BECOME A

PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT
What Is a Physician Assistant (PA)?

Physician assistants – also called PAs – can be found in a variety of health care environments these days. They are licensed medical professionals who work in hospitals, doctor’s offices, and both rural and urban clinics, delivering high-quality, cost-effective medical care.

What Health Care Services Are Provided by PAs?

PAs practice medicine on health care teams with physicians and other providers. PAs work in many specialties, including primary care, emergency medicine, psychiatry, and women’s health, providing a wide variety of clinical services:

- performing medical exams and procedures
- diagnosing and treating disease
- prescribing medication
- assisting in surgery

What Is the Job Outlook for PAs?

PAs are currently in great demand in the health care world. Employment of PAs is projected to grow 38% from 2012 to 2022, which explains why more than half of recent PA graduates have received at least three job offers. The median annual salary for a PA is over $90,000.

Is a PA Career a Good Fit for You?

You’ll need a strong interest in medicine – PAs have extensive medical responsibilities, including diagnosing illnesses and prescribing medicine. PAs work on health care teams alongside other providers, so working well with others is crucial.

For those who want to continue to expand their skills, PAs can also change specialties. For example, you could go from working in obstetrics to neurology to cardiology, without additional schooling.

How Can You Become a PA?

First, you’ll need to earn a bachelor’s degree – majoring in the health sciences is strongly recommended. Afterwards, once enrolled in an accredited PA program, you’ll earn a master’s degree, which typically takes an average of two years to complete. This includes time in the classroom and time getting hands-on patient experience at different clinical sites. Finally, you’ll need to take a national exam to become a certified PA and get licensed in your state to practice medicine.

What Classes Should You Start Taking Now to Prepare?

The majority of PA programs require the following prerequisites:

- chemistry
- physiology
- anatomy
- microbiology
- biology

Many PA programs also require previous health care experience. You can get this by working as:

- medical assistant
- medic or medical corpsman
- emergency medical technician (EMT)
- paramedic
- lab assistant/phlebotomist
- registered nurse
- emergency room technician
- surgical tech
- certified nursing assistant
- Peace Corps volunteer
- other health care professional

Most students have a bachelor’s degree and about three years of health care experience before entering a PA program.

How Do You Apply to PA School?

There are nearly 200 accredited PA schools in the U.S. The first thing you’ll need to do is research these programs to find the ones that are the best fit for you and your interests.
Details on most programs can be found in our Program Directory, [Directory.PAEAonline.org](https://Directory.PAEAonline.org).

When you’re ready to apply to PA school, you can use the online Central Application Service for Physician Assistants (CASPA), [Portal.CASPAonline.org](https://Portal.CASPAonline.org).

Sign up for an account and complete the application and personal statement. Check with each individual program for any additional requirements.

**LEARN MORE**

Visit [PAfocus.org](https://PAfocus.org) for detailed information about prerequisites, applications, and deadlines.

We also have a Facebook page, [Facebook.com/PAFocus](https://Facebook.com/PAFocus), where you can post questions for our student support team and read more about the PA profession.

Join the online conversation about everything PA-related at the largest online PA forum: [PhysicianAssistantForum.com](https://PhysicianAssistantForum.com)

Finally, you can email us your questions at [info@PAfocus.org](mailto:info@PAfocus.org).