

## **APTA Advocacy Network Newsletter — October 2024 Edition**

### **APTA's Fall Focus on Advocacy: Payment, Payment, and Payment**

October brings with it fall weather, college football, and the beloved pumpkin spice latte. Congress has recessed for the month, and members have left Washington, D.C., to campaign back in their districts for the upcoming November elections. Members of Congress won't return to D.C. until mid-November, and when they do, they will face a mountain of work to complete before the 118th Congress adjourns in December. APTA's top priority for Congress is to address [Medicare Payment](#).

APTA is advocating for payment reforms to be included in any year-end legislative package by Congress, and it appears the next anticipated spending deal to fund the government will potentially be the legislative vehicle. Funding for the federal government runs out Dec. 20, meaning Congress must pass another spending package by that date or face a government shutdown. This year-end spending deal is being targeted to be the vehicle to include policies to boost payment to the 2025 Medicare Physician Fee Schedule and provide much-needed payment reforms, including the creation of an annual payment update for the fee schedule. This will also be the vehicle to provide a two-year extension on Medicare telehealth flexibilities, which expires Dec. 31.

APTA and APTA member advocates have been busy pushing for these payment reform policies, including APTA's annual update to the fee schedule via [the Strengthening Medicare for Patients and Providers Act \(H.R. 2474\)](#). In addition, new legislation introduced in August by Sens. Peter Welch, D-Vt., and John Boozman, R-Ark., titled Physician Fee Stabilization Act, is aimed at addressing the outdated budget neutrality threshold, which is the policy that has triggered

harmful automatic payment cuts to Medicare for dozens of provider types. Both bills are supported by APTA, the American Medical Association, and other provider groups for inclusion in any year-end legislative package.

This effort is gaining steam. On Oct. 15, [a letter signed by 233 bipartisan members of the U.S. House of Representatives](#) was sent to House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., and House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries, D-N.Y., urging action by Congress before the end of the year to address the Medicare Physician Fee Schedule. The letter states that Congress must stop the impending 2.8% cut from occurring in 2025. In addition, the letter urges Congress to enact reforms to the fee schedule by providing an annual payment update to reflect inflation and increased costs, as well as addressing the current budget neutrality policy.

This latest development follows [a letter to congressional leadership that APTA and over 100 provider groups sent on Sept. 10](#) that urged quick action on Medicare payment before the end of the year.

The unknown variable at this time is what Congress will or won't get done during the frenzied final weeks and fourth quarter of the 118th Congress.

In these final three months of 2024 and the waning days of the 118th Congress, keeping the pressure on for Medicare payment reforms is more critical than ever. Stay up to date by visiting [APTA's #FixMedicareNow page](#).

As always, thank you for your advocacy and for being members of APTA.

Best,

Justin Elliott

Vice President, Government Affairs

## Advocacy Quick Hits



Cortney Meunier, SPT, was the 2024 APTA Posny Intern. She is a third-year DPT student at the University of Wisconsin at Stevens Point. During her time at APTA, Cortney was able to attend Hill meetings, including meeting U.S. Sen. Tammy Baldwin, D-Wis.



In September, APTA hosted the Physical Activity Alliance's Physical Activity Symposium. This annual event brings together individuals representing over 100 various health care, patient, and fitness organizations. Erin Wentzell, PT, DPT, currently serves as the APTA representative to the Board of Directors of the Physical Activity Alliance, working to advance our priorities related to health, wellness, and fitness. [Learn more](#) and get involved.

Left to right: Justin Elliott, APTA vice president government affairs; Justin Moore, PT, DPT, APTA CEO, Erin Wentzell, PT, DPT, and Ayanna McKnight, director of operations at the Physical Activity Alliance.



APTA CEO Justin Moore, PT, DPT, joined the White House Healthcare Safety Forum for [World Patient Safety Day](#). The event convened experts from key health organizations, patient and workforce advocates, health system executives, and administration officials to discuss health care safety.



APTA was invited to participate in the National Council on Aging's National Falls Prevention Summit held Sept. 9-10. The event included a panel discussion on the APTA-supported SAFE Act (H.R. 7618) and the Safe Steps for Veterans Act (S. 4556), bipartisan bills aimed at addressing falls.

## Congressional Update

### Advocacy on Falls Prevention

October is National Physical Therapy Month, and this year the focus is on the profession's role in preventing falls. New this year on our [NPTM landing page](#) is a guide to hosting a falls screening and assessment for PTs, PTAs, other health care professionals, and volunteers in your place of work or community. The NPTM page also includes [advocacy resources on falls prevention](#) and information on two pieces of falls prevention legislation. APTA is focusing on promoting the APTA-supported [SAFE Act \(H.R. 7618\)](#) during October in support of NPTM.

