

American Board of Physical Therapy Specialties



BOD Y05-25-01-01 [Amended BOD Y06-21-02-05; BOD G09-14-02-03; BOD G10-09-07-14; BOD G07-08-02-02; BOD G11-06-06-06; G11-05-27-72; BOD G03-05-19-53; BOD 03-03-18-46; BOD 03-00-34-93] [Policy]

I. Purpose

Pursuant to association policy [APTA Clinical Specialization Policy](#), the American Board of Physical Therapy Specialties guides the American Physical Therapy Association's Clinical Specialization Program and its specialty councils. ABPTS shall provide reasonable uniformity in the level and type of standards adopted as the basis for each specialty and subspecialty that includes the participation of consumer representatives in the decision-making process.

II. ABPTS Board of Commissioners, Including Composition, Eligibility, Terms, and Term Limits

A. Size of the ABPTS Board of Commissioners: 12 members.

B. Composition of the ABPTS Board of Commissioners and Commissioner Eligibility.

1. Nine commissioners are ABPTS board-certified physical therapists who represent a broad range of approved areas of board certification specialty practice and are APTA physical therapist members in good standing with a minimum of two years' experience with any of the following:
 - a. Specialty panel or related activities (e.g., external professional development portfolio reviewer, standard setting participant).
 - b. Specialization Academy of Content Experts.
 - c. American Board of Physical Therapy Residency and Fellowship Education Board of Commissioners.
 2. One commissioner serves as a test and measurements expert member who may be a physical therapist and shall have expertise in education and evaluation.
 3. One commissioner serves as a consumer member who shall not be a physical therapist or physical therapist assistant.
 4. One commissioner serves as a public member who shall not be a physical therapist or physical therapist assistant.
- C. Selection of ABPTS Board of Commissioners: ABPTS Board of Commissioners.
- D. Length of Term and Term Start Date: four years with each term beginning on January 1.
- E. Maximum Number of Consecutive Full Terms: one with partial terms not considered a full term.

III. Responsibilities of the ABPTS Board of Commissioners:

A. Establishes criteria for each subspecialty and subspecialty.

- B. Provides an efficient and credible system for the evaluation, certification, and maintenance of certification of physical therapist specialization and subspecialization.
- C. Establishes and maintains processes and procedures for the operations of the certification and maintenance of certification processes.
- D. Develops minimum requirements for certification and maintenance of certification to be used across all specialties and subspecialties.
- E. Oversees specialty panels, which define, develop, and modify the requirements for certification and recertification.
- F. Establishes standard operating procedures specific to examination administration and scoring.
- G. Serves as the appeal body for individuals whose eligibility application for initial certification or recertification is denied by a specialty panel.
Approves certification and recertification of qualified clinical specialists in each specialty and subspecialty.
- H. Determines outcomes of requests for reconsideration of certification and recertification decisions.
- I. Provide consultation to and oversee activities of approved specialty panels.
- J. Provides formal recognition to board certified clinical specialists and subspecialists.
- K. Makes appointments to ABPTS, specialty panels, and examination item writers.
- L. Provides consultation to and oversees activities of approved specialty panels, which define, develop, and modify the requirements for certification and recertification.
- M. Reviews petitions for the formation of new specialty and subspecialty areas and makes appropriate recommendations to the Board of Directors for consideration by the House of Delegates.
- N. Sets reasonable and appropriate certification fees to ensure that ABPTS and certification staff can effectively carry out their roles and responsibilities.

IV. Responsibilities of the APTA Board of Directors

- A. Assumes legal and fiduciary obligations on behalf of the American Physical Therapy Association, including the outcomes resulting from ABPTS action or inaction.
- B. Approves the annual budget, including the program budget and related work plans for ABPTS that ensures ABPTS has the necessary resources to conduct high quality services to current and prospective board-certified specialists and subspecialists.
- C. Serves as an appeal body for certification petitioners under consideration for a new specialty or subspecialty area.
- D. Serves as an appeal body for certification examinees and recertification candidates.
- E. Reviews complaints related to ABPTS' adherence to its processes and procedures.
- F. Ratifies selection of ABPTS Board of Commissioners for indemnification purposes.
- G. Conducts periodic reviews of ABPTS, which occurs at least annually.
- H. Provides ABPTS with a liaison from the APTA Board of Directors.

V. Governance Structure and Autonomy

- A. APTA is the legal entity responsible for ABPTS, which functions as a part of APTA.
- B. APTA provides the legal/corporate and administrative infrastructure (i.e. budget, accounting, facilities, insurance, personnel) to ABPTS.
- C. ABPTS acts in alignment with APTA bylaws and policies and in doing so shall be autonomous in meeting its responsibilities as identified in III., above.
- D. The ABPTS Board of Commissioners and any groups appointed by ABPTS shall not direct or manage APTA employees; however, the Chair of the ABPTS Board of Commissioners shall be consulted by the supervisor of the program director at least semi-annually on the performance of the program director of the specialist certification program and resource sufficiency to support ABPTS functions.
- E. The Chair of the ABPTS Board of Commissioners is accountable to the APTA Board of Directors.

VI. Amendment of This Policy

Amendments to this policy are made at the discretion of the APTA Board of Directors and may be requested by the ABPTS Board of Commissioners. The APTA Board of Directors shall consult with the ABPTS Board of Commissioners before making a policy change.

Explanation of Reference Numbers:

BOD P00-00-00-00 stands for Board of Directors/month/year/page/vote in the Board of Directors minutes; the "P" indicates that it is a position (see below). For example, BOD P06-22-05-04 means that this position can be found in the June 2022 Board of Directors meeting minutes on Page 5 and that it was Vote 4.

E: Binding Ethical Document | P: Position | Y: Policy

Last Updated: 05/29/2025

Contact: governancehouse@apta.org