



Workforce Shortage of Rehabilitation Providers

The National Association of Rehabilitation Providers and Agencies (NARA) and rehabilitation providers nationwide are facing a critical staffing shortage of qualified rehabilitation professionals including Physical Therapists (PTs), Occupational Therapists (OTs), and Speech-Language Pathologists (SLPs). This shortage is limiting patient access to medically necessary rehabilitation services across care settings including home health, outpatient, skilled nursing, inpatient rehab, and pediatric early intervention at a time when demand is rising.

The therapy workforce shortage is driven by multiple compounding factors:

- Reimbursement-driven salary constraints hinder recruitment/retention, while declining enrollment means too few new graduates to fill openings.
- Rising education costs and student debt are worsening the debt-to-income imbalance and discouraging students from choosing therapy careers.
- An aging population with chronic conditions needs more rehab, alongside increasing pediatric/early intervention needs (including survivors of premature births requiring specialized therapy).

**U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics
Occupational Outlook Handbook**

	PT	OT	SLP
Current Jobs	267,200	160,000	187,400
Projected Growth 2024-34	11%	14%	15%
Openings Per Year	13,200	10,200	13,300

<https://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/>

Common real-world access impacts include:

- Delayed access: longer waits to start care
- Service reductions/closures (especially rural/underserved), creating “therapy deserts” and forcing patients to travel farther or forgo care.
- Delayed recovery and higher risk of decline, complications, falls, and avoidable readmissions.
- Discharge delays across the continuum that drive up total costs.

Recommendations to Congress:

NARA recognizes the shortage rehabilitation professionals as a patient access crisis and urges Congress to support the following initiatives:

- Protect Graduate Student Access to Adequate Federal Loans
 - HR 6574: Permits access for all postsecondary students to Federal Student loan programs of up \$50,000/year and \$200,000 aggregate
 - HR 6862: Delay the implementation till July 1, 2030 of change to graduate student access to Federal Student Direct PLUS Loans
- Expand Loan Repayment & Recruitment Tools
 - HR 5621: The Physical Therapist Workforce and Patient Access Act of 2025 which would allow physical therapists to participate in the National Health Service Corps Loan Repayment Program, helping to ensure that individuals in rural and underserved areas have access to need therapy care.
- Establish mechanisms to facilitate the hiring of qualified rehabilitation professionals from other countries with greater ease.

NARA is the trade association representing 100+ organizations consisting of over 100,000 healthcare professionals dedicated to providing a multitude of skilled rehabilitation therapy services to individuals in a variety of settings including inpatient, outpatient, skilled care, assisted living, educational systems, industry/occupational health.