



**Canadian Association of Physician Assistants
Association canadienne des adjoints au médecin**

Compensation Report

The Canadian Association of Physician Assistants

2019

Introduction

This compensation report was prepared to assess salary and overall compensation for physician assistants (PAs) in Canada. The objective of the report is to help PAs assess employment opportunities and to help employers understand the landscape and remain competitive in their efforts to recruit and retain these advanced practice providers.

Who are PAs?

PAs are highly skilled healthcare providers who practice medicine in collaboration with physicians. In a range of clinical settings, PAs work autonomously under the supervision of a licensed doctor to “extend” physician services and improve patient access to care. They diagnose illness, develop and manage treatment plans, prescribe medication, perform procedures, act as first assist in surgery, and much more. In Canada, they were first introduced in the Canadian Armed Forces more than 40 years ago, but today have become “must haves” in provincial public health systems and physician practices across the country.

See Appendix B for a detailed look at PA education, certification, scope of practice, and maintenance of competency. See Appendix C for a series of reports from the Conference Board of Canada, including recommendations on how Canada can better leverage PAs to meet service gaps and health system sustainability goals.

Canadian Landscape

There are more than 650 certified practicing PAs in Canada working in both the military and public health systems. PAs practice in a range of areas (hospitals, family health teams, community health centres, private practice) and specialties (emergency medicine, primary care, long-term care, orthopaedic surgery, neurosurgery, general surgery, cancer care, pediatrics, and many others).

The profession has made considerable strides in raising awareness around how better leveraging PAs can help address many of Canada’s health system goals, such as improved continuity of care, access, equity, and sustainability. However, despite the increasing recognition of the tremendous value PAs add to the health care system, there continues to be a lack of guidance with regards to appropriate PA remuneration.

While the situation varies for PAs in a number of Canadian provinces, the relatively new and unregulated health environment in Ontario has led to considerable challenges including a lack of

consistent defined salary scales and compensation packages for PAs. The lack of clear guidelines coupled with uncertainty when it comes to PA roles and responsibilities has resulted in salaries that are not commensurate with the education, experience, clinical judgment, and overall workload of PAs, most notably in Ontario. The variability in PA roles and responsibilities within a practice and the wide range of specialties that PAs practice in have all contributed to this disparity.

In order to provide clarity to employers regarding appropriate compensation and to ensure that PAs across the country are being paid fairly, CAPA has collected some of the existing data on salaries and pay structures currently in place in some Canadian and international jurisdictions. The purpose of this document is to ensure that proper guidance is in place so that employers can pay their PA employees fair salaries that are consistent with their skills, training and experience. This report aims to serve as a resource to help practicing PAs negotiate their next career opportunity, to help employers appropriately position PAs within their organizations, and to serve as a guide for anyone working to establish pay scales and compensation packages. The figures will guide all parties in the hiring process and advocate for the financial security and stability of the profession.

It is worth noting that the pay scales and salaries outlined in this document are based on data collected to date and are not comprehensive or all encompassing. The figures have been obtained from a range of specialties and organizations in an attempt to provide further clarity and direction in regards to acceptable PA wages.

In addition, the variability in terms of regulation and government funding models also contributes to inconsistencies across the country. In Ontario, a significant funding source is the Government of Ontario's PA Career Start Program, which provides time-limited grants (no more than two years) to help transition new graduates into the health system. The program is integral to integrating new graduates, but does not address job security or the need for stable, long-term funding sources. This leads some Ontario PAs to accept hourly wages in lieu of a full-time salary, or to juggle multiple part-time positions.

While a general scope of practice exists for PAs, each PA's scope of practice is unique and based on the supervisory relationship, level of autonomy and delegation of various controlled acts. It is for that reason that PAs often become increasingly specialized in their specific fields. This specialization, along with the practice setting, plays a significant role in how much one is paid. Examples of different specializations include but are not limited to primary care, emergency medicine, endocrinology, and orthopedic surgery.

Salaries in Canadian Jurisdictions

Salary appears to be the most common approach to PA remuneration both in Canada and internationally. Salaries provide a stable source of income, allowing PAs to be involved in non-

clinical activities and encouraging collaborative care. Salaries are set at a rate that is reflective of the PA’s experience and their specialty area.



