

# USAHS Advocacy Interest Group Recap

The University of St. Augustine for Health Sciences Alumni Association Advisory Board is collecting and sharing information on issues pertinent to the healthcare professions represented by the University. The information is sorted by topics (and the associations with an interest related to that topic), calls to action, and USAHS affiliated persons filling roles in these associations. The purpose of this document is to provide the reader with an at-a-glance recap of the important issues facing healthcare professionals, the opportunity to take action, and examples of the roles being filled by USAHS-affiliated professionals.

Organizations monitored: APTA, AOTA, AMA, TOTA, FOTA, AONL, ANA, NAHN, NBNA, ASHA

## Telehealth

AMA (American Medical Association): Key points: location of person should not matter - **Telehealth Modernization Act 2021**; eliminate “unnecessary” requirement of person receiving mental health via telehealth has to see provider in person every 6 mos - **Telemental Health Care Access Act**

<https://www.ama-assn.org/system/files/2022-nac-action-kit-telehealth.pdf>

APTA (American Physical Therapy Association): **Expanded Telehealth Access Act** bipartisan bill for PT and PTA to continue telehealth after the current public health emergency ends. Our champion on the bipartisan *Expanded Telehealth Access Act*, Rep. Mikie Sherril (D-NJ) plans to reintroduce the legislation that would add physical therapists to the list of distant site providers—this legislative change would result in permanent Medicare coverage for care provided via telehealth. In the Senate, the bill leads will stay the same: Senators Steve Daines (R-MT) and Tina Smith (D-MN). The date of reintroduction has not yet been set.

<https://www.apta.org/advocacy/issues/telehealth>

AOTA (American Occupational Therapy Association): - **Advancing Telehealth Beyond Covid Act**: House passes extension of OT telehealth waivers through 2024 - current extension expires Oct. 14, 2022. The Senate must adopt for this policy to go into effect.

AOTA: **Expanded Telehealth Access Act** - This bill would permanently give OTs the ability to serve Medicare beneficiaries via telehealth - Action needed (see below)

TOTA (Texas Occupational Therapy Association): Update from August 10, 2022- House Bill 4 Telecommunications Telehealth will no longer be allowed for ECI services and has ended on June 15, 2022. See more at link <https://www.tota.org/assets/LegislativeInfo/HHSC/early-childhood-intervention-policy-hb4-public-comment-responses.pdf>

TOTA: Update from August 10, 2022- PT, OT, ST Services and related Durable Medical Equipment Services. Audio (phone) calls will no longer be billable for DME education however, telehealth is still covered. For more info see link <https://www.tota.org/assets/LegislativeInfo/HHSC/therapy-policies-hb4-public-comment-responses.pdf>

## **Mental Health**

AMA: **Telemental Health Care Access Act** - See above

AOTA: **Occupational Therapy Mental Health Parity Act** - This bill was just introduced to the Senate and would expand access to OT services for mental and behavioral health disorders under Medicare and Medicaid

**Mental Health Professionals Workforce Shortage Loan Repayment Act** - this Act will expand access to mental health services and increase opportunities for occupational therapy in mental health. Action needed.

FOTA: 2022- Ron Desantis (Governor) signed SB632, to modernize the scope of Occupational therapy as well as ensuring clients have access to necessary services. Florida passed legislation to recognize occupational therapists' role in mental health practices and intervention.

AONL (American Organization for Nursing Leadership): Mental health of nurses and health care workers

TOTA: school-based practitioner's advocacy efforts for mental health as required by Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015. There are 2 documents provided by TOTA.

[https://www.tota.org/assets/FINAL\\_OT\\_Role\\_ESSA\\_4-25-22\\_LONG%201.pdf](https://www.tota.org/assets/FINAL_OT_Role_ESSA_4-25-22_LONG%201.pdf)

[https://www.tota.org/assets/FINAL\\_OT%20ESSA%20Admin\\_4-25-22.pdf](https://www.tota.org/assets/FINAL_OT%20ESSA%20Admin_4-25-22.pdf)

TOTA: Update from August 16, 2022- comments and responses on draft behavioral health services HB Telecommunications Policy. See more at link below-

<https://www.tota.org/assets/files/behavioral-health-services-hb4-comment-responses.pdf>

AOTA 2023 Update: Academia opportunities: OT doctoral program grants available: Occupational therapy doctoral programs can apply for Behavioral Health Workforce Education Training (BHWET) Grants administered by HRSA. BHWET grants provide academic programs with funding to help train mental health professionals, including funding to support fieldwork opportunities in mental and behavioral health settings.

