

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: American Physical Therapy Association (APTA), American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA), American Medical Association (AMA), Texas Occupational Therapy Association (TOTA), Florida Occupational Therapy Association (FOTA), Occupational Therapy Association California, American Association of Nurse Practitioners® (AANP), American Nurses Association (ANA), American Speech Hearing Association (ASHA), Texas Speech Hearing Association

Advocacy Committee Members: Rebekah Jarrar (FOTA), Katie Hohman (APTA), Paige Funderburk (AOTA, OTAC), Lee Ann Hoffman (TOTA), Asiah Wilborn (ASHA, TSHA), Kellan Quigley (AMA), Polly Crabtree (AANP, ANA)

2024 Upcoming Dates

- June 7-12 – AMA Annual Meeting of House of Delegates – Chicago, IL
- June 24, 25 – AOTA Specialty Conference: Entrepreneurship - Livestream
- June 25-30 - AANP National Conference – Nashville, TN
- Sept. 13-14 – AOTA Specialty Conference: Adult Rehabilitation – Cleveland, OH\
- Oct. 25, 26 – AOTA Specialty Conference: Mental Health – Oak Brook, IL
- Dec. 13, 14 – AOTA Specialty Conference: Children and Youth – Seattle, Washington

KEY TOPICS EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Telehealth

AMA: 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>

AANP: supports telehealth — and holds that these health care services are not a separate specialty or the practice of any one profession. Health care provided via technology should be recognized, regulated, and reimbursed on parity with the same services delivered in person.

APTA, AOTA, ASHA: Expanded Telehealth Access Act HR 3875, S 2880 Aims to make telehealth services permanently covered for therapy practitioners under Medicare.

Bipartisan bill for PT and PTA to continue telehealth services permanently. This bill would permanently give OTs the ability to serve Medicare beneficiaries via telehealth Introduced by Reps. Sherrill, Harshbarger, and Sens. Daines, Smith

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

FOTA: Licensure Compact In 2022, AOTA joined by NBCOT embarked on state legislation to create an occupational therapy licensure compact. To date, 20 states have passed legislation enacting the compact. Florida has not yet joined the compact, however FOTA is interested in starting the conversation to pursue a compact in future Legislative Sessions.

TOTA: 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>

- 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

Occupational therapists are recognized at the federal level as mental health providers and while they cannot diagnose, they work with those to create treatment plans and provide appropriate and valuable treatment. OTs provide mental health services in a diverse range of settings, including community-based home health care, hospitals, schools, nursing facilities, and private practice.

AMA: Telemental Health Care Access Act - See above

AOTA: Occupational Therapy Mental Health Parity Act - This bill was 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**

TOTA: school-based practitioner's advocacy efforts for mental health as required by **Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015**.

FOTA: . Florida passed legislation in 2022 to update the OT practice act and recognize OTs role in mental health.

APTA, AOTA: Current legislation: **SAFE Act – HR 7618** Stopping Addiction and Falls in the Elderly Act. Aims to Expand and increase access to falls screen and prevention. Welcome to Medicare annual wellness visit with PT or OT.

Workforce Diversity

AOTA, APTA, ASHA: Allied Health Workforce Diversity Act (H.R. 3320/S. 1679) - this Act would provide grant funding to increase opportunities for students from underrepresented backgrounds, including racial and ethnic minorities, in the professions of OT, PT, respiratory therapy, SLP, and audiology.

ANA: Diverse workforce programs to educate nurses to practice in rural and medically underserved communities

Referral, Billing, & Reimbursement

AOTA, APTA, ASHA: On March 9, 2024, President Biden signed the **Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2024**, which includes a +1.68% increase adjustment to the 3.37% conversion factor cut for the remainder of the 2024 calendar year. This still is not enough and there is more work to do.

Additional Rehab proposed legislation for 2024:

- *Stopping Addiction and Falls for the Elderly (SAFE) Act* (H.R. 7618) - bill would add falls prevention services provided by an OT or PT to the Medicare annual wellness visit if a beneficiary has experienced a fall in the last year.
- *Telehealth Modernization Act* (H.R. 7623) - bill would make OT, PT, SLP providers and assistants permanent Medicare telehealth providers.
- *Medicare Home Health Accessibility Act* (H.R. 7148) - bill outlines the crucial role of OTs in preventing rehospitalizations and helping people to remain and thrive in their homes.
- Strengthening Medicare for Patients and Providers Act HR 2474

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.

AOTA: New coding for reimbursement (CPT codes 96202, 96203, 97550, 97551, and 97552) for therapy practitioners to train and involve one or more caregivers to assist patients with certain diseases or illnesses in carrying out a treatment plan, without the patient present.

- A regulatory change to the supervision requirements of therapy assistants from *direct* to *general* supervision, allowing for remote therapeutic monitoring (RTM), for licensed practitioners in private practices.
- Telehealth therapy services delivered to individuals in their homes will be compensated at the non-facility rate, utilizing modifier "95", when the clinician is in the hospital or outpatient facility while the patient is at home.
- *** Waived PAYGO budgetary legislation, preventing a possible 4% payment cut for Medicare providers.

FOTA: Medicaid reimbursement levels for occupational therapists in Florida are amongst the lowest in the country, despite the fact that occupational therapists are a key factor in reducing health care costs, improving quality of life, and helping people return to work.

Education

Occupational Therapy: 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

Nursing: 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.

