

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 act, and examples of the roles being filled by USAHS-affiliated professionals.

Advocacy Committee Members: Rebekah Jarrar, VP (FOTA), Katie Hohman (APTA), Paige Funderburk (AOTA, OTAC, WFO, AMA), Lee Ann Hoffman (TOTA), Polly Crabtree (AANP, ANA), Arkena Dailey (ASHA), Kayla Lambert

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), World Federation of Occupational Therapists (WFOT)

2025/ 2026 DATES

1. May 6-12, 2025 – ANA – National Nurses Week
2. June 1,2 or June 3,4, 2025 – AONL – Advocacy Academy; Advocacy Day - Washington, DC
Registration: <https://web.cvent.com/event/74dfca98-7862-40db-bf5f-4253a686a17a/summary>
3. June 17-22, 2025 – AANP National Conference – San Diego, CA
4. July 9-10 APTA Future of Rehab Therapy Summit - Washington DC and Alexandria VA
5. October 27 – WFOT – World Occupational Therapy Day - Every year
6. February 23-25, 2026 – AMA - National Advocacy Conference – Washington D.C.

KEY TOPICS EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

TELEHEALTH

On March 3, 2025 U.S. Reps. Mike Kelly (R-PA), Mike Thompson (D-CA), and Adrian Smith (R-NE), members of the Ways & Means Subcommittee on Health, announced the introduction of [H.R. 1614](#), bipartisan legislation that would permanently expand the list of practitioners eligible who provide telehealth services to include qualified physical therapists, occupational therapists, speech language pathologists, and audiologists.

AOTA: **OT Licensure Compact** is a multi-year joint initiative of the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA) and the National Board for Certification in Occupational Therapy (NBCOT®). The OT Compact is an interstate professional licensing compact for OT which will address licensure portability.

AMA: Telehealth coverage via CONNECT for Health Act and The Telehealth Modernization Act to permanently extend telehealth coverage.

AANP: Supports telehealth/ telemedicine, not as 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. AANP endorses the use of the term telehealth to refer to these services.

APRN (Advanced Practice Registered Nurse): Compact Licensure: AANP does not endorse the APRN Compact for multistate licensure, which was adopted by the National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN) in August 2020. AANP strongly opposes the inclusion of practice hours as a prerequisite for a multistate advanced practice registered nurse (APRN) license. The inclusion of practice hours is inconsistent with the evidence and is in direct conflict with the Consensus Model for APRN Regulation: licensure, accreditation, certification, and education. The evidence is clear, APRNs are prepared for safe entry to practice at the point of graduation from an accredited graduate program and after successful passage of a national certification board examination.

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>

BEHAVIORAL HEALTH

Occupational therapists are recognized at the federal level as mental health providers and while they cannot diagnose, they work 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.

AOTA: CMS reinforces role of OT in PHP and IOP

AMA: Dr. Lorna Breen Health Care Provider Protection Act – wellness resources

National campaign to enact confidentiality laws that protect physicians seeking help for wellness, burnout and fatigue, and remove inappropriate, stigmatizing questions on physician licensure/renewal applications

AMA Organizational Biopsy®, assessment tool for health care organizations to improve the well-being of physicians/health professionals. Regulations to reduce documentation burdens

AOTA: Occupational Therapy Mental Health Parity Act (S. 1592) - This bill was introduced to the Senate and would expand access to OT services for mental and behavioral health disorders under Medicare and Medicaid without changing the current benefits or scope of services.

WORKFORCE DATA/ EDUCATION

Tracking what is present and anticipating future growth stats – state of the profession – to sustain professions going forward – succession

AOTA: Advocates for federal policies to increase diversity of OT workforce to promote diversity of the healthcare workforce for improved access to care, greater patient choice, satisfaction, and outcomes.

