



New Data Shows Strong, Sustained Demand for Physical Therapists

Record Applicant Pool Reinforces Strength and Appeal of the Profession

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Alexandria, VA — The American Physical Therapy Association today announced encouraging data from the close of the 2025–2026 Physical Therapist Centralized Application Service cycle, reinforcing that interest in pursuing a career as a physical therapist remains strong and resilient.

For the 2025–2026 cycle, there were 19,236 unique applicants, the highest level in PTCAS history, reflecting sustained demand for Doctor of Physical therapy education and careers. PTCAS, launched by APTA in 2008, streamlines the application process for students and academic programs while providing valuable insights that help strengthen and advance a highly qualified workforce.

The message is clear: physical therapy continues to attract highly motivated, high-achieving students seeking careers grounded in purpose, impact, and connection. Even amid broader healthcare system challenges, including payment and administrative burdens, students continue to choose physical therapy as a meaningful path to improve lives and communities.

“Students continue to choose physical therapy in remarkable numbers, indicating the profession continues to be a highly sought after career in healthcare” said APTA CEO Justin Moore, PT, DPT. “This is a profession grounded in purpose, impact, and growing relevance and value in today’s healthcare system. Physical therapy remains a vibrant and highly valued career path, now and into the future. We’re encouraged by these trends and cautiously optimistic and will continue working to push and sustain this upward momentum.”

A Profession of Growing Importance

Physical therapists play a critical role in improving patient outcomes, supporting recovery, managing chronic conditions, and advancing preventive care, particularly as the nation faces the challenges of an aging population and rising healthcare costs.

The continued strength of the applicant pipeline highlights the profession's enduring appeal to individuals seeking a career that is both impactful and deeply connected to improving quality of life.

Addressing Workforce Challenges with Action

APTA recognizes that physical therapy, like many healthcare professions, faces ongoing workplace challenges, including reimbursement pressures, administrative complexity, and evolving care delivery models.

Association leaders emphasize that these challenges are being actively addressed through advocacy, innovation, and collaboration across the profession, and do not diminish the value or opportunity within physical therapy.

"The challenges facing our profession are real, complex, and solvable," said APTA Private Practice President Mike Horsfield, PT, MBA. "By focusing on purpose-driven practice environments, we can build a stronger, healthier future for our professionals, practices, and communities."

Leading with Data, Strengthening the Profession

APTA continues to work closely with academic programs, accrediting bodies, policymakers, and employers to align education, workforce needs, and healthcare system demands. **(See [APTA's Workforce Data](#))**

Through data-driven insights and collaboration, APTA is advancing key priorities including.

- Workforce sustainability and retention
- Education access and affordability
- Federal policy and funding alignment
- Recognition of physical therapy as a high-value, essential healthcare profession

APTA will also continue to amplify the profession's impact through initiatives such as [#PTMovesMe](#), which highlights the meaningful connections between physical therapists, physical therapist assistants, students, and the people and communities they serve. Through civic engagement in the kindergarten through college education space, strategic partnerships, and member participation, APTA is increasing awareness of the physical therapy professions and the pathways into them.

Looking Ahead

The final PTCAS report inclusive of acceptance data for the 2025-26 application cycle will be released in early 2027, with key metrics from the applicant pool available in fall 2026, offering additional insights into trends shaping the future of the profession.

"There is a clear and compelling story to tell about physical therapy," said APTA President Kyle Covington, PT, DPT, PhD. "It is one of growth, resilience, and opportunity, and we are committed to ensuring that story is understood by prospective students, policymakers, and the public alike. APTA remains committed to advancing a profession that is essential to the health of society and valued by those it serves."

About APTA

The American Physical Therapy Association represents 100,000 physical therapists, physical therapist assistants, and physical therapy students nationwide. Visit the APTA website to learn more.