

Physician Assistants (PAs) in the Veterans Administration (VA) System

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Fast Facts

- The national PA position **vacancy rate** in the VA system was **23%** as of late 2015.¹
- The annual **turnover rate** for PAs in the VA is **12-14%**.²
- The VA currently has **no strategic plan** to recruit and retain PAs, limiting access to care.²
- Currently, there is **no system** to ensure PAs are compensated at a competitive rate by the VA, contributing to a diminished quality of care for veterans.²

What's the Issue?

In recent years, the VA system has experienced an array of institutional challenges that have ultimately worsened the quality of care provided to the nation's veterans. Long wait times, persistent provider shortages, inadequate strategic planning, and limited resources have contributed to the gradual deterioration of the VA system and worsening outcomes for those served by VA facilities. The severity of the current crisis at the VA calls for innovative solutions through which VA administrators can recruit highly trained providers in a cost-effective manner, reduce wait times for veterans, and ensure higher quality care for those who have served the United States in the armed forces.

What's the Solution?

Supporting the next generation of health care professionals represents a crucial component of a comprehensive strategy to resolve the issues currently plaguing the VA. S.426, the Grow Our Own Directive (GOOD): Physician Assistant Employment and Education Act of 2017, introduced by Senator Jon Tester, would invest in workforce development by providing financial assistance to aspiring PAs seeking to complete their education. In exchange for this assistance, recipients would commit to work at a VA facility. In addition to providing financial assistance to those enrolled in PA educational programs, S.426 would direct the VA to establish competitive compensation standards for PAs, thereby improving retention rates, quality standards, and access to care for veterans. Through this comprehensive approach, the crisis at the VA may be effectively addressed in the interest of the nation's veterans.

For additional information, please contact Director of Government Relations Athena Abdullah at abdullah@PAEAonline.org.

REFERENCES

¹ Half of Critical Positions Open at Some VA Hospitals, USA Today, August 20, 2015.

<https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2015/08/20/half-critical-positions-open-some-vas/32003103/>. Accessed June 9, 2017.

² AAPA, Supporting PAs in the VA, 2017. <https://www.aapa.org/career-central/leaders-innovators/supporting-pas-va/>. Accessed June 9, 2017.