In Canada, most PAs are remunerated via salary (75.91 per cent), with civilian salaries ranging from approximately \$75,000 (or less) to \$120,000 (or more) annually, depending on the individual PA’s education, experience, scope of practice, and hours worked. However, a proportion of PAs hold several part-time positions through contracts. This is especially true in Ontario, the province with the highest proportion of PAs (64.74 per cent). Appendix A shows PA wages broken down into hourly rates across Canadian provinces.

A recent report highlighted this issue and indicated that “practice setting interviews

with several PAs and supervising physicians in the province uncovered a sentiment that, among some Ontario PAs, unsustainable and unpredictable funding engenders insecurity and turnover, irrespective of the practice setting or funding model of the physicians with whom they work. Like other health care professionals, some PAs work within multiple practices to maintain a full-time equivalent (FTE) income while others choose to work part time at multiple sites because of medical/career interests or for better work–life balance”.

In contrast, in Manitoba employers that are looking to hire PAs must demonstrate their ability to absorb approximately \$100,000 per year to support a PA salary. PA salaries in Manitoba range from \$75,000 to \$110,000 per year. Unlike in Ontario, Manitoba also has an established pay scale used by the various provincial health authorities. Below is the scale for the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority. The salaries in the Northern Regional Health Authority have a 25% geographic differential from the salaries outlined in the scale below. The steps in the scale below correspond to yearly increases.

Manitoba: Winnipeg Regional Health Authority Collective Agreement 2015-2019					
Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step 5	Step 6
\$81,446	\$85,115	\$94,159	\$101,606	\$109,859	\$118,475
\$39.157	\$40.921	\$45.269	\$48.849	\$52.817	\$56.959

Effective from April 1, 2018 through March 31, 2019

As mentioned above, Ontario does not have an established salary scale for remuneration; however various institutions have established their own scales based on labour market trends. Below are examples of salary scales implemented within Ontario hospitals.

Example: Greater Toronto Area Hospital

	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step 5
Hourly	\$43.360	\$46.076	\$48.779	\$51.496	\$54.201
Annual	\$84,552.00	\$89,848.20	\$95,119.05	\$100,417.20	\$105,691.95

Example: Southern Ontario Hospital

	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step 5
Hourly	\$43.171	\$44.8130	\$47.4420	\$50.0840	\$52.7150
Annual	\$82,233.45	\$87,385.35	\$92,511.90	\$97,633.80	\$102,794.25

Example: Northern Ontario Hospital (1)

	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step 5	Step 6
Hourly	\$42.16	\$44.28	\$46.38	\$48.49	\$50.60	\$52.72
Annual	\$82,212	\$86,346	\$90,441	\$94,555.50	\$98,670	\$102,804

Effective April 1, 2018. Full-time employees move up a step annually and part-time employees move up a step by hours (1,725 hours = one step).

Example: Northern Ontario Hospital (2)

	Step 1	Step 2	Step 3	Step 4	Step 5
Hourly	\$43.080	\$44.979	\$46.877	\$48.778	\$50.679
Annual	\$84,006	\$87,709.05	\$91,410.15	\$95,117.10	\$98,824.05

Benefit Packages

Hospital-Based PAs

PAs employed by hospitals have compensation opportunities that are distinct from those employed in private practice, family health teams, community health centres etc. Their compensation packages tend to be higher, including a higher base salary, paid vacation and sick leave, medical and dental benefits, pension, and in some cases, a CPD budget. Hospital-based PAs may also be eligible to receive evening, night, and weekend premiums, as well as on-call hours.

Privately Employed PAs

Privately employed negotiate compensation packages directly with their physician employer. Compensation packages include paid vacation and sick leave, medical and dental benefits, and a CPD budget.

Ontario Family Health Teams

In Ontario, Family Health Teams (FHTs) employ a wide range of interdisciplinary health care providers (occupational therapists, nurse practitioner, dietitian, registered nurse, social worker etc.). The compensation structure and benefits for health care providers follow Ontario Ministry of Health guidelines.