Be sure to [check out a special video from U.S. Rep. Carol Miller, R-W.Va.](#), and sponsor of the SAFE Act (H.R. 7618) for National Physical Therapy Month.

### Telehealth Legislation Updates

On Sept. 18, the House Energy and Commerce Committee voted unanimously to approve a two-year extension of all current telehealth policies in the Medicare program, including permitting PTs, PTAs, and other therapy providers to use telehealth to treat Medicare patients until Dec. 31, 2026.

For PTs, PTAs, and their Medicare patients, extension of these telehealth flexibilities is critical to maintaining the continuity of care. If Congress fails to act by the end of this year, PTs and other therapy providers will no longer be able to use telehealth to treat Medicare patients. APTA and a coalition of other therapy provider associations have been advocating for passage of H.R. 3875/S.2880 — the Expanded Telehealth Access Act — to ensure that PTs, OTs, and SLPs are permanent, not temporary, authorized providers of telehealth in Medicare.

The action by the House Energy and Commerce Committee must be approved by the full House of Representatives, the Senate, and signed into law. At present, the entire telehealth extension will cost approximately \$4 billion. Congress is examining budgetary options to ensure that the telehealth proposal is paid for.

It is widely expected that after the election and during the “lame duck” session, Congress will include this telehealth extension provision in an end-of-year spending bill.

## **State Update**

### **State Affairs: 2024 State Legislative Season Highlights**

The 2024 state legislative season proved to be busy and successful, with state advocates securing significant victories for the advancement of the physical therapy profession. Explore [APTA's 2024 State Roundup](#), where key legislative highlights relating to direct access, PT Compact, disability placards, prior authorization and administrative burden, fair copays, and more are found.

In recognition of our dedicated advocates, we are pleased to share that nominations are open for the APTA State Legislative Leadership Award. This award recognizes and rewards component leaders in the area of state legislative leadership who bring increased awareness and involvement to state legislative issues and who achieve success in state legislative issues that strengthen the practice of physical therapy. Nominations can be submitted until Dec. 1 by using the [online nomination form](#).

The recipient of this prestigious award will be notified in May 2025, acknowledging their outstanding contributions to the profession. For further details about the award and its criteria, please refer to the additional information available [here](#).

The State Affairs department recognizes that we can only achieve our mission through ongoing conversation, collaboration, and partnership with our state chapters. If you have questions or require any assistance from the State Affairs Department, please email [Advocacy](#).

## **State Chapter Advocacy Spotlight: APTA Montana Win on Prior Authorization**

APTA Montana's Payment Committee had a big win on prior authorization in their state with a major payer. Their advocacy efforts resulted in the removal of a new prior authorization policy for Mountain Health Co-Op for all physical therapy evaluation and therapeutic exercise codes.

Mountain Health Co-Op had recently changed their policies to require prior authorization for all physical therapy evaluations and therapeutic exercises (97110) codes, which became effective Sept. 1. After meeting with APTA Montana, Mountain Health Co-Op reversed this new prior authorization requirement for rehabilitation services.

## **Regulatory Update**

### **APTA 2025 Physician Fee Schedule Advocacy**

APTA thanks its incredible and dedicated member advocates who submitted comments on the 2025 Physician Fee Schedule proposed rule. This year, APTA's membership mobilized around several critical policy issues, including plan of care certification and PTA general supervision. Your involvement was crucial in advancing these issues. Our approach to member advocacy has evolved, embracing a three-pronged strategy that includes technical policy work, individualized stories from members, and substantial submissions to demonstrate our dedication. Members contributed approximately 2,800 letters, including 150 high-quality individualized comments that offered poignant feedback on the policies under consideration. APTA also witnessed an encouraging increase in both new and returning advocates. The positive feedback regarding the ease of use and helpfulness of our comment submission tool reflects our collective commitment to making an impact. Thank you once again for your invaluable support, and APTA hopes that these efforts yield good news in the final rule, which is likely to be released in early November.

Right when our team was wrapping up our fee schedule comments, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services released a request for information on the potential consolidation of four Medicare Administrative Contractor, or MAC, jurisdictions into two MAC jurisdictions. MACs play a significant role in the administration of the Medicare program. Their responsibilities include enrollment and claims processing, so their ability to function efficiently and effectively has a direct impact on how quickly you all get enrolled in Medicare, as well as the accuracy and timeliness of Medicare payments. Historically, CMS has restricted MACs' geographic jurisdictions and claims volume to limit the workload of any individual contractor, but the agency is reconsidering the unique benefits and challenges of consolidation. In response to the potential change, APTA encouraged the agency to examine the impact of consolidation on provider enrollment and claims processing. Our comments generally hesitated to support further consolidation of the MACs and explained to the agency how longer award timelines and less competition could disincentivize innovation. APTA will inform members if CMS proposes any changes to the current MAC jurisdictions.

