

# The Allied Health Workforce Diversity Act (H.R. 3320/S. 1679)



## Position

The American Physical Therapy Association strongly urges Congress to enact the Allied Health Workforce Diversity Act (H.R. 3320/S. 1679). 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, respiratory therapy, and audiology. H.R. 3637 was introduced by Reps. Bobby Rush, D-Ill., and Markwayne Mullin, R-Okla. S. 1679 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.

## Support A More Diverse Workforce

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, respiratory therapy, 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.

## Endorsing Organizations

This legislation is supported by the following organizations:

- American Physical Therapy Association
- American Occupational Therapy Association
- American Speech-Language-Hearing Association
- American Academy of Audiology
- American Association for Respiratory Care
- American Academy of Physical Therapy
- National Association of Black Physical Therapists
- Asian/Pacific Occupational Therapy Association
- National Black Occupational Therapy Coalition
- Coalition of Occupational Therapy Advocates for Diversity
- Multicultural, Diversity, and Inclusion Network
- Association of University Centers on Disability

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



**Co-sponsor H.R. 3320/S. 1679 Today!**

For more information and contact info for APTA Government Affairs staff, scan here or visit [apta.org/position-paper](http://apta.org/position-paper).