Salaries in International Jurisdictions

There are some differences between Canadian and international jurisdictions when it comes to the PA profession. For example, the length of time in which PAs have been part of the health care system and, notably, the fact that Canadian PAs remain some of the most underpaid PAs internationally.

The United States provides PA remuneration through a discounted fee-for-service model. The median salary in the United States is US\$95,000 (2015 dollars), plus benefits. Between 2000 and 2013, wages increased by 40 per cent (compared with the cumulative 35.3 per cent inflation rate). In 2016, the average certified PA base salary was US\$104,131, with pathology, dermatology, emergency medicine, critical care medicine, and surgery subspecialties paying the most.

In the Netherlands PA services can be billed to insurance companies and deducted from practice expenses. Individual PAs negotiate their own salaries with their employer, with an average base salary of €80,000 (C\$101,762). The averages outlined here for both the United States and the Netherlands are base salaries only. Total compensation for PAs may include bonuses, call hours, profit sharing, etc.

PA Perspectives

“I was able to secure employment as new graduate through the Career Start Program with a salary of \$90,000 working four days per week. But Career Start funding lasts for a maximum of two years and after this point the employer couldn’t renew my contract for full-time hours.

I’ve been offered contracts in the range of \$30 to \$40 per hour, but I feel this significantly undervalues my skills and training, and doesn’t appropriately compensate an experienced PA like me for the workload and responsibilities I undertake or the value I bring to a physician’s practice.

I’ve since returned to my first career as an ultrasound technologist, where I’m paid \$47/hour with benefits, a pension plan, four weeks of paid vacation, and paid sick days. I’m passionate about being a PA, but poor compensation models are jeopardizing the profession in Ontario.”

-PA, Southern Ontario

Recommendations for Employers

Consider All the Factors

When developing salary scales employers must consider, among several factors, the skills, training, and experience of the PA. They should also take into account labour market trends, annual inflation rates, and the increased specialization and expertise that PAs develop over time. Given the nature of the profession, each PA’s scope of practice is unique and directly linked with the supervisory relationship, and the level of autonomy and delegation of various controlled acts from the supervising physician.

Competitive Salaries and Benefits

A key to recruitment and retention of advanced practice providers, especially in provinces where there are no clear scales or collective agreements in place, is to offer competitive salaries and benefits that are both appropriate for the PA and feasible for the employer. Examine the median to get an idea of what you should expect to compensate the PA and don't forget to consider the full package – vacation days, sick days, health benefits, pension or RRSP contributions, and a budget for CPD.

To have PAs who routinely perform exceptional work and strive to do their best, it's important that they feel sufficiently compensated for their worth and comfortable discussing their growth. Appropriate compensation inspires above average performance and ensures employee loyalty.

Appendix A: Salaries in Canadian Jurisdictions

The following data points were obtained from the Labour Force Survey conducted by Statistics Canada and the data was last updated on October 1, 2018. According to Statistics Canada, the numbers below are reflective of PA pay in various provinces across Canada. The numbers do not reflect the differences in work setting, specialty, education, and experience. Since most PAs are salaried, the table below was adapted from the Statistics Canada data. The salaries were calculated based on an assumption that the PA is working 37.5 hours a week.

AREA	MEDIAN	HIGH
Canada Overall	\$81,000	102,600
Nova Scotia	\$69,300	\$121,158
New Brunswick	\$69,300	\$121,158
Ontario	\$84,600	\$104,400
Toronto Area	\$84,600	\$90,000
Alberta	\$97,434	\$97,434
British Columbia	\$82,386	\$96,138
Manitoba	\$79,200	\$106,200

Source: <https://www.jobbank.gc.ca/wagereport/occupation/24908>

Appendix B: About PAs

Education

In Canada there are four accredited PA education programs. These programs meet national standards of education, including a defined set of competencies that are outlined in the profession's National Competency Profile (CanMEDS-PA). The programs are:

- University of Manitoba Masters 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).
- Canadian Armed Forces Health Services Training Centre Physician Assistant Program

By aligning PA education with the medical model, it lays the foundation for a collaborative working relationship with physicians.