APTA: Physical Therapist Workforce and Patient Access Act - This bill allows PTs to participate in the National Health Service Corps Loan Repayment Program, which repays up to \$50,000 in outstanding student loans to certain health care professionals who agree to work for at least two years in a designated Health Professional Shortage Area. This bill expands patient access to essential physical therapist services to children and adults who receive care at rural health clinics and federally qualified health centers, also known as community health centers. The legislation elevates the status of PTs in the health centers by, among other measures, allowing them to bill independently for services billed to Medicare and

Medicaid. The bill is endorsed by the National Rural Health Association and the National Association of Community Health Centers.

ANOL: Sustain and Grow Funding for Nursing: AONL advocates for funding Nursing Workforce Development programs authorized under Title VIII of the Public Health Service Act (42 U.S.C. 296 et seq.). These programs support the supply and distribution of qualified nurses to meet our nation's increasing health care needs.

ANA: Workforce Programs: Nursing Workforce Development programs bolster nursing education at all levels, strengthen nursing education and fund institutions educating nurses to practice in rural and medically underserved communities.

AMA: Advocacy focus: Finding solutions to physician workforce crisis

WFOT: **World Health Assembly Rehabilitation Resolution** WFOT advocacy to promote the inclusion of OT with universal health coverage and support landmark Resolutions in collaboration with World Health Organization (WHO) & World Health Assembly (WHA): Learning, Acting, Building for Rehabilitation in Health Systems (ReLAB-HS)

USAHS: Lighthouse Alumni Award (for OT or PT) - Free CEU Support via USAHS - Dean's Scholar Award

REFERRAL, BILLING, REIMBURSEMENT (Medicare, Medicaid)

Medicaid is a state–federal partnership that provides health care to people of all ages—children, pregnant people, working-age adults, individuals with disabilities, and people over age 65. OT, PT, SLP, work with people who rely on Medicaid for health care across multiple settings, including schools, community mental health centers, skilled nursing facilities, and clients' homes

Medicare

APTA: The REDUCE Act - Medicare Part B permits Medicare beneficiaries to receive therapy evaluation and treatment with/ without a physician's order. However, the therapy provider must submit the plan of care (POC) to the patient's physician. This act clarifies a streamlined model for outpatient therapy services, provided under a physician's order, to have POC certification requirement satisfied once qualified therapist submits POC to referring physician, within 30 days of initial evaluation

AOTA: Post-Acute Care Payment AOTA's legislative and regulatory advocacy activities work promote and protect therapy services, reimbursement, and the role of OT practitioners working in post-acute care settings—including skilled nursing facilities, home health agencies, and inpatient rehabilitation facilities. Health Care Reform AOTA works to ensure OT is valued and protected in the health insurance marketplaces created by the Affordable Care Act (ACA).

APTA, AOTA: EMPOWER Act- The EMPOWER Act would remove the current direct supervision requirement for physical therapist assistants and occupational therapy assistants providing Medicare Part B services in private practice settings. The bill would require U.S. Government Accountability Office to analyze how Medicare Part B 15% payment differential for PTA and OTA services has impacted access to physical and occupational therapy in rural and medically underserved areas.

ASHA – Promotes more money to be paid to audiologists and SLPs. Compounded by congressionally required budget control methods that jeopardize Medicare payments, the MPFS conversion factor (CF) reduction results in providers weighing the pros and cons of participating in Medicare, which may restrict patient access to care. Medicare payments are also being negatively impacted by medical inflation and are not keeping up with rising costs of healthcare.

Pre-Authorizations

AMA: Advocates to change the prior authorization process imposed by Medicare Advantage plans to prevent care delays, patient harm, and increasing volume of requirements for practices.

ASHA: Working with congress to increase access to Audiologists without physician referral. The current proposal decreases beneficiary access and increases financial risk to patients and audiologists.

AOTA: Medicare Part B Advocacy efforts with Congress and CMS seek to mitigate the impact of recent payment cuts associated with the evaluation and management code increases. AOTA rejects budget neutrality cuts and sequestration that decreases the value of OT services.

