



# Informing Benefit Design for Better Coverage, Payment, Access, and Cost-Effective Care

Highlights of the American Physical Therapy Association Report  
“The Economic Value of Physical Therapy in the United States”

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## The Cost-Effectiveness of Physical Therapist Services

The newly released report from the American Physical Therapy Association showcases the cost-effectiveness and economic value of physical therapist services for a broad range of common conditions. “The Economic Value of Physical Therapy in the United States” compares physical therapy with non-PT based care across a suite of health conditions commonly seen within the U.S. health care system.

Physical therapists and physical therapist assistants play an important role in the U.S. health care system. The report underscores and reinforces the importance of including physical therapists and physical therapist assistants as part of multidisciplinary teams focused on improving patient outcomes and decreasing downstream costs.

“The Economic Value of Physical Therapy” aims to objectively inform broader health policy decision making. Policymakers and commercial payers should consider the insights provided in this report to support access to, coverage of, and payment for physical therapist services. Policies that position physical therapists as entry-point providers will ensure beneficiaries have timely access to proven, cost-effective care.

### **APTA: Supporting the Role of Physical Therapists and Physical Therapist Assistants in the U.S. Health Care System**

APTA represents more than 100,000 physical therapists, physical therapist assistants, and students of physical therapy nationwide. We aim to enhance societal health through our mission: building a community that advances the profession of physical therapy. Physical therapists are movement experts who help to optimize physical function, movement, performance, health, quality of life, and well-being of the individuals they engage with.

As of 2016, all physical therapists must receive a doctor of physical therapy degree from an accredited physical therapist education program before taking and passing a national licensure exam that permits them to practice. Licensure is required in each state (or other jurisdiction, including the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands) in which a physical therapist practices. Physical therapist assistants must complete a two-year associate degree from an accredited physical therapist assistant program and pass a national exam. State licensure or certification is required in each state (or jurisdiction) in which a physical therapist assistant works.

Physical therapists play an important role in managing a wide range of diagnoses and conditions, mitigating risk for adverse events, and promoting overall wellness. The demand for physical therapist services is increasing in the United States, with more than 300 million Americans seeking physical therapist services each year (“Physical Therapists Industry in the US — Market Research Report,” IBISWorld, 2022).

Despite rising demand, patients face barriers to receiving the physical therapist services they need. Costly copays, declining payment rates, and increased administrative burden all impact patient access to physical therapist services.

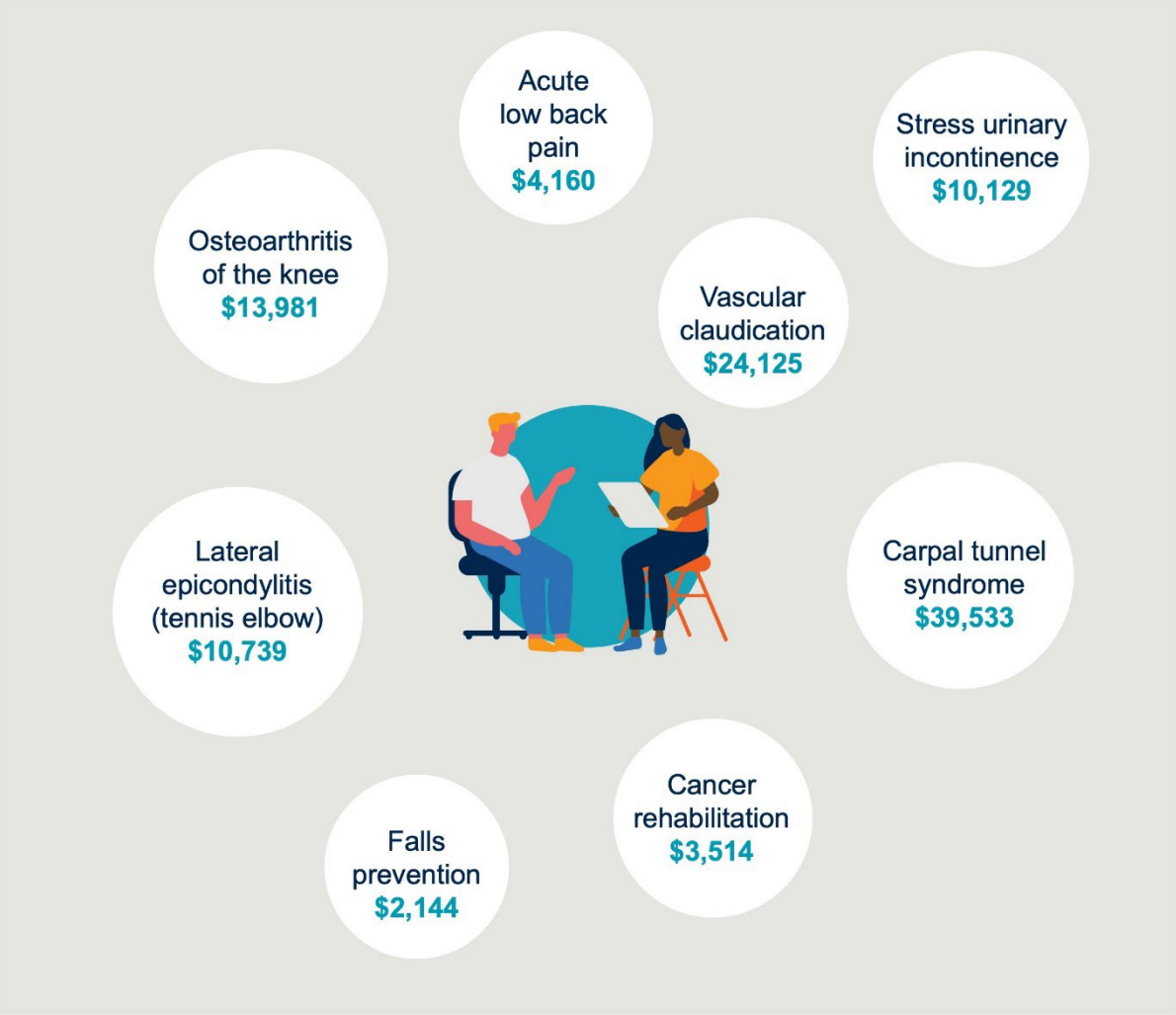
## The Value of Physical Therapy in Reducing Health Care Costs Should Drive Benefit Design, Including Coverage, Payment, and Early Access for Beneficiaries