The intensive PA program extends over 24 months and begins with classroom instruction in basic medical sciences. This is followed by physician-directed rotations with multidisciplinary teams in medical and surgical disciplines. The students participate in over 2,000 hours of clinical training in areas that include trauma, anesthesia, general surgery, sports medicine, orthopaedics, internal medicine, emergency medicine, paediatrics and family medicine. See Table 1 for links to more information on each program.

Table 1: PA Education Programs in Canada

Institution	Degree	Admission Requirements	Curriculum
McMaster University Physician Assistant Education Program	Bachelor of Health Sciences Degree (Physician Assistant)	Applicants must have completed a minimum of two years of undergraduate work and only degree courses at an accredited university will be considered. Applicants are expected to have achieved an overall simple average of at least 3.0 on the Ontario Medical School Application Service scale for consideration. Complete details.	A 24-month program – year one focuses on clinical sciences and year two involves 48 weeks of supervised clinical placements.

Institution	Degree	Admission Requirements	Curriculum
The Consortium of PA Education (University of Toronto in collaboration with the Northern Ontario School of Medicine and Michener Institute for Applied Health Sciences)	Bachelor of Science Physician Assistant Degree	Admission requirements include a minimum of 10 full-year courses or the equivalent of four semesters full time of undergraduate university education from a recognized university. Complete details	A 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 Manitoba	Masters of Physician Assistant Studies	Complete details – requires a four year Bachelor's degree and requires undergraduate courses in anatomy, physiology and biochemistry	Educational philosophy and curriculum – 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.
Canadian Armed Forces Health Services Training Centre Physician Assistant Program	Physician Assistant Baccalaureate in Allied Health Program.	Graded entry based on prior learning will be available for candidates with advanced standing or experience such as other allied health professionals, or paramedics. Qualification Level 6 Medical Technician qualification; rank of Sergeant; and successful completion of the Junior Leadership Course or Professional Level. Qualifications (12-15 years of service). In addition, candidate must be merit listed for promotion to Warrant Officer. Requirements	

Certification and Maintenance of Certification

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

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.

Importantly, the PACCC maintains a strict policy regarding the maintenance of certification that involves partnering with the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada for use of the Mainport ePortfolio.

Continuing Professional Development

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.

In terms of CPD requirements to maintain certification, PAs must earn and report at least:

- **400 credits** of CPD activities over the course of your five-year cycle by participating in educational activities that meet the identified needs of their professional practice.
- **40 credits** of CPD activities per year, even in the years after you have reached the 400-credit minimum requirement.

Credits are documented using the MAINPORT ePortfolio, the CPD reporting tool for the Maintenance of Certification (MOC) Program. In addition to the education component, PAs must annually renew their membership with CAPA to maintain certification and access to the MOC program.

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. In Canada, their degree of autonomy will vary in each provincial jurisdiction where they practice.

Prior to assigning clinical work, supervising physicians must consider:

- the best interest of the patient *f*
- the competence of the PA to safely complete the task *f*
- the amount of supervision the PA should have in completing the task, and how that supervision will be provided *f*
- the organization's policies and procedures.

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.

Standards of Practice

CanMEDS-PA is a framework that describes the abilities of PAs to meet the needs of the patients they serve.

It was developed with the support of the RCPSC and the College of Family Physicians of Canada to define how and under what circumstances PAs may exercise their competencies

within the health care system. It also communicates a set of standards that all PAs are expected to acquire for entry to practice. The competencies that PAs acquire are grouped thematically into seven roles:

- Medical Expert
- Communicator
- Collaborator
- Leader
- Health Advocate
- Scholar
- Professional

CanMEDS-PA is a resource for PAs, supervising physicians, educators, legislators, and other health professionals.

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 Bradley's Insurance, which is underwritten by Berkley's Canada. The Canadian Medical Protective Association can provide further information about managing risks to practicing physicians. The CMPA also provides some guidance on [its website](#).

Appendix C: 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.

- [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](#)

Notably, the Conference Board states that hiring more PAs and properly integrating them on health care teams could save the Canadian health care system up to \$1 billion by the year 2030.

Resources

- [CAPA 2017 President's Annual Report](#)
- [PCAM Collective Bargaining Agreements](#)
- <https://www.jobbank.gc.ca/wagereport/occupation/24908>