



## JGAC Briefing Memo

March 2026

### Federal Agencies

- **ACCESS MODEL:** The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) released a [Request for Applications for the Advancing Chronic Care with Effective Scalable Solutions \(ACCESS\) Model](#) on February 12, 2026. ACCESS pays providers for measurable outcomes through technology-enabled care for patients in traditional Medicare. The Request for Applications includes previously unreleased details about ACCESS including payment amounts for each of the four clinical tracks. Currently, ACCESS continues to require a physician clinical director for oversight in participation of the model. ACCESS will begin on July 5, 2026, and will continue for 10 years, through June 30, 2036. Applications are being accepted now through April 1, 2033. Applications to participate in the first cohort are due April 1, 2026.

The requirement for application is that there is a physician clinical director so an independent PT practice could only apply if they employ or contract with a physician. We are currently not aware of any PTs applying. We were however able to establish that PTs can bill for co-management of patients under the ACCESS model. The other important caveat is that patients who are being managed under ACCESS cannot receive physical therapy from the same provider for the same condition so if a PT is an ACCESS participant and they determine that the patient requires PT they would need to refer the patient to another PT provider. **Read more [HERE](#).**

- **HHS:** On Feb. 23, 2026, APTA submitted comments to HHS on the [Request for Information: Accelerating the Adoption and Use of Artificial Intelligence as Part of Clinical Care](#). APTA provided information on barriers to adoption, governance issues, and AI in prior authorization. Included in its submission, APTA noted that AI should augment licensed clinicians, not replace them and that it can improve efficiency and outcomes when paired with strong guardrails, transparency, reimbursement alignment, and clear accountability.
- **Education:** On March 2, 2026, APTA submitted comments in on the [Department of Education's Reimaging and Improving Student Education proposed rule](#), which proposed a definition of "professional degrees" that excludes DPT degrees, as well as several other health professions degrees. This rule accompanies the One Big Beautiful

Bill Act, which created separate loan limits for graduate and professional degree programs and eliminated student access to graduate PLUS loans. APTA's letter thoroughly explains how the DPT degree meets all the requirements of a professional degree and explicitly defines the potential consequences of the reclassification of the DPT as a graduate degree. APTA also signed on to comments submitted by the Advanced Professional Workforce Alliance of which APTA is a steering committee member, and the Coalition to Preserve Rehab (CPR).

## U.S. Congress

- **Telehealth:** On February 11, 2026, Senators Daines (R-MT) and Tina Smith (D-MN) reintroduced the Expanded Telehealth Access Act (S.3834), an APTA-endorsed bill that would make PTs and PTAs permanent authorized providers of telehealth in the Medicare program. This comes after Congress authorized a two-year extension of current pandemic-era Medicare telehealth policies for another two years which ensures that PTs and PTAs are approved telehealth providers in Medicare through the end of 2027.
- **Administrative Burden:** On February 18, 2026, APTA submitted a detailed statement to the Senate Special Committee on Aging in response to the Committee's hearing, "The Doctor is Out: How Washington's Rules Drove Physicians Out of Medicine." APTA urged Congress to reform current prior authorization procedures in Medicare Advantage plans that too often produce unnecessary delays in patient access to needed care. APTA also offered a series of policy recommendations to repeal or significantly modify outdated and costly CMS regulations in the Medicare provider reimbursement system. Read APTA's comments [HERE](#).
- **Workforce:** On February 24, 2026, the House Ways and Means Health Subcommittee held a hearing, "Advancing the Next Generation of America's Healthcare Workforce," to examine how to better train and increase the number of healthcare professionals, especially in the medically underserved regions. APTA submitted extensive comments to the Subcommittee detailing our support legislation to include PTs in the National Health Service Corp (NHSC) Loan Repayment Program, reforming the unsustainable Medicare provider payment system, and opposition to the proposed rule from the Department of Education on federal student loans.
- **NHSC Legislation:** On February 25, 2026, APTA submitted to Congress an APTA-led letter of support signed by almost forty organizations endorsing H.R. 5621 – the Physical Therapist Workforce and Patient Access Act. This APTA-endorsed bill would add physical therapists to the NHSC Loan Repayment program that offers up to \$50,000 in school loan repayment in exchange for completion of at least a 2-year service commitment in an underserved region. Further, this bill would provide more flexibility to federal community health centers in how they provide and bill physical therapist services. Supporting organizations include the National Association of Community

Health Centers, the National Association of Rural Health Clinics, the National Rural Health Association, the American Farm Bureau, and many health clinics and hospitals.  
<https://www.apta.org/siteassets/pdfs/advocacy/apta-sign-on-letter-hr5621.pdf>

- **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 119<sup>th</sup> Congress. Click [HERE](#).

## Events & Presentations

- 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

- [CMS Releases New Details on the ACCESS Model, Including Payment Structure | APTA](#)
- [Rural Health Care Workforce Shortages Highlighted in Congressional Hearing | APTA](#)
- [Congressional Advocacy by the Numbers: Together, We Are Driving Payment Progress | APTA](#)
- [APTA State Chapters Record 48 Wins in 2025, Work Continues in 2026 | APTA](#)
- [APTA State Advocacy Map | APTA](#)
- [Payer Advocacy by the Numbers: APTA Members and Staff Driving Progress | APTA](#)
- [Medicare Telehealth Flexibilities Extended Through Dec. 31, 2027 | APTA](#)