The evidence presented in “The Economic Value of Physical Therapy in the United States” should inform payer decisions on premiums, copays, and coverage to improve access to health care. These decisions will help accelerate value-based care by making every health care dollar go further for payers and beneficiaries alike. APTA recommends that payers use the evidence in the report to inform the following actions and decisions:

- **Expand access, coverage, and payment for physical therapist services for beneficiaries with chronic conditions.** Physical therapists and physical therapist assistants treat pain and manage function in patients who need ongoing and/or intermittent services for chronic conditions, with cost-effective results and downstream savings. Payers should consider benefit design, reduce premiums and copays, to make physical therapist services more accessible. Benefit design should ensure that physical therapists can be accessed as entry-point providers for appropriate conditions. For example, the report demonstrates that managing osteoarthritis of the knee with physical therapy delivers a net cost benefit of approximately \$14,000 per episode of care compared with the common alternative treatment of intra-articular glucocorticoid injections.
- **Position physical therapists as primary entry points to health care.** Physical therapist management of pain can be more cost effective than more-invasive procedures such as surgery and injections. By designing benefits that identify episodes for which the physical therapist is the primary point of entry, non-invasive physical therapist services can more likely be accessed first, delaying or avoiding more costly treatments. For example, the report demonstrates that treating acute lower back pain with physical therapy services delivers a net cost benefit of approximately \$4,100 per episode of care compared with the alternative treatment of intra-articular glucocorticoid injections. Physical therapist services can provide a viable alternative for use of pain medication and the associated risks and costs.
- **Ensure early access and payment for physical therapist services for the treatment of musculoskeletal conditions.** Physical therapists are well-positioned to provide early intervention and prevent costly, invasive, and/or passive treatments. Payer decisions about coverage and cost-sharing for conditions affecting the joints and muscles should promote early and direct access to physical therapists. For example, the report demonstrates that for patients with carpal tunnel syndrome, physical therapist services deliver a net cost benefit of approximately \$39,500 per episode of care compared with the alternative treatment of surgery.
- **Provide patient education and provide early access to physical therapist services for bariatric, cardiovascular, and orthopedic conditions to help reduce costs.** Payers should provide education and tools to patients about the benefits of early access to physical therapy for these conditions for prevention and treatment. For example, the report demonstrates that physical therapist treatment, combined with what is referred to as optimal medical care, for restricted blood flow to the lower limbs (known as claudication, which results from peripheral arterial disease) delivers a net cost benefit of approximately \$24,125 per episode of care relative to optimal medical care alone, which typically aims to prevent progression of the peripheral arterial disease through lifestyle modifications such as smoking cessation, medications such as antiplatelet agents, and treatment of underlying diabetes and hypertension (Pereira K. “Treatment Strategies for the Claudicant,” Seminars in Interventional Radiology, December 2018).

# Our Report Validates the Cost-Effectiveness of Physical Therapist Services Across a Range of Conditions

“The Economic Value of Physical Therapy in the United States” compares the costs and benefits of physical therapist services with other forms of treatment for a variety of health conditions. For each condition, the report demonstrates and validates the cost-effectiveness of physical therapist services, quantifying the average net cost benefit in economic terms. Following our evaluation of these conditions, APTA plans to expand to additional conditions in future reports.



## Getting the Word Out: APTA's Awareness Campaign for the Report

Along with the release of “The Economic Value of Physical Therapy in the United States,” APTA's awareness campaign, running over several months, will reach multiple audiences on different platforms to highlight aspects of the report demonstrating the cost-effectiveness of physical therapy for the selected health conditions. The campaign includes infographics, a foundational paper, social media posts, and more.

You can learn more about our campaign and “The Economic Value of Physical Therapy in the United States” on our ChoosePT.com or ValueofPT.com websites.

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