

# Primary Health Services Enhancement Act (H.R. 5365)



## Position

The American Physical Therapy Association strongly urges Congress to pass the Primary Health Services Enhancement Act (H.R. 5365). This bipartisan legislation would expand patient access to essential physical therapy services to children and adults who receive care at rural health clinics and federally qualified health centers, also known as community health centers. H.R. 5365 was introduced by Reps Ron Kind, D-Wis, Diana DeGette, D-Colo., Jackie Walorski, R-Ind., and Don Bacon R-Neb.

## Background

Community health centers provide primary health services to more than 30 million people in over 12,000 rural and urban communities across America, including nearly 3 million Medicare beneficiaries and one in five Medicaid beneficiaries. These facilities provide a lifeline to communities in need of essential health services whose barriers to health care include, cost, lack of insurance, distance, and language. Presently, CHCs offer a range of health services, including access to physicians, advanced practice nurses, dentists, clinical laboratory, emergency medical, behavioral health, and COVID-19 testing and vaccine distribution. However, CHCs are restricted in how physical therapy services are provided and reimbursed. H.R. 5365 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.

## Pain Management and COVID-19

Between 2015 and 2018, 73% of community health centers reported an increase in opioid use disorder, and 69% reported an increased number of patients addicted to prescription opioids. This abuse is widespread in rural and medically underserved areas where CHCs are often the only option for medical care. COVID-19 has caused health, social, and economic stress that has exacerbated the opioid epidemic. Data collected by the Overdose Detection Mapping Application Program demonstrated that drug overdoses generally were 18% higher in March,

29% higher in April, and 42% higher in May 2020 than in their respective months in 2019. There is a growing realization that current strategies for managing pain have to change—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 Role of Physical Therapy

PTs evaluate individuals for risk factors for pain to help prevent future pain issues. These services often can reduce, if not eliminate, a patient's pain, and help a patient avoid surgery, hospitalizations, and opioid use.

Physical therapists treat patients with long COVID for musculoskeletal conditions such as fatigue, weakness, and muscle or joint pain. Prescribed movement is essential to long COVID recovery, and physical therapy can improve strength, stamina, and quality of life for patients with long COVID symptoms. Therefore, physical therapy must be part of solving both public health emergencies.

## Providing Flexibility and Increasing Access

Physical therapists work both independently and as members of multidisciplinary health care teams to enhance the health, well-being, and quality of life of their patients, who present with a wide range of conditions, including those that commonly cause pain. This legislation would afford Medicare and Medicaid beneficiaries greater access to their physical therapy benefit. H.R. 5365 does not mandate that CHCs furnish physical therapy, but rather presents CHCs with the necessary flexibility to offer physical therapy services to children and adults who may require such services.

This legislation is supported the National Association of Community Health Centers.

# 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.



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