



## **Feedback on Striving for Dependable Health Care**

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**To:** Government of New Brunswick  
**From:** Canadian Association of Physician Assistants

### **Introduction**

The Canadian Association of Physician Assistants is a nationally incorporated bilingual professional association that advocates on behalf of its members at the direction of a volunteer Board of Directors which represents Physician Assistants (PA) including those serving in the Canadian Armed Forces, PA students, and other members across Canada and internationally. CAPA members share a desire to help develop Canadian health care, and to advocate for the professions' model of cooperative, collaborative, patient centered quality health care excellence.

### **About Physician Assistants**

A PA is an advanced practice clinician who is educated in the medical school model and practices medicine under the supervision of a licensed physician with negotiated autonomy, often within a multidisciplinary health team. PAs possess a defined body of knowledge and a professional philosophy for effective patient care. They apply these clinical competencies to collect data and interpret information, develop, and investigate differential diagnoses, make appropriate clinical decisions, and carry out required diagnostic, procedural, and therapeutic interventions.

These highly skilled health professionals can work in any clinical setting to extend a doctor's reach, complement existing services, and help improve patient access to care. A few examples of their key functions include:

- conducting patient interviews and taking medical histories
- conducting physical exams
- ordering and interpreting tests
- prescribing medications
- formulating treatment plans
- providing patient counseling and preventative health care
- assisting in surgery; and
- performing other tasks within the supervising physician's scope of practice that the physician deems the PA qualified to complete.

Across Canada PAs have become "must-haves" in primary care, long-term care, emergency medicine, cancer care, general internal medicine, and surgical specialties like orthopaedic surgery and neurosurgery.

## **PAs in New Brunswick**

Currently, there are two PAs that work in the province, both in the Emergency Department at the Dr. Everett Chalmers Hospital in Fredericton, however there is capacity to have significantly more working in the health care system.

### **Feedback on how expanding on the use of PAs, will better equip your government to fulfill the objectives outlined in your policy paper and achieve your vision of a dependable health care system:**

#### Objective 1: Optimize Population Health and Well-Being

A key function of a PA is patient counseling and preventative health care, including the ability to manage chronic disease thus resulting in decreased hospitalizations.

#### Objective 2: Provide Quality, Patient-Centred Care

PAs reduce wait times in primary, emergency, and surgical care. Adding PAs to primary care teams means many doctors can offer more same-day appointments. PAs also improve access to care in rural and remote communities.

In emergency rooms, PAs help overstretched doctors, fast-track less complex patients, and bring down key benchmarks like the 'leave without being seen rate' and 'initial practitioner assessment time'.

PAs also drive efficiencies by providing crucial support in long-term care, surgical suites and cancer centres, enabling physicians to have a better work-life balance.

#### Objective 3: Improve Addiction and Mental Health Outcomes

PAs increase access to mental health services by counselling patients and writing prescriptions. They can also initiate psychiatric referrals, allowing for a better bridge between the patient, physician, and psychiatrist.

#### Objective 4: Improve the Care and Service Experience of our Seniors

PAs improve care for seniors in long-term care by improving key quality benchmarks such as reducing hospital admissions. With PAs onsite and spending more time with residents, they can perform medication reviews, teach Residents skills, and identify those who may potentially benefit from a reduced number of prescriptions.

#### Objective 5: Provide Innovative Care Using Digital Technologies

Since the pandemic, PAs are increasingly working in virtual care clinics. PAs are experienced with E-Consults and through this service the PA can consult with a specialist virtually.

#### Objective 6: Maintain and Invest in Facilities, Technology and Equipment

PAs are integral participants in healthcare organizations working with their supervising physician to organize sustainable practices, make decisions about allocating resources, and contribute to the effectiveness of the health care system.

### Objective 7: Recruit and Retain a Qualified, Accountable Health Workforce

There are many experienced PAs who have left New Brunswick (or other parts of Atlantic Canada) to train and practice medicine. They would jump at the chance to return home and their skills would offer an immediate boost to the health care system. Furthermore, implementing a PA education program would also keep New Brunswickers in the province.

### **The PA Advantage**

While familiar in other provinces and countries worldwide, PAs represent a new workforce that has remained untapped in this province. Instead of shifting gaps from one profession to another, PAs can fill existing vacancies. And with a generalist training, the government can quickly deploy PAs to fill needs across the health system.

### **Global and Canadian Evidence**

In its series of four reports, the Conference Board of Canada examined PA productivity, cost-effectiveness, and funding models. It also delivered a series of recommendations on how governments can tap into PAs to deliver high levels of service while reducing costs:

- [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 “[Gaining Efficiency](#)” report outlines cost savings that could be generated in primary care and emergency care, where PAs can be a cost-effective substitute for certain designated medical tasks.

### **Next Steps**

As is being seen in other provinces, the Government has a prime opportunity to leverage the PA model to grow New Brunswick’s health care workforce, strengthen team-based care, and save money.

It is CAPA’s recommendation that:

- Additional PAs be hired
- Current PA regulation is expanded to allow for more flexibility in staffing
- Work with stakeholders be done to identify the clinical settings and communities across New Brunswick where PAs are needed most
- Develop a plan to train PAs locally by implementing a PA Education Program at Dalhousie Medicine New Brunswick to keep citizens in their home province

CAPA is eager to establish a working relationship with the Department of Health and discuss strengthening our partnership to improve health care delivery in the province.