



New Legislation Could Provide Relief From Some Student Loan Debt for PTs

Inclusion in The National Health Service Corps' Loan Repayment Program Elevates the Role of Physical Therapists in Community Health Centers Around the Country

**For Immediate Release:
July 25, 2023**

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Alexandria, VA – The American Physical Therapy Association applauds new legislation that addresses the physical therapy workforce and expands patient access to therapy services in rural and underserved areas. Introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives by Reps. Diane DeGette, D-Colo., and Kelly Armstrong, R-N.D., as the Physical Therapist Workforce and Patient Access Act (H.R. 4829), this bipartisan legislation would add physical therapists to the National Health Service Corps Loan Repayment Program and expand patient access to physical therapist services in community health centers.

“APTA applauds Reps. DeGette and Armstrong for introducing the Physical Therapist Workforce and Patient Access Act, bipartisan legislation that will provide relief to the current health care workforce crisis and ensure residents in rural and medically underserved areas have greater access to physical therapist services,” said APTA President Roger Herr, PT, MPA. “Including physical therapists in the National Health Service Corps Loan Repayment Program will help recruit and retain therapists to deliver care in areas experiencing health care workforce shortages. Moreover, this legislation will provide options and flexibilities for community health centers in offering physical therapy so that patient care is not delayed. Physical therapy is vital to helping patients recover from long COVID and provides a nonpharmacological treatment option to opioids for those who have chronic pain.”

The loan repayment program repays up to \$50,000 in outstanding student loans to certain health care professionals who agree to work for at least two years in a designated Health Professional Shortage Area. The inclusion of physical therapists in the NHSC will expand patient access to essential physical therapist services for children and adults who receive care at rural health clinics and Federally Qualified Health Centers, also known as CHCs, which provide health care to more than 30 million patients, 90% of whom have low incomes.

CHCs are currently restricted in how physical therapist services are provided and paid for. H.R. 4829 addresses this problem by allowing CHCs to hire physical therapists as full-time employees and bill Medicare and Medicaid for physical therapist services, which those respective programs already cover.

"Underserved areas were struggling through the ongoing opioid crisis way before they were hit with the COVID-19 pandemic and now its aftermath," said Steve Kline, specialist, APTA congressional affairs. "H.R. 4829 would fix a glaring gap in the NHSC — namely, its lack of a physical rehab component — and connect the dots between NHSC service and community health centers, where much of that service takes place."

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The American Physical Therapy Association represents 100,000 physical therapists, physical therapist assistants, and physical therapy students nationwide. Visit [apta.org](https://www.apta.org) to learn more.