

**TITLE:** Are pelvic health physical therapists ready for the “Optimizing Postpartum Outcomes Act of 2022” (H.R. 8181)?

**BACKGROUND:** Pelvic floor dysfunction can be defined as the lack of coordination, strength, and/or endurance of the pelvic floor muscles. Dysfunction can contribute to urinary or fecal incontinence, overactive bladder, constipation, and painful intercourse. Research demonstrates that pelvic floor dysfunction often begins in women following pregnancy and childbirth. It is projected that the number of women in the United States experiencing at least one pelvic floor dysfunction will increase to 43.8 million by 2050. Despite this prevalent issue, a vast majority of women affected by pelvic dysfunction have little knowledge of pelvic floor physical therapy as an effective treatment, and financial constraints are one of the most prevalent hurdles disallowing women access to pelvic floor rehabilitation during the postpartum period. As a result, the United States Congress constructed the bipartisan “Optimizing Postpartum Outcomes Act of 2022” (H.R. 8181) When passed, this bill will increase accessibility for women who received Medicaid benefits and increase the demand for pelvic health physical therapy on a limited number of providers.

**PURPOSE:** The purpose of this study is to determine the number of outpatient physical therapy clinics and physical therapy providers in Tennessee that treat pelvic floor dysfunction. This information will be utilized to assess the ability of the physical therapy profession to meet the demand for postpartum pelvic floor rehabilitation by women who will gain access to services through the benefit of H.R. 8181. It is hypothesized that Tennessee is currently limited in the number of providers that deliver pelvic health physical therapy and that increasing the demand without increasing the number of providers could have detrimental effects on the delivery of pelvic health services by physical therapists.

**METHODS:** A literature review was performed to determine the prevalence of pelvic health dysfunction in the United States. A search of federal and state statistics was conducted to determine the number of women of childbearing age enrolled in federal Medicaid programs. Statistics were utilized from the American Physical Therapy Association (APTA) to determine the number of board certified and specialty trained PTs who are APTA members practicing in TN. Since only 11% of practicing physical therapy professionals are APTA members in TN, a survey will be conducted of outpatient clinics and providers to determine the number of trained pelvic health physical therapists and the number of patients they are able to treat within a given time frame. This information will then be compared to the estimated number of women in TN who will need pelvic floor physical therapy.

**DISCUSSION:** Among the 42 million women who are Medicaid recipients in the United States, about half of them would qualify to receive pelvic floor rehabilitation under the proposed federal bill H.R. 8181. There are approximately 225,000 physical therapists employed in the United States. However, there is limited data on how many physical therapists treat pelvic floor dysfunction and how many outpatient clinics accept patients insured through Medicaid. More research is needed to assess the availability of pelvic floor physical therapy for the women who will benefit from the impending federal bill.