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

USAHS: Lighthouse Alumni Award (for OT or PT)

Free CEU Support via USAHS

Dean's Scholar Award

CALLS TO ACTION

APTA: Looking for co-sponsors for legislation

<https://www.apta.org/advocacy/take-action/patient-action-center>

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:

- 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>

FOTA: Medicaid reimbursement levels for occupational therapists in Florida are amongst the lowest in the country, despite the fact that occupational therapists are a key factor in reducing health care costs, improving quality of life, and helping people return to work.

- Occupational therapy has been shown to have a statistically significant relationship to lower 30-day readmission rates for primary health conditions such as heart failure and pneumonia, as well as reduce hospital length of stay for intensive care patients, resulting in cost savings for the health care system. **Support increased reimbursement rates for Medicaid providers and specifically occupational therapists.**

ASHA: *Support the bill:* <https://www.votervoicenet/ASHAAction/Campaigns/113178/Respond>

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

<https://link.edgepilot.com/s/4dfa6249/SI2AJJ5jUu2jwogqALPDg?u=https://www.votervoicenet/ASHAAction/Petitions/3368/Respond>

- Oppose a 4.5% Medicare cut to the SLP outpatient services
- The Stop CMV Act (H.R. 7542/S. 3864), a bill submitted in both the House and the Senate, would support state-based cytomegalovirus (CMV) screening programs at the federal level to enhance early diagnosis and intervention. The bill "will focus needed attention and resources on screening for congenital cytomegalovirus in newborns, a huge step forward in identifying children at risk for hearing loss, communication disorders, and developmental delays," according

to a press release from the sponsors, which quoted ASHA President Tena McNamara.

- [Support the bill:](https://www.votervoice.net/ASHAAction/Campaigns/113178/Respond)
<https://www.votervoice.net/ASHAAction/Campaigns/113178/Respond>

APPENDIX / Resources

1. **AOTA, APTA, ASHA Therapy Combined Efforts**

AOTA, APTA, ASHA collaborative letter to CMS regarding the provision of all therapy services via telehealth through 2024, regardless of setting:

<https://www.aota.org/-/media/corporate/files/advocacy/joint-therapy-letter-to-cms-re-ub-telehealth-billing.pdf>

Additional information on CMS waivers:

<https://www.cms.gov/files/document/frequently-asked-questions-cms-waivers-flexibilities-and-end-covid-19-public-health-emergency.pdf>

Office for the Advancement of Telehealth

<https://www.hrsa.gov/telehealth>

2. **AOTA**

Occupational Therapy Faces Increased Challenges in Providing Care to Medicare Beneficiaries:

<https://www.aota.org/-/media/corporate/files/advocacy/federal/hill-day/2023/medicare-payment-cuts-2023-one-pager.pdf>

End of Year Legislation- Wins and Challenges for OT:

<https://www.aota.org/advocacy/advocacy-news/2022/end-of-year-legislation-major-wins-continued-challenges>

FOTA

OTAC

TOTA

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/files/behavioral-health-services-hb4-comment-responses.pdf>

3. **APTA**

Keep PTA reimbursements cut up to 85% - **SMART Act (H.R. 5536)**, PTA virtually supervised, APTA will continue to advocate for supervision of PTAs to be changed to general supervision

<https://www.apta.org/advocacy/issues/medicare-physician-fee-schedule>

4. **AHSA**

5. **AANP**

American Hospital Association PAYGO Fact Sheet:

<https://www.aha.org/system/files/media/file/2022/09/Fact-Sheet-Statutory-PAYGO-Sequester-Relief-Needed-for-Health-Providers.pdf>

6. **ANA**

7. **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>

USAHS ACTIVE LEADERSHIP POSITIONS & OPENINGS

1. **AOA** *American Occupational Therapy Association*
Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee Members: Dr. Inti Marazita. Precious Osuoha (both USAHS Faculty)
Psychosis Community of Practice Co-Facilitator: Dr. Erin McIntyre (faculty)
- FOTA** *Florida Occupational Therapy Association*
VP current; FOTA President newly elected: Dr. Antonette Fernande (USAHS Faculty)
Treasurer: Dr. Nichel Brunder-Allen (USAHS Faculty)
- OTAC** *Occupational Therapy Association California*
Chair of Nominations Committee: Dr. Jessica De Brun (USAHS Faculty)
Advocacy & Government Affairs Committee: Dr. Erin McIntyre, Kersten Laughlin (both USAHS Faculty)
- TNOTA** *Tennessee Occupational Therapy Association*
NE District Vice Chair and TN Health Disparities Advisory Group: Dr. Jennifer Crowder (USAHS Faculty)
2. **APTA** *American Physical Therapy Association*
Government affairs committee: Katie Hohman, PT (USAHS Alumni, Advocacy committee board member) (for the Private practice section of APTA)
- TBPTE** *Texas Board of Physical Therapy Examiners*: Tony Domenech, PT (USAHS Faculty Program Director for PT, Austin Campus)
- AAOMPT** *American Academy of Orthopaedic Manual Physical Therapists*
President: Elaine Lonnemann, PT, MSC, DPT, OCS
3. **ASHA** *American Speech and Hearing Association* Hispanic Caucus Board as the graduate student representative: (MS-SLP) student Inez C. Esparza
- TSHA** *Texas Speech-Language Hearing Association*
President: Robyn Martin (USAHS Faculty), MS, CCC-SLP, BCS-F
4. **ANA, AANP**
5. **AMA** *American Medical Association*
Open positions – President-elect, Speaker, Vice Speaker, Board of Trustees (4), Council on Constitution and Bylaws, Council on Medical Education, Council on Medical Service (3), Council on Science & Public Health, Council on Science)