### **APTA Update: UnitedHealthcare Medicare Advantage Prior Authorization**

APTA's advocacy seeking rescission of UHC's prior authorization requirement for outpatient therapy services effective Sept. 1, resulted in meetings with UHC on Sept. 5 and Oct. 2, with its Chief Medical Officer, Government Programs. APTA, in coalition with other therapy groups, continues to engage UHC and has requested a meeting with the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services. APTA has also contacted the office of the U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services to inform him of the situation and request assistance. APTA is also in the process of meeting with members of the U.S. Congress who have been champions of reigning in the use of prior authorization by Medicare Advantage programs. APTA advocacy has also led to a letter to UHC from the Coalition to Preserve Rehab, a national coalition comprised of patient advocacy and clinician organizations.



## Grassroots Update

### Let's Build Our Strength in Numbers

Did you know that there are only 10,000 APTA members in the APTA Advocacy Network? That means there are thousands of your colleagues who are not receiving advocacy information and news. If your colleagues are APTA members, [please share this link and encourage them to join the APTA Advocacy Network](#) so the voice of the physical therapy profession can be loudly heard on Capitol Hill. As fictional President Jeb Bartlet from the television series "The West Wing" said, "decisions are made by those who show up." Let's show up for the physical therapy profession on Capitol Hill.

### Flash Action Strategy: Great Student Engagement and More Advocacy Opportunities

Thousands of students participated in the [APTA Flash Action Strategy](#) Sept. 25-26 by creating social media posts and videos and donating to PTPAC, APTA's political action committee. APTA students raised over \$2,000, and 140 programs participated in the two-day event. The top three schools to participate were Briar Cliff University, University of Toledo, and University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

To prepare for the campaign, students received information on what a political action committee is and why it's important for our legislative success on Capitol Hill, accessed resources to organize their programs' involvement, and downloaded sample social media graphics and posts.

Student involvement in advocacy is critical to the future of the physical therapy profession. Activities like APTA's Flash Action Strategy aim to show students that it doesn't take a lot of time to participate in and make an impact. Other student advocacy offerings include the [Student Advocacy Challenge](#) and [National Advocacy Dinners](#).

The Student Advocacy Challenge is a year-long competition among PT and PTA programs to participate in advocacy activities for points toward school recognition. A menu of eligible activities is provided, and participants can submit their activities for credit through the APTA website or APTA Advocacy

app. The challenge runs the calendar year, with this year's competition ending Dec. 31; it will begin again at the start of 2025. The winning program not only gets bragging rights, they also are featured on APTA's website and receive a virtual or in-person presentation by an APTA staff or Board of Directors member of the program's choice.

APTA's National Advocacy Dinners are organized by students and programs to get together and learn about advocacy. An APTA National Advocacy Dinner raises awareness of what advocacy is, educates others about the importance of advocacy, and shows students how they can participate throughout their career. Dinners typically are held in the spring, although they can occur throughout the year.

## **PTPAC Update**

### **The Latest From Inside Elections: Counting Down**

Inside Elections, by Nathan Gonzales, is an exclusive look at the political landscape and the upcoming elections. [APTA Advocacy Network members can view this exclusive digest](#), as we close in on the 2024 election.

### **On Valentine's Day Have Fun at APTA CSM's PTPAC Party**

Support PTPAC's advocacy efforts on Capitol Hill at PTPAC's evening event during the APTA Combined Sections Meeting. This year, the event will take place at [Joystix](#). Joystix is one of the largest pinball and classic arcade collections in the country, as well as the hottest new arcade games, air hockey, Skee-Ball, basketball, foosball, driving games, carnival games, and much more.

The event will be Friday, Feb. 14, from 7-10 p.m. Tickets cost \$100 for PTs and PTAs and \$50 for students. The ticket includes drinks, appetizers, and all the video games you want. You can buy your PTPAC tickets when registering for the 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](#) to reserve your ticket.

*Contributions to PTPAC are not tax deductible as charitable contributions. Contributions are voluntary. Your contribution will be used to support candidates for federal office who support physical therapy issues. The amount given by the contributor or the refusal to give will not benefit or disadvantage the person being solicited.*

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