AOTA 2023 Update: Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics (CCBHCs) Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) created the criteria for these new

Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics (CCBHCs), AOTA, in conjunction with occupational therapy (OT) advocates from across the country, worked to ensure that occupational therapy practitioners were among the list of suggested staffing for CCBHCs.

### **Diversity**

AOTA: **Allied Health Workforce Diversity Act** - this Act would provide grant funding to increase opportunities for students from underrepresented backgrounds, including racial and ethnic minorities, in the professions of occupational therapy, physical therapy, respiratory therapy, speech language pathology, and audiology.

AONL, ANA (American Nurses Association): Diverse workforce programs to educate nurses to practice in rural and medically underserved communities.

NAHN (National Association of Hispanic Nurses), NBNA (National Black Nurses Association): Supporting access to sexual and reproductive health.

NBNA: Recognizing obesity as a disease, not a choice.

NBNA: Recognizing the need for equitable, real-world evidence in maternal health.

California Healthcare - diversity, how to communicate with employee/employer (pronouns)

### **Pre-Authorizations**

AMA: Reducing burdens overall - **Improving Seniors' Timely Access to Care Act** ( H.R. 3173/S. 3018) implements standardized electronic auth program nationwide, transparent prior auth plans reviewed annually

ASHA: Working on helping congress with increased access to Audiologists without physician referral, though the current proposal decreases beneficiary access and increases financial risk to patients and audiologists.

### **CMS Reimbursement Cuts**

AMA: Stay up with inflation, decrease cuts, increase in money (\$12,811) and hours (200) to comply with MIPS, decreased funding from CMS was reduced in 2020 by 14% or \$13.9B  
<https://www.ama-assn.org/system/files/2022-nac-action-kit-payment-reform.pdf>

ASHA: Oppose a 4.5% Medicare cut to the SLP outpatient services

APTA: Update/ response to SMART ACT (H.R. 5536):

- We are working with the previous sponsors to introduce a bill that will focus on requiring Medicare to accept a state's supervision standard for PTAs and OTAs in outpatient settings instead of Medicare maintaining their own direct supervision requirement.

- For strategic reasons, the bill does not include specific language to negate the 15% differential like the *SMART Act* did in the 117<sup>th</sup> Congress; instead, it seeks to provide evidence of the impact of the cut and need to mitigate the differential by requiring a Government Accountability Office (GAO) study on how the PTA/OTA differential has impacted access to therapy services in rural and underserved areas.

California PT - PTA cuts

### **Calls to Action:**

APTQI - <https://www.aptqi.com/take-action/>

AMA: Call to Action Plan/Kit <https://www.ama-assn.org/system/files/2022-nac-action-kit.pdf>

AOTA: Calls to action

- Write a letter asking Congress to support the Expanded Telehealth Access Act - <https://cqrcengage.com/aota/home?4>
- Write a letter to urge Congress to support the Allied Health Workforce Diversity Act - <https://cqrcengage.com/aota/home?4>
- Ask your legislators to support the Mental Health Professionals Workforce Shortage Loan Repayment Act <https://cqrcengage.com/aota/home?4>

ASHA: USA MS-SLP students can take action by going to this link

<https://link.edgepilot.com/s/4dfa6249/SI2AJJ5jUu2jwoqgALPDg?u=https://www.voterveice.net/ASHAAction/Petitions/3368/Respond>

HRSA (Health Resources and Services Administration): announced the availability of \$15 million to grow the nursing workforce, improve access to nursing education, and advance health equity. \*\*\*\*\*The need for nursing preceptors is limiting admissions to nursing schools; as a result, \$10 million of the fund is earmarked for clinical nursing faculty and preceptors. The deadline for the first round of funds was August 19, 2022.

**H.R. 728: Title VII Nursing Workforce Reauthorization Act of 2019.** Passed in October 2019, this bill expands and reauthorizes through FY2024 specified nursing workforce development programs including loan repayment and scholarships for nurses, loans for nursing faculty development, advanced education nursing grants, grants for increasing nursing workforce diversity, and nurse education practice and retention grants. Extension beyond FY2024 is sought to provide for the projected 194,500 average annual openings for registered nurses between 2020 and 2030.

USAHS: OT Torchlight Alumni Referral Award - <https://www.usa.edu/alumni/news-and-benefits/alumni-torchlight-ot-referral-program/>

Free CEU Support via USAHS

### **Leadership Positions & Openings**

USAHS Master of Speech-Language Pathology (MS-SLP) student Inez C. Esparza was selected to serve on the **American Speech and Hearing Association (ASHA) Hispanic Caucus Board** as the graduate student representative.

