



Canadian
Association
of Physician
Assistants

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INFORMATION BRIEF: PHYSICIAN ASSISTANTS

1.0 ABOUT PHYSICIAN ASSISTANTS (PAs)

PAs are important members of health care teams. They help make it easier for patients to receive care. They work in any clinical setting: family doctors' offices, emergency rooms, long-term care, cancer centres and surgical suites.

PAs are physician extenders who practice medicine under the supervision of a licensed physician with negotiated autonomy, providing focused, comprehensive patient care. A few examples of what they can do include:

- Conduct physical exams
- Diagnose and treat illness
- Order and interpret tests
- Develop treatment plans
- Counsel on preventative health care
- Write prescriptions
- Assist in surgery

PAs Help Reduce Wait Times

- Adding PAs to primary care teams means that many doctors can offer more same-day appointments. **Adding one PA to a site has the potential to increase the patient roster by at least 500.**
- In emergency rooms, PAs help doctors treat patients with less complex issues faster, limiting the number of people leaving without being seen. They also help improve the time it takes to assess a patient.

PAs Help Improve Access to Care in Rural and Remote Communities

Rural communities are hit hard by doctor shortages and need more health care providers. Adding multiple PAs, under the supervision of just one physician, can have an immediate impact. **PAs have been used to keep emergency departments open when no physician remains in the community.** In a rural practice, PAs can:

- Provide home, nursing home, and hospital visits
- Provide direct emergency and urgent care services
- Perform office procedures
- Provide after-hours consults and work on-call
- Improve the continuity of care, especially for patients with chronic conditions.

PAs Help Gain Efficiencies and Save Money

The Conference Board of Canada reports that if PAs could relieve more than 30 per cent of physicians' time in all practice areas, this could represent \$620 million in cost savings for the health care system.

2.0 GROWTH OF PAs IN CANADA

- 1984** **Canadian Armed Forces (CAF)** established PA profession to provide full spectrum medical care. When their value to patient care became apparent, they began to be employed in civilian settings.
- 1999** **Manitoba** regulates clinical assistants. In 2009 the title was amended to Physician Assistant. In 2024, the government doubled the number of training spots.
- 2006** **Ontario** pilot project allows PAs to practice as unregulated health professionals. In 2020, the Government announces intent to regulate. In 2023, fifty-two new training spots are added to the PA Programs at McMaster and the University of Toronto. Regulation to fall under the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario and will come into effect by 2025.
- 2009** **New Brunswick** amends Medical Act to include PAs in health care model.
- 2010** **Alberta** bylaw passed to allow PAs to operate under responsibility of a regulated member. Demonstration project begins in 2013 with 13 PAs. Regulation enacted in 2021. In 2023, the Alberta Government allocates funding for a PA program with 40 seats at the University of Calgary.
- 2019** **Nova Scotia** introduces PAs via pilot in orthopedic surgery. PAs were successfully incorporated in 2022 into emergency departments. In 2023, the government invests to add PAs in primary care and instructs College of Physicians and Surgeons of Nova Scotia to regulate profession. Regulation enacted April 1, 2024. Dalhousie University launches a masters PA program with 24 seats in January 2024.
- 2023** **Saskatchewan** allocates funding for 12 PA positions and introduces legislative change to allow PAs to practice. The government also passes legislation to regulate PAs under the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Saskatchewan. Government invests in PA training program at the University of Saskatchewan.
- Newfoundland and Labrador** invest in PA pilot program. Recruitment for PAs begins in 2024.
- Prince Edward Island** makes legislative change to allow PAs to practice. First PA hired in 2024.
- British Columbia** announces plans to introduce PAs in ER's and instructs College of Physicians of Surgeons of British Columbia to allow PAs to practice as unregulated professionals.
- Yukon** unanimously passes motion to introduce legislation to allow PAs to practice in the territory.
- 2024** **Quebec** Minister of Health announces pilot project to introduce PAs in Northern Quebec.

3.0 EDUCATION AND TRAINING

There are five, soon to be six accredited PA programs which meet national standards of education, including a defined set of competencies outlined in the profession's [Entrustable Professional Activities](#). The programs are:

- University of Calgary Master of Physician Assistant Studies
- Dalhousie University Master of Physician Assistant Studies
- McMaster University Physician Assistant Education Program
- The Consortium of PA Education (University of Toronto in collaboration with the Northern Ontario School of Medicine and the Michener Institute at UHN)
- University of Manitoba Master of Physician Assistant Studies
- University of Saskatchewan (Fall 2025)

All programs are delivered in partnership with the faculties of medicine at Canadian universities. By aligning PA education with the medical model, it lays the foundation for a collaborative working relationship with physicians.

