

# Diversity in Physician Assistant (PA) Education

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## Fast Facts

**69.4%** of first-year PA students are **Caucasian** compared to **60.4%** of the U.S. general population.<sup>1</sup>

**3.9%** of first-year PA students are **Black or African American** compared to **13.4%** of the U.S. general population.<sup>1</sup>

**7.6%** of first-year PA students are **Hispanic or Latino** compared to **18.3%** of the U.S. general population.<sup>1</sup>

## What's the Issue?

As the general population of the United States has grown increasingly diverse, the urgency of combating health disparities based upon race and ethnicity has become clear among health care stakeholders. This is particularly true among health care educators who recognize the role that diversity plays in the delivery of high-quality patient care. While the value of diversity among health care professionals is clear, more work is needed to create a health care workforce fully equipped to provide culturally competent care. Black or African American and Hispanic or Latino individuals remain significantly underrepresented among first-year PA students, posing a threat to the goal of health equity among traditionally marginalized patient populations.

## What's the Solution?

To ensure the development of a truly diverse health care workforce, Congress should act to provide incentives for PA program enhancement/development at institutions with large student populations from economically and educationally disadvantaged backgrounds. Enactment of the Physician Assistant Higher Education Modernization Act would represent a significant step towards achieving diversity in PA education by prioritizing grant applications for institutions providing post-baccalaureate opportunities to Hispanic Americans and allowing existing sources of funding for historically black colleges and universities to explicitly be used for the development of PA programs, among other provisions. Further progress could be achieved through the enactment of the Perinatal Workforce Act, which would authorize \$15 million annually for five years to support PA and other health professions programs with a demonstrated strategy to recruit and retain underrepresented minority students. Through these investments in the development of a diverse PA workforce, Congress can reaffirm its commitment to the provision of culturally competent care to patients and a more equitable health care system for all.

For additional information, please contact [tsmith@PAEAonline.org](mailto:tsmith@PAEAonline.org).

## REFERENCE

<sup>1</sup> Physician Assistant Education Association, *By the Numbers: Program Report 35: Data from the 2019 Program Survey*. Washington, DC: PAEA, 2020. doi: 10.17538/PR35.2020