Elaine Lonnemann, PT, MSC, DPT, OCS, MTC (USAHS Alumni) serves as **President of the American Academy of Orthopedic Manual Physical Therapists (AAOMPT)**.

Robyn Martin, MS, CCC-SLP, BCS-F (USAHS Faculty) serves as the **President of the Texas Speech-Language Hearing Association (TSHA)**.

Tony Domenech, PT (USAHS Faculty Program Director for PT, Austin Campus) serves on the **Texas Board of Physical Therapy Examiners**

Katie Hohman, PT, (USAHS Alumni, Advocacy committee board member) serves on the **GAC (government affairs committee) for the Private Practice Section of the APTA**

### **Upcoming Dates & Events:**

TOTA elections from June 1-30 for Trinity North District state positions (President Elect and Vice President)

NAHN (National Association of Hispanic Nurses):  
48<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference: Portland, OR, July 11-14, 2023

## **AOTA/ APTA Highlights**

1. Mental/ Behavioral Health (AOTA)
  - a. Help build support for the Occupational Therapy Mental Health Parity Act (S. 1592)
  - b. The Occupational Therapy in Mental Health Parity Act (S. 1592) seeks to remove barriers to the provision of occupational therapy services for someone with a mental health diagnosis under Medicare and Medicaid where these services are already an allowed benefit. This bill, introduced in the Senate by Sen. Maggie Hassan (D-NH) and Sen. Tim Scott (R-SC)

would expand access to OT services for mental and behavioral health disorders without changing current Medicare and Medicaid benefits or scope of services.

- c. Support for the 988-suicide prevention helpline program and mental health crisis services.
  - d. Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics (CCBHCs) Substance Abuse Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) created the criteria for these new Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics (CCBHCs), AOTA, in conjunction with occupational therapy (OT) advocates from across the country, worked to ensure that occupational therapy practitioners were among the list of suggested staffing for CCBHCs.
2. Telehealth (AOTA, APTA)
- a. Medicare is considering allowing for Telehealth services to be available and covered on a permanent basis for PT, OT, and SLP. This was opened to therapists during COVID PHE, and it has been found greatly beneficial in rural areas and areas without as much access to therapy for these patients, clients, and residents. Specifically SNF and outpatient settings.  
  
<https://www.cms.gov/files/document/frequently-asked-questions-cms-waivers-flexibilities-and-end-covid-19-public-health-emergency.pdf>
  - b. CMS is currently scheduled to end Telehealth coverage on 12/31/2023. ASHA, APTA, and AOTA all support and advocate for keeping Telehealth. The steppingstone to this advocacy is to first have CMS extend the coverage of these services through 12/31/2024.  
  
[https://www.apta.org/siteassets/advocacy/2023/telehealth\\_therapy\\_coalition\\_statement\\_051123.pdf](https://www.apta.org/siteassets/advocacy/2023/telehealth_therapy_coalition_statement_051123.pdf)
3. Diversity
- a. Help support efforts to encourage Congress to Fund the Allied Health Workforce Diversity Program
    - a. Administered by the Health Resources Services Administration (HRSA), who will award grant funding to accredited higher education programs of OT, respiratory therapy, PT, ST, and audiology (such as USAHS).
    - b. Grants will support efforts to increase opportunities for students from underrepresented and disadvantaged backgrounds.
4. Medicare Reimbursement

- a. April 3<sup>rd</sup>, Representatives Raul Ruiz (D-CA), Larry Bucshon (R-IN), Ami Bera (D-CA) and Mariannette Miller-Meeks (R-IA) introduced the *Strengthening Medicare for Patients and Providers Act* (H.R.2474) which seeks to add a permanent inflation-based update to the MPFS as a way to help reimbursement keep up with the cost of doing business. This legislation has broad stakeholder support that includes not only APTA but the American Medical Association as well. APTA did an action alert on this bill.
- b. APTA Private Practice recently signed a letter of support for this bipartisan bill. The text of the letter makes important points such as
  - i. Medicare payments to clinicians have declined by 26% from 2001-2022
  - ii. The Fee Schedule rates are not keeping pace with the true cost of providing care, year-over-year cuts, and the lack of available alternative payment model/value-based care models.
  - iii. An inflationary update such as the bill seeks to implement will provide much needed budgetary stability in the face of increasing administrative and economic burdens for all providers—especially those who provide care in small business settings.
  - iv. This letter is being spearheaded by the same coalition of provider organizations who have been vocal in recent years to push back against cuts to the Medicare Physician Fee Schedule/conversion factor. This effort is in line with that long-term/overarching goal.