

## 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 (H.R.1639/S.619)* 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 9.7 million underserved individuals across the nation. The program allows for the placement of certain health care professionals in areas which are either medically underserved (MUA) or 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 to continue to serve in the areas of the country that needed it most. For example, in 2012, the NHSC had an 82% retention rate for providers within the program.

At the same time, 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 profoundly impacting rural and underserved areas. The U.S. Department of Labor's Bureau of Labor and Statistics notes that many physical therapists live in urban and suburban areas, creating a maldistribution of physical therapists throughout the country.

#### INCREASE ACCESS TO CARE IN RURAL AND UNDERSERVED AREAS:

As 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. In addition to the care they provide, PTs also can alleviate the demands on other primary care providers by serving 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, H.R.1639 was introduced by Representatives John Shimkus (R-IL) and Diane DeGette (D-CO); S.619 was introduced by Senators Jon Tester (D-MT) and Roger Wicker (R-MS). This legislation authorizes physical therapists to participate in the NHSC Loan Repayment Program. Should this bill become law, those PTs who own clinics in MUAs or HPSAs could use this program as a recruitment tool and simultaneously reduce their initial salary outlays. This would also support recruitment of new therapists and improve patient access to essential physical therapy services in rural, remote, and medically underserved areas.

**PPS believes that providing access to therapy in rural and underserved areas will improve functional outcomes and save costs. Including physical therapists in the NHSC Loan Repayment Program (H.R.1639/S.619) will help ensure that rehabilitation services are available to underserved communities.**

Please contact Brian Looser ([brian.looser@mail.house.gov](mailto:brian.looser@mail.house.gov)) in Representative John Shimkus's office to cosponsor **H.R.1639**. To cosponsor **S.619**, please contact Hannah VanHoose ([hannah\\_vanhoose@tester.senate.gov](mailto:hannah_vanhoose@tester.senate.gov)) in Senator Tester's office.