



[JOIN \(/JOIN.ASPX\)](#)

[RENEW \(/RENEW.ASPX\)](#)

[LOGIN](#)

MENU

[HOME \(/\)](#) / [WHAT IS A PA?](#)

What is a PA?

[BECOME A PA \(/TWOCOLUMNMAIN.ASPX?ID=288\)](#)

[WHAT IS A PA? \(/TWOCOLUMNMAIN.ASPX?ID=290\)](#)

[EMPLOYING A PA \(/TWOCOLUMNMAIN.ASPX?ID=289\)](#)

[What is a PA?](#) | **[Become a PA \(/twocolumnmain.aspx?id=288\)](#)** | **[Employ a PA \(/twocolumnmain.aspx?id=289\)](#)**

A physician assistant (or PA) is a nationally certified and state-licensed medical professional. PAs practice medicine on healthcare teams with physicians and other providers. They practice and prescribe medication in all 50 states, the District of Columbia and all U.S. territories, with the exception of Puerto Rico.



[What is a PA? \(www.aapa.org\)](http://www.aapa.org) | [¿Que es un asociado médico? \(https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TOdm-oHz08w\)](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TOdm-oHz08w)

- **What can a PA do for me?**
- **Will my insurance cover an appointment with a PA?**
- **Where can I find a PA?**

- **How are PAs educated and trained?**
 - **How are PAs certified and licensed?**
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What can a physician assistant do for me?

PAs can:

- Take your medical history
 - Conduct physical exams
 - Diagnose and treat illnesses
 - Order and interpret tests
 - Develop treatment plans
 - Counsel on preventive care
 - Assist in surgery
 - Write prescriptions
 - Make rounds in hospitals and nursing homes
- PAs' specific duties depend on:

- The setting in which they work
 - Their level of experience
 - Their specialty
 - **State laws** (</threeColumnLanding.aspx?id=304>)
- ↑**Back to top**
-

Will my insurance cover an appointment with a physician assistant?

Yes. PA medical and surgical services are covered by:

- Nearly all private payers
 - **Medicare** (</threeColumnLanding.aspx?id=316>)
 - **Medicaid** (</medicaid/>)
 - TRICARE
- ↑**Back to top**
-

Where can I find a physician assistant?

PAs work in all specialties and settings.

They treat patients in:

- Hospitals
 - Physician offices
 - Rural and urban community health centers
 - Nursing homes
 - Retail clinics
 - Schools and university-based facilities
 - Industrial settings
 - Correctional institutions
 - The uniformed services and other federal government agencies
- ↑**Back to top**
-

How are PAs educated and trained?

Most programs are approximately 26 months (3 academic years) and require the same prerequisite courses as medical schools. Most programs also require students to have about three years of healthcare training and experience.

Students take courses in basic sciences, behavioral sciences and clinical medicine across subjects such as anatomy, pharmacology, microbiology, physiology and more.

They then complete a total of more than 2,000 hours of clinical rotations in:

- Family medicine
 - Internal medicine
 - Obstetrics and gynecology
 - Pediatrics
 - General surgery
 - Emergency medicine
 - Psychiatry
 - **How to become a PA** (</twocolumnmain.aspx?id=288>)
 - **The Physician Assistant Education Association (PAEA)** (<http://www.paeaonline.org/>) (represents PA programs)
 - **Accreditation Review Commission on Education for the Physician Assistant** (<http://www.arc-pa.org/>) (ARC-PA)
- ↑**Back to top**
-

How are PAs certified and licensed?

Before they can practice, PAs who graduate from an accredited program must:

- Pass the Physician Assistant National Certifying Exam (PANCE) administered by the National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants
- Get licensed by the state they wish to practice in

In order to maintain certification, PAs must:

- Complete a recertification exam every 10 years
 - Complete 100 hours of continuing medical education (CME) every 2 years
- The "PA-C" after a PA's name means they are currently certified.

- **National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants (administers PANCE) (<http://www.nccpa.net/>)**
- **State licensing requirements (</twocolumn.aspx?id=346>)**
- **More information on maintaining certification (</picme/>)**
- **Learning Central - more than 450 CME activities (<https://cme.aapa.org/>)**

↑[Back to top](#)

See also:

- **[Becoming a PA \(/twocolumnmain.aspx?id=288\)](/twocolumnmain.aspx?id=288)**
- **[Employing a PA \(/twocolumnmain.aspx?id=289\)](/twocolumnmain.aspx?id=289)**
- **[History of PAs \(/threeColumnLanding.aspx?id=429\)](/threeColumnLanding.aspx?id=429)**

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