

Private Practice Physical Therapists

Small business professionals restoring function to America - one patient at a time.

ADD PHYSICAL THERAPISTS TO THE NATIONAL HEALTH SERVICE CORPS

RECOMMENDATION: The Private Practice Section (PPS) of the American Physical Therapy Association (APTA) urges Congress to pass the bipartisan *Physical Therapist Workforce and Patient Access Act (S.970)* to add physical therapists to the National Health Service Corps (NHSC) Loan Repayment Program.

BACKGROUND:

The National Health Service Corps (NHSC) addresses the health needs of more than 11.4 million underserved individuals across the nation. The program allows for the placement of certain health care professionals in areas designated as a health care professional shortage area (HPSA). In exchange for serving at least two years in these areas, eligible health professionals are provided up to \$50,000 towards the cost of their education. In some cases, providers can extend their NHSC contract and receive up to \$100,000 in loan repayment in exchange for 5 years of service. The NHSC has not only served as a pipeline for providers in underserved areas, but has successfully retained many of its providers. For example, in 2012, 82% of NHSC providers stayed on in the communities after their service obligation had expired.

Based on current trends in the physical therapy workforce, the shortage of physical therapists in the U.S. could potentially reach over 27,000 by 2020. The U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor and Statistics notes that many physical therapists live in urban and suburban areas. This maldistribution of physical therapists throughout the country is likely to profoundly impact rural and underserved areas.

INCREASE ACCESS TO CARE AND NONPHARMCOLOGICAL INTERVENTIONS FOR PAIN IN UNDERSERVED AREAS:

An essential member of the healthcare team, physical therapists (PTs) play an important role in the management of chronic disease and conditions such as diabetes, stroke, and obesity, and their impact on an individual's quality of life and ability to work in his or her community. Adding physical therapists to the NHSC will also ensure that individuals in underserved areas have access to nonpharmacological options for the prevention, treatment, and management of pain. Physical therapy is an essential component of the multidisciplinary undertaking that will be required to improve both patient outcomes and alter the trajectory of the current opioid crisis. PTs also can serve as the entry point to the healthcare system for many individuals, maximizing the care received by the entire population of the underserved communities. **Currently, there is no rehabilitative care component in the NHSC and physical therapists are not eligible to participate in the program.**

To address this concern Senators Jon Tester (D-MT), Roger Wicker (R-MS), and Angus King (I-ME) introduced S.970. This legislation authorizes physical therapists to participate in the NHSC Loan Repayment Program. Including PTs in the NHSC would support recruitment of new therapists and improve patient access to essential physical therapy services in rural, remote, and medically underserved areas. Additionally, physical therapists who own clinics in HPSAs could use this program as a recruitment tool and simultaneously reduce their initial salary outlay as their business grows to provide additional community-based care and support an additional therapist long-term.

PPS believes that including physical therapists in the NHSC Loan Repayment Program (S.970) will improve functional outcomes and save costs by increasing access to critical rehabilitation services and nonpharmacological options for pain management in underserved communities.

To cosponsor S.970, please contact Katie Rubinger (Katie_Rubinger@tester.senate.gov) in Senator Tester's office.