



FAL Briefing Memo

January 2026

Please share this document with your component's leadership and members!

Federal Agencies.

- **Centers for Medicaid and Medicare Services:** On December 4, 2025, APTA attended an event at Health and Human Services (HHS) along with senior HHS policymakers and association and other organizational leaders announcing a new payment model - [Advancing Chronic Care with Effective, Scalable Solutions](#) (ACCESS). This model tests an outcome-aligned payment approach in Original Medicare to expand access to new technology-supported care options that help people improve their health and prevent and manage chronic disease focusing on conditions including chronic musculoskeletal pain. ACCESS will begin on July 5, 2026, and operate for 10 years, through June 30, 2036. APTA subsequently reached out to CMS seeking clarity on the model's physician clinical director requirement given direct access and PT primary care.

U.S. Congress

- **Medicare Fee Schedule Reform:** In response to an invitation to submit comments to the Congressional Doctors Caucus, APTA submitted extensive comments outlining the current payment challenges faced by physical therapists under the Medicare Physician Fee Schedule. PTA's recommendations included:
 - Reforming the Merit-Based Incentive Payment System, or MIPS, program
 - Expanding opportunities for participation in alternative payment models, or APMs
 - Increasing transparency and analysis of the CPT coding valuation process

In addition, APTA provided comments on the need for Congress to repeal the problematic policy known as the [Multiple Procedure Payment Reduction](#), or MPPR. The request for information from the Republican and Democratic House Doctors Caucuses – comprised of U.S. House members who are physicians – was sent out to select national health care associations as part of ongoing efforts to reform the physician fee schedule.

Also noted in APTA's comment letter is that physical therapists, in particular, have struggled to participate in MIPS or meaningfully engage in APMs. This is in part because CMS has failed to pilot or implement several alternative payment and delivery models applicable to therapy providers, highlighting the need to adopt APTA's recently developed alternative payment model that addresses frailty by incorporating physical therapists into a patient's primary care team. Read more [HERE](#).

- **Telehealth:** On January 22, 2026, the U.S. House passed a minibus appropriations bill funding the U.S. Department of Health & Human Services (HHS) through the end of 2026. The legislation includes a *two-year extension* of Medicare telehealth flexibilities for physical therapists and physical therapist assistants through the end of 2027. The legislation now goes to the U.S. Senate for consideration; the spending package must be enacted by January 30 deadline to avoid a government shutdown.
- **Department of Education:** The U.S. Department of Education's recently announced proposal to reclassify physical therapy and other health care degrees as graduate degrees as opposed to professional degrees for loan limit purposes is facing pushback from members of Congress. Much of Congress's attention is focused on how the lower loan limits (\$20,500 per year/\$100,000 total) available to students in the reclassified professions would affect an already-understaffed health care marketplace. On December 5, 2025, Rep. Kennedy (D-NY) was joined by 69 other House Democrats in a sign-on letter to Secretary Linda McMahon expressing their concerns about the proposal and urging the Department to reconsider it; that letter to Secretary McMahon can be found [HERE](#). Rep. Kennedy has also introduced legislation known as the [LEAP Act](#), which would eliminate the loan limit disparities between professional and graduate loans. Rep. Lawler (R-NY) introduced his own bill, the [Professional Student Degree Act](#), which would add physical therapy to the statutory list of professional degrees for loan limit purposes. The proposed rule that would enact the new loan limits is expected to be published for public comment later in January.
- **Legislative Bill Tracker:** Be sure to check out the APTA Legislative Bill Tracker that outlines some of the bills that APTA is currently working on in the 119th Congress. Click [HERE](#).

Events

- Support PTPAC's advocacy efforts on Capitol Hill at PTPAC's evening event during Combined Sections Meeting. This year, the event will take place at [Golden Road Brewing!](#) The event will be on Friday, February 13, from 7:00-10:00 PM. Tickets cost \$100 for PTs and PTAs and \$50 for students. The ticket includes drinks, food, and music. You can buy your PTPAC tickets when registering for conference online. You must be at least 21 years of age to attend. All PTPAC Eagle club members receive one

free ticket but please contact Michael Matlack at michaelmatlack@apta.org to reserve your ticket.

- APTA Capitol Hill Day (April 19-21) Registration is now open ([APTA Capitol Hill Day 2026 | APTA](#)). This year's location is on Capitol Hill at the Hilton Washington DC Capitol Hill.

APTA Articles of Interest

- [APTA Invited to Inform Key Congressional Caucus on Medicare Payment Reform | APTA](#)
- [2026 Medicare Physician Fee Schedule Calculator Now Available for APTA Members | APTA](#)
- [CMS Launches Models for Chronic Care Management and Lifestyle Interventions | APTA](#)
- [Quality Payment Program: What Physical Therapists Need to Know in 2026 | APTA](#)
- [APTA Unveils Key Workforce and Income Trends in Physical Therapy | APTA](#)
- [IDEA at 50: What the Education Law Has Accomplished and How to Protect It | APTA](#)
- [Final 2026 Home Health Rule: CMS Reduces Impact of PDGM Cut | APTA](#)
- [CMS Launches new ACCESS Model to expand access to new technology-supported care options | CMS](#)