PEDIATRICS & SCHOOL BASED PRACTICE

AOTA: Protect/promote the role of OT in primary education and early intervention through federal laws such as the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA) and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), which was most recently amended by Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

AANP: Artificial Intelligence for health care must incorporate broadly recognized health care ethics, be evidence-based, ensure health care equity and recognize diversity of patients. The development of predictive algorithms and AI platforms must include nurse practitioners. We urge all health care professionals to take a measured approach, one that continues to place the clinical decision making of healthcare providers as the defining factor in diagnoses/ treatment of patients. The use of AI should be transparent to patients, supporting and enhancing the provider patient relationship.

EDUCATION

APRN: Mandated Residency and Fellowship Training Position: Strongly opposed to the inclusion of practice hours as a prerequisite for a multistate advanced practice registered nurse (APRN) license. The inclusion of practice hours is inconsistent with the evidence and is in direct conflict with the Consensus Model for APRN Regulation: licensure, accreditation, certification, and education.

FLORIDA, CALIFORNIA, & TEXAS LEGISLATIVE UPDATES

ASHA: Florida Joins Interstate Compact Applications for compact rights are expected to be accepted in late 2024 or early 2025.

FOTA: SB 7016 – Live Healthy, which included \$34 million in recurring funding for a Medicaid rate increase for OTs, PTs, and STs. The bill was passed by both chambers and signed into law by Governor Ron DeSantis. This is the first Medicaid rate increase for OTs in approx. 30 years. The legislation also includes other significant reforms to improve health care access across Florida.

FOTA: Introduced legislation to join the **Occupational Therapy Licensure Compact**, sponsored by Representative Adam Anderson (Pinellas) and Senator Alexis Calatayud (Miami).

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

OTAC: Affirms OTs role in pelvic health and position that, with appropriate training, it is within OTs scope to address **pelvic floor dysfunction** to promote independence, enhance quality of life, and optimize occupational participation and performance across diverse segments of the population.

TPTA: SB 671 and SB 157 Expansion of Direct Access: These bills aim to lift or extend limitations on how long patients can receive physical therapy without a referral. Greater access allows patients to complete their course of care without unnecessary delays or restrictions.

Fair Co-Pay for Physical Therapy: Proposed legislation would reduce financial burdens on patients, potentially lowering co-pays by 50%.

CALLS TO ACTION

- **APTA:** Seeking Key Contacts in the Private Practice
[https://urldefense.com/v3/https://ppsapta.org/get-involved-advocacy_!!L1pk_x_9Nw!HHDE2IJKxu5rgfS69IRw1FKy7JxfzrDkaIXULV1vIJPwKI12ZVxKMFdZ07M48hr5fBtG56Flc3Ke_2M\\$](https://urldefense.com/v3/https://ppsapta.org/get-involved-advocacy_!!L1pk_x_9Nw!HHDE2IJKxu5rgfS69IRw1FKy7JxfzrDkaIXULV1vIJPwKI12ZVxKMFdZ07M48hr5fBtG56Flc3Ke_2M$)

