

TITLE: Meeting the Challenge: Evaluating Tennessee’s Preparedness for Increased Demand in Pelvic Health Physical Therapy

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, nationally, 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 availability and readiness of physical therapy providers in Tennessee to provide care for patients with pelvic floor dysfunction.

METHODS: A mixed method study will be done utilizing a comprehensive 18-item online survey will be emailed to licensed physical therapists (PT) and physical therapist assistants (PTA) across Tennessee.

DISCUSSION: In 2013, 911,400 women received Medicaid in Tennessee. Additionally, approximately 4,220 licensed physical therapists and 2,130 licensed physical therapist assistants practiced in the state. Presumably, those figures have seen an increase over the past decade. Because data on pelvic floor dysfunction treatment availability, especially for Medicaid patients, is scarce, further research is crucial to understand the readiness for this federal legislation. The authors anticipate that Tennessee may have a limited number of pelvic health physical therapy providers, and increasing demand without a corresponding increase in providers could adversely impact service delivery. This may lead to a significant disparity between licensed clinicians and the volume of female pelvic floor patients in Tennessee.