



PHYSICAL THERAPY  
OCCUPATIONAL THERAPY  
INDUSTRIAL HEALTH

February 16, 2018

To the Members of the Medicaid Provider Rate Review Advisory Committee:

I am a clinician, educator, researcher, and physical therapist practice owner in Fort Collins, CO. I would like to submit the following to your committee for review and action.

Barriers to accessing physical therapists by Colorado citizens using Medicaid are a substantial problem. One the biggest challenges is the need for a physician referral prior to receiving physical therapy services. It is well documented that barriers to early access of physical therapy drives up costs, increases opioid use, increases imaging, and increases surgery. Please see the attached fact sheet on this issue.

If you have any further questions or desire additional information please do not hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Timothy W. Flynn".

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## MEDICAID DIRECT ACCESS TO A PHYSICAL THERAPIST- FACT SHEET

Coloradoans are seeking more accessible health care services, more affordable health care services, and increased choice in their health care decisions. In Colorado consumers have had direct access (i.e. no requirement for physician referral) to physical therapy since 1988. Unfortunately, this has not applied to CO citizens that utilize Medicaid.

- **Direct consumer access saves money for both consumers and payers.** The cost-effectiveness of direct access to physical therapists is substantial. Studies have found that costs incurred for physical therapy visits were 123% higher when patients were first seen by a physician than when they went to physical therapist directly.<sup>1</sup>
- **Direct and early access to PT decreases opioid use.** The benefits of early and direct access to physical therapist results in a nearly 40% reduction in opioid usage in patients with spinal pain.<sup>2</sup>
- **Direct consumer access to PT decreases the use of diagnostic imaging and surgery.** The benefits of direct access to physical therapist included reduced exposure to diagnostic imaging and invasive procedures such as injections and surgery.<sup>3</sup>
- **Direct consumer access to PT decreases overall healthcare utilization.** Episodes of care that start with physician referral generate 67% more physical therapy claims and 60% more office visits than direct access episodes.<sup>1</sup>
- **Direct consumer access promotes preventative health care.** Physical therapists educate patients on how to avoid injury and re-injury during activities of daily living and recreation. Direct access also allows early intervention and treatment of injuries. This decreases lost wages in industry because of fewer injuries and earlier return to work.

1. Mitchell J, de Lissovoy G. A comparison of resource use and cost in direct access versus physical referral episodes of physical therapy. *Phys Ther.* 1997;77:10-18
2. Childs, J, Fritz J, Wu S, Flynn T, et al. Implications of Early and Guideline Adherent Physical Therapy for Low Back Pain on Utilization and Costs." *BMC Health Services Research* 2015; 15:150.
3. Ohja, H. A., Snyder, R. S. & Davenport, T. E. (2014) Direct access compared with referred physical therapy episodes of care: a systematic review. *Physical Therapy*, 94 (1), 14–30.