



**Written Submission for the Pre-Budget  
Consultations in Advance of the 2022  
Federal Budget**

**By: The Canadian Physiotherapy Association**



**Recommendation 1:** That the Government of Canada expand the eligibility of the existing Canada Student Loan forgiveness measure to additional health professionals, beyond family doctors and nurses, who work in designated rural and remote communities. Specifically, this expansion should include physiotherapists.

**Recommendation 2:** That the Government of Canada make permanent the temporary removal of the referral requirement for coverage of physiotherapy services from the Public Service Health Care Plan (PSHCP).

1. The Canadian Physiotherapy Association (CPA) represents 16,000 physiotherapy professionals and students across Canada. CPA members are rehabilitation professionals dedicated to the health, mobility, and fitness of Canadians. In partnership with provincial and territorial Branches and practice Divisions, the CPA enables members to learn, share knowledge, and enhance practice. The CPA provides resources, education, ideas, and advocacy to enable our professional community to better serve Canadians.
2. CPA is pleased to provide these recommendations for specific measures that will increase access to physiotherapy services for Canadians.
3. Physiotherapists are highly trained regulated health care practitioners, with an expertise in movement and exercise. Physiotherapists combine their knowledge of neurological, cardiovascular and musculoskeletal systems with hands-on clinical skills to assess, diagnose and treat symptoms of illness, injury or disability. Often physiotherapy is associated with recovery from physical injuries. In addition to this 'responsive' role, physiotherapists play a critical 'proactive' or prevention role in helping Canadians deal with the complexities of aging. Physiotherapy promotes healthy physical functioning across the lifespan, and patient education to prevent injury, particularly in older Canadians. As such, CPA's recommendations will contribute to an overall culture of 'healthy aging' in Canada, with all of its attendant benefits.

### **Extending Canada Student Loan forgiveness to physiotherapy practitioners**

4. CPA notes that access to extended health care services in rural and remote communities remains an ongoing challenge for many Canadians. Extending the eligibility of the Canada Student Loan forgiveness measure to additional regulated health care professionals has the potential to increase access to more health services for Canadians living in underserved rural and remote communities.
5. To help more Canadians get the health care they deserve, the Government of Canada has been offering the loan forgiveness benefit to encourage family doctors, residents in family medicine, nurse practitioners and nurses to practice in underserved rural or remote communities by forgiving a portion of Canada Student Loans:

- Family doctors and family medicine residents may be eligible for forgiveness of \$8,000 per year to a maximum of \$40,000 over five years.
  - Nurses and nurse practitioners may be eligible for forgiveness of \$4,000 per year to a maximum of \$20,000 over five years.
  - Now in its eighth year, the program defines underserved rural or remote community as a municipality (as determined by Statistics Canada) that is located outside of:
    - i. census metropolitan areas;
    - ii. census agglomerations (geographic units) with an urban core population of 50,000 or more; and,
    - iii. provincial capitals.
6. The COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for increased access to health services in these communities, but also, the need for student borrowers to access financial support to balance the costs of higher education.
7. Extending loan forgiveness to physiotherapists would translate into tangible long term, diverse and committed health care services for Canadians living in underserved rural and remote communities, including improving access to services for Indigenous populations situated in rural and remote regions in Canada and services and supports under Jordan's Principle for unmet needs of First Nations children.
8. This recommended measure would mean more skilled health professionals joining rural and remote labour markets and participating in those local economies as they establish their in-person services outside of Canada's urban centres, where they and their families may in turn decide to reside for the long term. It would mean advancing more inclusive federal policies by offering loan forgiveness to regulated health professionals distinct from family medicine and nursing; the same professionals that are serving Canada's health system every day.

## **Making permanent the temporary removal of the referral requirement for coverage of physiotherapy services from the Public Service Health Care Plan (PSHCP)**

9. In April 2020, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Government of Canada implemented temporary changes to the Public Service Health Care Plan (PSHCP). These changes were designed to help PSHCP members and eligible dependants access health care benefits while at the same time minimizing social interaction with health care professionals. The flexibilities are to remain in effect until non-critical business is authorized to resume or as indicated otherwise.
10. Among these flexibilities was the removal of the referral requirement for coverage of physiotherapy services from PSHCP.
11. This move has increased access to physiotherapy services required during the COVID-19 outbreak, without placing additional administrative burdens on the health care system. Increased direct access to physiotherapy remains a key element in ensuring that Canadians avoid injury, are able to remain in their own homes longer, ultimately reducing demands on the healthcare system.
12. CPA strongly recommends that the requirement for a physician referral under the PSHCP should be eliminated altogether.
13. CPA appreciates the opportunity to provide its recommendations as part of this process, and respectfully requests an opportunity to appear before the Committee as part of its hearings into Budget 2022.