

Student Loan Forgiveness for Physical Therapists and Physical Therapist Assistants

HF XXXX (Rep.)/ SF XXXX (Sen. Kupec)

What This Bill Does

Minnesota faces growing demand for rehabilitation services, especially in rural and underserved communities, but workforce shortages make access difficult.

This bill allows physical therapists (PTs) and physical therapist assistants (PTAs) to participate in Minnesota's Health Professional Education Loan Forgiveness Program (Loan Forgiveness Program). Currently, they are not allowed to participate in this loan forgiveness program and have limited loan forgiveness programs dedicated to the profession, none at the state level.

This existing program offers loan forgiveness to healthcare professionals serving in high-needs areas, including rural and underserved communities, and is already administered to health professionals by the Minnesota Office of Rural Health and Primary Care.

PTs and PTAs who commit to working for three years in designated rural communities or underserved urban areas (federally designated shortage areas) would be eligible for loan forgiveness just like many other health professionals already are.

The bill includes a \$500,000 FY27 appropriation to support PT and PTA loan participants.

Why This Matters to PTs and PTAs, Their Patients, and Minnesota's Health System

PTs & PTAs keep Minnesotans moving and living independently

Access to physical therapy helps prevent injuries and complications that often lead to hospitalizations or long-term care because every day, PTs & PTAs help people:

- Recover after surgery, injury, stroke, or illness
- Prevent falls
- Manage chronic conditions
- Avoid unnecessary surgeries
- Stay in their homes instead of entering institutional care

As Minnesota ages, this care becomes even more critical. By 2033, 1 in 5 Minnesotans will be over age 65, a group that relies heavily on physical therapy to maintain mobility and safety. Ensuring that all Minnesotans have access to PT services will be essential to maintaining a stable health system in our state.

PTAs are frontline rehab providers themselves and are equally essential, especially in rural care facilities.

PT students graduate with very high debt

Becoming a physical therapist requires a doctoral-level degree.

- Nationally, the average PT graduates with about \$142,489 in student debt, and nearly 90% carry education-related debt.
- Regional program data show similar results. One Upper Midwest DPT program reports an average total student debt of roughly \$134,000 in recent years.

For new PTs, this debt load strongly influences where they can afford to work. Higher-paying urban settings often feel like the only financially realistic option — even when students want to serve rural or underserved communities.

For PTAs, wages are lower, so even smaller loan amounts can significantly affect financial decisions early in their careers. Loan forgiveness gives clinicians a choice where they can practice.

Minnesota data show:

- 92% of providers who grew up in rural communities and received loan forgiveness stayed in rural practice, compared to 53% without it.
- 56% of urban-background providers moved to rural areas with loan forgiveness, compared to just 7% without it.

This is a state tool for directing clinicians to communities that struggle to recruit providers.

Physical therapy reduces health care costs

PT services often help people avoid complications and higher-cost care. For many common conditions, physical therapy is associated with thousands of dollars in net economic benefit per patient, including falls prevention and musculoskeletal conditions. PT services help keep patients out of the hospital and in their homes, saving them and the state money.

The Ask

Minnesota's loan forgiveness program already supports physicians, nurses, mental health professionals, dentists, pharmacists, and others, but physical therapists and physical therapist assistants are not eligible. This bill fixes that gap and recognizes PTs as essential providers in Minnesota's health care workforce.

Including PTs and PTAs in the Loan Forgiveness Program is a targeted way to improve access to cost-effective care in communities that need it most. We encourage the Legislature to include them and the additional funding during the 2026 Legislative Session.

For questions, please email Josh.Ney@ewald.com