#ATRA in Action

October 2026 Advocacy & Legislative Update

Introduction

ATRA's advocacy activities are focused on bills, actions, or issues that directly impact the profession of recreational therapy or people with disabilities. ATRA responds to issues in a non-partisan manner to advocate and protect the recreational therapy profession and people served by recreational therapists. October was a slower month of legislative activity as legislators returned to their home districts to campaign prior to the election.

Rural Health Transformation Program (RHTP)

The Rural Health Transformation Program is a federal grant initiative managed by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS), with $50 billion in funding. Each state is set to receive approximately $200,000,000 to transform rural healthcare through initiatives that improve access, resources, and services. The funding comes from the One Big Beautiful Bill (PL 119-21) and assists states in strengthening rural communities.

Why does this matter?

The RHTP provides numerous opportunities that touch the profession of recreational therapy. States are offering grants to address the goals of:

- Workforce recruitment, training and retention
- Innovative care models, partnerships and payment systems
- Technology modernization such as telehealth and electronic health records
- Expansion of access to primary, maternal and behavioral health care

There is a strong emphasis on evidence-based practice, measurable interventions, and partnerships within and for rural communities.

Most of the monies for fiscal year 2026-2027 have already been allocated; however, recreational therapists are strongly encouraged to learn more about RHTP and to monitor opportunities for funding, partnerships and community engagement in rural communities that create access to recreational therapy services where they are needed. A variety of information is available at the websites noted below:

- CMS/Medicaid.gov Rural Health Transformation at https://www.medicaid.gov/resources-for-states/rural-health
- National Rural Health Association https://www.ruralhealth.us/programs/center-for-rural-health-innovation-and-system-redesign/rural-health-transformation-program
- CMS announcement (12/29/2025) https://www.cms.gov/newsroom/press-releases/cms-announces-50-billion-awards-strengthen-rural-health-all-50-states

ATRA Board of Directors: Ashley Bowen, President; Gena Bell Vargas, President-Elect; Nancy Nisbett, Immediate Past-President; Amina Abdallah, Treasurer; Chelsea Farrington, Secretary; Members at Large: Jackson Amburn, Whitney Broghammer, Cliff Burnham, Jasmine Edwards, Megan Janke, & Alona Thompson

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ACTION ALERTS – Please take action!

- No major alerts in October

Advocacy Activities

- Advocacy and public policy presentations given at the ATRA SoCal Conference. If you were not there, topics included Current Procedural Terminology (CPT) codes and the work of the CPT Work Group, Social Prescribing movement, and Advocacy as a Recreational Therapist
- Posts on ATRA Connect in the Advocacy and Public Policy group and for older adults, special education, higher education, developmental disabilities, and mental health in the Special Interest Groups

What We Are Watching

- What happens now after the ruling on Section 504 integration mandate. Here's a release from the American Association on Health and Disability - https://aahd.us/2026/09/aahd-denounces-texas-v-kennedy-decision-as-move-toward-institutionalization/
- Healthcare affordability and changes that impact people with disabilities especially as Medicaid cuts go into effect January 1, 2027
- Medicaid changes at the state level, including waiver activities
- Impact of changes at the Department of Education with pushes for change in special education and higher education
- Social Prescribing

Sign On Letters During October

- Consortium for Constituents with Disabilities (CCD) supporting Money Follows the Person (MFP) and Spousal Impoverishment Protections
- CCD and DRRC letters expressing concerns about the removal of key disability data from the National Health Interview Survey
- ITEM coalition written testimony to the Food and Drug Administration on patient-focused drug development for non-healing chronic wounds, something many people with disabilities deal with

Stay Connected

- Join ATRA Connect for postings throughout the month
- Follow ATRA on Social Media (Instagram, Facebook, and LinkedIn) @ATRAinAction
- Visit the Advocacy page on ATRA's website for official ATRA communications and advocacy resources

Thank you and shout out to **Tye Thompson**, **Beth Eastman**, and **Kristen Greenlee** for their work on the CPT Work Group and **Betsy Kemeny**, **Liz Creasman**, and **Kaitlyn Lewis** for their work on Social Prescribing for the ATRA Conference in SoCal.

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