- Join APTA's advocacy network<[https://urldefense.com/v3/_https://www.apta.org/advocacy/apta-advocacy-network_!!L1pk_x_9Nw!HHDE2JKxu5rgfS69IRw1FKy7JxfzrDkaIXULV1vJPwKI12ZVxKMdZO7M48hr5fBtG56FIN_zjNwM\\$](https://urldefense.com/v3/_https://www.apta.org/advocacy/apta-advocacy-network_!!L1pk_x_9Nw!HHDE2JKxu5rgfS69IRw1FKy7JxfzrDkaIXULV1vJPwKI12ZVxKMdZO7M48hr5fBtG56FIN_zjNwM$)
- **AOTA:** Share your challenges with TRICARE
<https://www.votervoice.net/AOTA/Campaigns/126316/Respond>
- **AOTA:** Protect Federal Higher Education Financial Aid
<https://www.votervoice.net/AOTA/Campaigns/122992/Respond>
- **AOTA: OT/OTA Advocates: Ask Congress to support the Department of Education** the Department of Education provides guidance to states on the implementation and coordination of IDEA and ESSA, to ensure that students have access to the resources and services promised by these laws. <https://www.votervoice.net/AOTA/Campaigns/121232/Respond>
- **AOTA: Protect Federal Higher Education Financial Aid.** Contact your Members of Congress and urge them to support Pell Grants, Grad Plus Loans, IDR, and PSLF to ensure a strong, sustainable occupational therapy workforce.
<https://www.votervoice.net/AOTA/Campaigns/122992/Respond>
- **AOTA: Ask your Representatives to support the Medicare Home Health Accessibility Act.** Occupational therapy (OT) has long been recognized as an important home health service under Medicare; however, it is the only skilled service that does not qualify a beneficiary for the Part A home health benefit. This means that OT services cannot be ordered at the start of care unless nursing, PT or speech services are also ordered.
<https://www.votervoice.net/AOTA/Campaigns/112215/Respond>
- **AANP - Urge support for H.R. 1317/S. 575, the ICAN Act:**
H.R. 1317/S. 575, the Improving Care and Access to Nurses (ICAN) Act promotes patient access to health care services delivered by the provider of their choice by removing outdated Medicare and Medicaid barriers on NPs and other advanced practice registered nurses (APRNs). Urge your Members of Congress to cosponsor the ICAN Act to increase patient access to high-quality, NP and APRN provided health care.
<https://www.votervoice.net/AANP/1/Campaigns/121843/Respond>

APPENDIX

USAHS ACTIVE ADVOCACY LEADERSHIP POSITIONS:

AOTA *American Occupational Therapy Association*

- Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee Members: [Dr. Inti Marazita](#) (Faculty)
- Psychosis Community of Practice Co-Facilitator: [Dr. Erin McIntyre](#) (Faculty)
- ACOTE Roster of Accreditation Evaluator, Community of Practice Leadership Member, Affiliated State Association Presidents:
- AOTPA Ambassador: [Kersten Laughlin](#) (Faculty)

FOTA *Florida Occupational Therapy Association*

- VP current; President starting July 1, 2025: [Antonette Fernandez](#) DrOT, OTR/L
- Treasurer: Dr. Nichel Brunder-Allen (USAHS Faculty)

OTAC *Occupational Therapy Association California*

- Chair of Nominations Committee: Dr. Jessica De Brun (USAHS Faculty)
- Co-Chair of Practice, Ethics and Reimbursement Mental and Behavioral Health Committee: Dr. Jessica De Brun (USAHS Faculty)
- Advocacy & Government Affairs Committee: Dr. Erin McIntyre, Kersten Laughlin (both USAHS Faculty)

- Practice, Ethics, and Reimbursement, Mental Health Subcommittee: Dr. Erin McIntyre (Faculty)
 - Region 1 Director: Kersten Laughlin (Faculty)
 - Chair of DEIJ Committee: Michelle Arakaki, (Alumni)
- CCBH** *California Coalition for Behavioral Health*
- Treasurer: Dr. Erin McIntyre
- TNOTA** *Tennessee Occupational Therapy Association*
- NE District Vice Chair and TN Health Disparities Advisory Group: Dr. Jennifer Crowder (Faculty)
- FPTA** *Florida Physical Therapy Association*
- Board member: Jonathan Bray (Faculty)
- 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)
- Texas Capital Area District Delegate**
- Derrick F. Campbell (Director of PT ClinEd)
- ASHA** *American Speech and Hearing Association*
- Hispanic Caucus Board VP of Public Relations: Inez C. Esparza (Alumni)
- LSHA** *Louisiana Speech and Hearing Association*
- Board Member State Advocate for Reimbursement, State Advocate for Reimbursement): Inez C Esparza (Alumni)
- TSHA** *Texas Speech-Language Hearing Association*
- President: [Robyn Martin](#) (Faculty), MS, CCC-SLP, BCS-F