

Expanded Telehealth Access Act of 2023 (H.R. 3875)



Position

The American Physical Therapy Association supports the Expanded Telehealth Access Act (H.R. 3875), legislation that would add physical therapists, physical therapist assistants, and other therapy providers in private practice, as well as facility-based outpatient therapy providers under Medicare Part B, as permanent authorized providers of telehealth services under Medicare. H.R. 3875 was introduced by Reps. Mikie Sherrill, D-N.J., and Diana Harshbarger, R-Tenn.

Background

In response to the coronavirus public health emergency in 2020, Congress passed and the president signed into law legislation that authorized the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services to significantly expand Medicare's coverage of telehealth services during the PHE to protect the health and safety of Medicare patients. Under the authority of Section 1135 of the Social Security Act, CMS permitted virtually all medical providers, including physical therapists, to provide services via telehealth to Medicare beneficiaries. In late 2022, Congress approved legislation that extended Medicare's telehealth flexibilities for another two years. Medical providers will be permitted to treat Medicare patients via telehealth until Dec. 31, 2024. After that date, Medicare patients may lose coverage of telehealth visits unless Congress acts.

Improving Patient Outcomes

Telehealth technology can safely and effectively meet the needs of patients and has proven to be a widely utilized resource. Physical therapy provided via telehealth can improve access to care for patients who live in rural and underserved areas. It has allowed patients to achieve desired outcomes for a variety of health problems, including post-traumatic stress syndrome, chronic pain, stroke, and other neurological and musculoskeletal conditions. PTs and PTAs utilize telehealth to deliver the following services:

- Conduct evaluations when necessary to prevent delays in essential care.
- Guide patients through prescribed exercises, analyze the patient's performance, instruct modifications of a care program, and promote self-efficacy.
- Assess a patient's home environment and recommend adjustments that improve safety and navigation, which is harder to replicate in the clinic.

- Reduce the number of in-clinic visits and still maintain important monitoring and follow-up care. This is especially important for Medicare patients who lack transportation or socioeconomic means for multiple in-person visits.
- Co-treat with another clinician who is treating patients via real-time audio and video technology.
- Supervise treatment being provided by a PTA in a patient's home.

Telehealth helps to ensure continuity of care. In a recent report by [Epic Research](#), the findings indicated that expanded access to telehealth resulted in fewer patients missing their health care appointments. Additionally, telehealth is also a cost-effective method to deliver quality care. The report found that there was not increased utilization of health care services and concluded that many telehealth appointments were substitutions, not additive. Most telehealth visits did not necessitate an in-person visit, according to the report. For PTs specifically, the study noted that 65% of telehealth appointments did not require a follow-up with the PT.

Hospital admissions and readmissions, emergency department visits, and urgent care visits, among other expenses, potentially will decrease if beneficiaries have access to both in-person and telehealth services. Moreover, increasing access to physical therapy, including through audio and video telecommunications technology, can result in increased work productivity and decreased absenteeism while improving presenteeism. Physical therapists play a critical role in ensuring that Americans are healthy and able to work.

Support Permanent Telehealth Extensions

APTA urges Congress to support the Expanded Telehealth Access Act to make PTs and PTAs permanent authorized providers of telehealth under Medicare.

This bill is endorsed by APTA, the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association, the American Occupational Therapy Association, and the Alliance for Connected Care.

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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