Table 1: PA Education Programs

Institution	Degree	Spots	Admission Requirements	Curriculum
Dalhousie University	Master of Physician Assistant Studies	24	Requires at least a four-year bachelor's degree and undergraduate course in anatomy, physiology, and biochemistry. Complete Details	Condensed two-year medical curriculum. Curriculum Overview including program requirements and sample schedule.
McMaster University	Bachelor of Health Sciences Degree (Physician Assistant)	50	Applicants must have completed at least two years of undergraduate work and are expected to have achieved an overall simple average of at least 3.0 Complete Details	24-month Program Year one focuses on clinical sciences and year two involves 48 weeks of supervised clinical placements.
Consortium of PA Education (University of Toronto, Northern Ontario School of Medicine, Michener Institute at UHN)	Bachelor of Science Physician Assistant Degree	59	Admission requirements include at least 10 full-year courses or the equivalent of four semesters full-time of undergraduate university education from a recognized university. Complete Details	24-month Program Year one focuses on clinical sciences and year two involves 40 weeks of supervised clinical placements, with specific experience in rural Ontario settings.
University of Calgary	Master of Physician Assistant Studies	20	Admission requirements include completion of a four-year baccalaureate degree, a minimum 3.20 GPA and prior client-facing health care experience. Complete Details	Year one focuses on PA fundamentals, foundations of practice, and clinical skills, followed by core rotations, electives and foundations of practice in year two. Curriculum Overview
University of Manitoba	Master of Physician Assistant Studies	30	Requires a four-year bachelor's degree and requires undergraduate courses in anatomy, physiology and biochemistry. Complete details	Curriculum Overview An academic first year followed by 13 months of clinical rotations in various medical and surgical environments, with one quarter of clinical education in rural environments.

4.0 CERTIFICATION AND MAINTENANCE OF CERTIFICATION

Certification

Graduates of accredited Canadian PA programs are eligible to write the Physician Assistant Certification Council of Canada (PACCC) PA Certification Exam entry to practice exam. Individuals who successfully pass the exam are awarded the Canadian Certified Physician Assistant (CCPA) designation.

Maintenance of Certification

Like other health professionals, after graduation PAs continue learning in the clinical work environment and through [continuing professional development \(CPD\)](#). A PA's scope of practice grows and shifts over time with advanced or specialized knowledge, with changes or advances in the medical profession overall, or with changes in the PA's practice setting or specialty.

CPD Requirements – All certified PAs must annually renew their CAPA membership and earn and report at least:

- **250 credit hours of CPD activities over a five-year cycle by participating in educational activities that meet the identified needs of their professional practice.**
- **25 credit hours** of CPD activities per year.
- **Section 3 – minimum of 25 credits** at the end of the five-year cycle and **includes one *Feedback Received* activity** focusing on meaningful learning and continuous practice improvement.

Credits are documented using the MAINPORT ePortfolio, the CPD reporting tool for the RCPSC maintenance of competency program.

5.0 SCOPE AND STANDARDS OF PRACTICE

Scope of Practice

A PA scope of practice is physician-delegated, and the medical services assigned to the PA must be within the scope of the supervising physician. Prior to assigning clinical work, supervising physicians must consider: Each PA and their supervising physician(s) will establish a practice agreement that documents the types of clinical work the PA will perform in that practice setting, how that work will be assigned and the type of supervision they will receive when performing that work.

Standard of Practice

The [EPA-PA Competency Framework](#) describes the abilities of PAs to meet the needs of the patients they serve. This document identifies the competencies and outcome-based goals for Physician Assistant education in Canada. Competency-based education allows for an outcome-approach to curriculum delivery that directly addresses and assesses student preparation for clinical practice, patient navigation and resource application. EPA-PA is a resource for PAs, supervising physicians, educators, legislators, and other health professionals.

6.0 REGULATION

Province	Authority	Legislation or Bylaws	Registry	Other
MB	College of Physicians and Surgeons of Manitoba	The Regulated Health Professions Act (C.C.S.M. c. R117) (see p. 59 for PA details)	PA Register Directory	CPSM Continuing Professional Development Requirements

				CPSM Registration Requirements
NB	College of Physicians and Surgeons of New Brunswick	New Brunswick Medical Act, Regulations and Guidelines – Regulation #6: Physician Assistants	List of Licensed PAs in New Brunswick	
AB	College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta	Health Professions Act allowing CPSA to begin regulating Physician Assistants (PAs)	List of Registered PAs	CPSA Standards of Practice
ON	College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario	Bill 283 Advancing Oversight and Planning in Ontario’s Health System Act, 2021 <i>Currently PAs operate under delegation but are not regulated.</i>	Forthcoming 1, April, 2025	Policy – Delegation of Controlled Acts
NS	College of Physicians and Surgeons of Nova Scotia	Section 39, 63(a-e) of the Medical Act Regulations		Physician Assistant License: Requirements and Conditions
SK	College of Physicians and Surgeons of Saskatchewan	The Medical Profession Amendment Act, 2023		
PEI	College of Physicians and Surgeons of Prince Edward Island	Regulated Health Professions Act Chapter R-10.1 Physician Assistants Regulations		
BC	College of Physicians and Surgeons of British Columbia	Health Professions Act RSBC Part 2, Section C – Physician Assistants	Registry	FAQ: Physician Assistants
NL	College of Physicians and Surgeons of Newfoundland and Labrador	Medical Act, Section 8		
QC		Quebec Healthcare Practitioners		

7.0 PROFESSIONAL LIABILITY PROTECTION

Many PAs are responsible for securing their own professional liability coverage for their practice. Employers may require that liability insurance be in place as a condition of employment. Through CAPA, all certified PAs have access to coverage through BMS' Insurance, which is underwritten by Berkley's Canada.

8.0 CONFERENCE BOARD OF CANADA REPORTS

A series of reports from the Conference Board of Canada also provides important evidence on how PAs can help alleviate demand and save money.

- [2023 Report – Unlocking Potential: Exploring Physician Assistant Funding Models and Impact Potential in Three Practice Settings](#)
- [Value of Physician Assistants: Understanding the Role of Physician Assistants Within Health Systems](#)
- [Funding Models for Physician Assistants: Canadian and International Experiences](#)
- [Gaining Efficiency: Increasing the Use of Physician Assistants in Canada](#)
- [Value of Physician Assistants: Recommendations for Action](#)