



December 10, 2021

The Honourable Doug Ford
Premier of Ontario
Legislative Building
Queen's Park
Toronto ON M7A 2C4
Via email: premier@ontario.ca

The Honourable Christine Elliott
Minister of Health
10th Floor, Hepburn Block
80 Grosvenor St
Toronto ON M7A 2C4
email: christine.elliott@pc.ola.org

Dear Premier Ford and Minister Elliott,

On behalf of the Canadian Association of Physician Assistants (CAPA), we would like to revisit our discussion about expanding the role of physician assistants (PAs) in Ontario.

We applaud the government for recognizing the importance of the PA profession by making a legislative change to regulate PAs. This important initiative is a giant step forward to modernizing the PA model in the province and will help solidify the important role that PAs are playing in hospitals, emergency departments and in primary care settings to name a few.

PAs are academically prepared and highly skilled health care professionals who provide a broad range of medical services. PAs are physician extenders and not independent practitioners; they work with a degree of autonomy, negotiated, and agreed on by the supervising physician(s) and the PA. PAs can work in any clinical setting to extend physician services. PAs complement existing services and aid in improving patient access to health care. A relationship with a supervising physician is essential to the role of the PA.

Today there just over 600 certified PAs working in the province to deliver seamless care in a cost-effective manner. Enhancing the PA model will improve patient care and encourage more team-based care:

- In primary care, PAs make services more accessible, and help physicians grow their roster while increasing the volume and scope of services they provide.
- In hospitals, PAs play a significant in-house role that continues to expand in the light of the evolving work patterns of medical residents (resulting from changes to resident training practices).
- PAs in emergency departments can cut wait times and reduce left without being seen rates by half.
- In long-term care centres and residential care homes, integrating PAs can help improve key quality benchmarks such as reducing annual hospital admissions.
- PAs are working in various surgical specialties such as orthopedics to help with the surgical backlog.

As the province works to develop a health human resources strategy to tackle the important challenges our health system is facing – expanding the number of PA training spaces should be one of the key priorities.

INVESTING IN ADDITIONAL PA EDUCATION SEATS

Context

While PAs are not replacements for physicians, they do help physicians manage more patients and improve outcomes. Just as important to government—it costs significantly less to train a PA and takes only two years

(compared to approximately seven to train a physician). Further, the cost of hiring a PA is up to 90 per cent less than a doctor.

Current State of PA Education in Ontario

There are two undergraduate education programs in Ontario. McMaster University launched a PA Program in 2008 and the Consortium for PA Education (University of Toronto, Northern Ontario School of Medicine, The Michener Institute for Education at UHN) followed suit in 2010. Both programs take 24 months to complete and offer a Bachelor of Science Physician Assistant degree.

On average, each PA program receives more than 850 applicants per year for relatively few seats. The current admissions cycle (class of 2023) has received **over 2000 applicants combined for an existing 54 seats**. Both programs are highly competitive.

Leveraging Future PA Contributions

Increasing enrollment in PA education programs is one cost-effective way of meeting health human resource issues in Ontario. Given the shorter education period (two years), a PA can enter practice more quickly. And with training that has a generalist focus, future PAs can be effectively deployed between primary care and specialties to meet evolving provincial workforce demands.

Our Request - An Ontario plan for PA enrollment expansion

The government should move quickly to announce funding to support the creation of 100 new training spots for PAs over the next 3 years. Both Ontario programs are immediately prepared to increase their training spots by 15 starting in the fall of 2022, resulting in 30 more advanced care professionals graduating and entering the workforce in August 2024. With additional time and resources, they can grow further in the years to come. CAPA also believes that if the funding is announced and government makes the expansion of PAs a priority, other medical schools will step forward to create new programs in Ontario.

STAKEHOLDER SUPPORT

The following stakeholders support PAs and their contributions to health care: the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario, the Ontario Hospital Association, Ontario Medical Association, Nurse Practitioners Association of Ontario, Home Care Ontario, Ontario Long Term Care Association, Canadian Armed Forces, Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada.

NEXT STEPS

Develop an Ontario plan for PA enrollment expansion.

Your government has successfully launched some of the most significant health reforms that Ontario has seen in many decades. Enhancing support for the PA profession is one more way to advance your transformation agenda and save money.

Thank you, Premier Ford and Minister Elliott, for considering these policy options that would help create Ontario's health care workforce of the future and meet the growing needs of patients across our province. Please contact me anytime if I can be of assistance to you or your staff.

Sincerely,



Patrick Nelson,
Executive Director
pnelson@capa-acam.ca