research, Health Services Research, Workforce Research), a definition for each of the categories, and numerous associated research items that are currently being synthesized into a 2022 Research Agenda.

To develop the 2021-2022 Scientific Research Priorities, stakeholders were asked to identify the top three research categories from the list of six. This identification was made by using a ranking of 1, 2, and 3 for the top three choices. Based on the survey results, Population Health Research, Clinical Research and Health Services Research were selected as the priority categories. From the compiled research agenda and based on frequency, themes, and current importance to the profession the Scientific and Practice Affairs Committee selected three research items in each of the three selected categories for a total of nine priorities.

APTA 2021-2022 Scientific Research Priorities

APTA's 2021-2022 Scientific Research Priorities for the Physical Therapy Profession identify the top action items from these three categories of scientific research:

- Population health research.
- Clinical research.
- Health services research.



Population Health Research

This type of investigation seeks to characterize, explain, and/or influence the levels and distributions of health within and across populations, such as among individuals and groups, and across time and generations. This includes areas such as health disparities, social determinants of health, and global health.

Action items:

1. Disparities: Investigate health equity in rehabilitation (disparities across race and ethnicities, various age groups, cultures, and socioeconomic status) — and its impact on access to care and outcomes, reducing clinician biases, and institutional and community level oppression.
2. Social determinants of health: Investigate the mechanisms and mediators by which upstream social determinants of health (food insecurity, physical environment, access-to-care, education, employment/working conditions, transportation barriers, early child development, etc.) shape the development of disparities in impairments, activity limitations, participation restrictions, and poor rehabilitation outcomes, in order to identify targets for multilevel intervention.
3. Interventions: Investigate the impact of physical therapy on population outcomes (health and wellness) across the lifespan; including total cost of care, quality of life, reductions in disability, and reduction in the burden of care.

Clinical Research

This type of research investigates the safety, effectiveness, and efficacy of diagnosis and diagnostic procedures, treatment regimens and protocols, devices, and technology intended for human use. This includes areas such as genomics, novel technologies, and innovation.

Action items:

1. Telehealth: Determine the effectiveness of telehealth delivery, clinical examination via telehealth, and patient engagement strategies, and identify patient populations most likely to benefit from telehealth.
2. Value: Determine value (cost-effectiveness, impact on longer-term clinical outcomes, and quality of life) of physical therapy compared with nonrehabilitation treatments for clinical conditions appropriate for physical therapy.
3. Treatment: Determine the effects of physical therapist interventions in addressing secondary prevention and health promotion in individuals with chronic diseases (diabetes, obesity, arthritis, neurological, and other disorders).

Health Services Research

This type of research investigates how social factors, financing systems, organizational structures and processes, health technologies, and personal behaviors affect access to health care, the quality and total cost of health care, and ultimately health and well-being. Its research domains are individuals, families, organizations, institutions, communities, and populations. This includes areas such as patient experience, personalized medicine, and shared decision making.

Action items:

1. Delivery models: Explore cost analysis and assess outcomes of delivery of care models (one-on-one versus multiple patients per provider versus team based) and facility ownership (outpatient corporate versus outpatient independently owned versus outpatient hospital-affiliated versus inpatient hospital based) and payment models (insurance versus cash pay).
2. Utilization and cost: Explore the financial benefits for physical therapy. Compare utilization and costs (outcomes/costs) of the numerous practice areas for physical therapists (identifying where physical therapists add value to the system, where physical therapists add additional cost, where physical therapy services add redundancy, etc.).
3. Payment and insurance: Explore the impact of various payment models and insurance providers on patient and clinical outcomes and downstream costs and utilization

About the Scientific and Practice Affairs Committee

The APTA Board of Directors created the Scientific and Practice Affairs Committee in 2019 to provide strategic advice, recommendations, and counsel to the Board in the areas of practice and research.

As part of its charge, the committee does the following:

- Identifies and recommends practice and research priorities to the Board of Directors.
- Recommends a research agenda for the profession to the Board of Directors and maintains the adopted agenda.
- Annually advises and counsels the Board of Directors on proposed practice- and research-related policies and positions coming before the APTA House of Delegates.
- Identifies and provides advice to the Board of Directors regarding innovative practice models and strategies to successfully implement them.



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