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Statement for the Record
Submitted to
U.S. Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor & Pensions
“Examining Health Care Workforce Shortages: Where Do We Go From Here?”
February 16, 2023

The PA Education Association (PAEA), representing the 300 accredited PA programs in the United States, welcomes the opportunity to submit a statement for the record regarding federal policy options to mitigate health care provider shortages.

This hearing comes at a time of both great challenges and significant opportunities for the future of our nation’s health workforce. As health systems across the country adapt to a new, post-pandemic normal, one of the most pressing issues that must be addressed by policymakers is a critical shortage of health care professionals exacerbated by the pandemic. According to the Association of American Medical Colleges, the U.S. is anticipated to face a shortage of up to 124,000 physicians by 2034.¹ While this projection is daunting, the PA profession is committed to playing a critical role in addressing workforce gaps, particularly in our nation’s most rural and underserved communities.

The PA profession was founded in the mid-1960s specifically to address projected shortages of primary care physicians. Based upon the fast-track model of training physicians used during World War II, PA education provides high-quality, medical model-based training to all

¹ Association of American Medical Colleges. (2021). *The Complexities of Physician Supply and Demand: Projections from 2019 to 2034*. <https://www.aamc.org/media/54681/download>.

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students in a manner that allows them to quickly enter the clinical workforce. The typical PA program lasts approximately 27 months and is divided into a didactic, or classroom-based phase, followed by a clinical phase. During students' clinical year, they complete a series of clinical rotations in primary care, behavioral health, obstetrics and gynecology, surgery, and emergency medicine, among other specialties. This intensive training provides PA graduates with the education necessary to switch specialties over the course of their careers based upon the workforce needs of their communities.

While the PA profession has significant potential to address projected workforce shortages, this potential can only be fulfilled if PA programs have the resources necessary to produce practice-ready graduates and if graduates have appropriate financial support to practice in high-need capacities. As the Health, Education, Labor and Pensions committee works to strengthen the health workforce in the 118th Congress, PAEA would like to offer the following recommendations for the committee's consideration.

National Health Service Corps Reauthorization

One of the most critical health workforce priorities that Congress must address in 2023 is the upcoming expiration of mandatory funding for the National Health Service Corps (NHSC) on September 30. For over 50 years, the NHSC has been one of the federal government's largest investments in workforce distribution, making loan repayment and scholarship agreements with clinicians and students in exchange for a practice commitment in an underserved community. In 2021, Congress took historic action to address workforce shortages in underserved communities through the American Rescue Plan Act by investing \$800 million in supplemental funding for the NHSC's scholarship and loan repayment programs. This unprecedented funding level for the NHSC resulted in field strength growing from 13,053 providers in fiscal year 2019 to 20,215 providers in fiscal year 2022, an increase of nearly 55%.²

² Health Resources and Services Administration. (2022). *Bureau of Health Workforce Field Strength and Students and Trainees Dashboards*. <https://data.hrsa.gov/topics/health-workforce/field-strength>.



While this investment led to a remarkable increase in the number of clinicians fulfilling service commitments in underserved communities, the exhaustion of the supplemental appropriation and the upcoming expiration of the NHSC's mandatory authorization threaten to limit access to care as workforce shortages continue to grow. **As such, PAEA urges the HELP Committee to reauthorize the NHSC at a funding level that allows HRSA to fund 100% of eligible applicants for at least five years.**

Palliative Care and Hospice Education and Training Act

While extending the mandatory authorization for the NHSC is critical, Congress must also make new investments to strengthen the capacity of health professions education to meet national demand for graduates. Specifically, Congress must ensure that PA programs have a sufficient supply of faculty equipped to provide comprehensive education in specialty areas anticipated to be in high demand and the clinical training opportunities necessary to produce practice-ready graduates. According to a recent survey of PA programs, over 50% of respondents indicated that they are having increased difficulty securing clinical rotations in family medicine and other high-need settings, indicating the importance of congressional intervention to strengthen educational capacity.³

In recognition of the unique health care needs of older Americans and the capacity of the PA profession to provide this care, PAEA has been proud to support the bipartisan Palliative Care and Hospice Education and Training Act. This legislation would support faculty development, clinical training experiences, and didactic curriculum development for students in interprofessional palliative and hospice care. **Given the particularly acute elder care workforce shortage, PAEA urges the committee to advance this legislation in the 118th Congress.**

³ PA Education Association. (2021). *COVID-19 Rapid Response Report 4*. <https://paea.edcast.com/insights/covid-19-rapid-response-report-4>.



Black Maternal Health Momnibus Act

Beyond the value of investing in palliative care training, ensuring a robust, well-trained workforce also requires Congress to examine opportunities to promote workforce diversity. Historically, across health professions, individuals from racially and ethnically underrepresented communities have faced formidable barriers to entering and completing a health professions program. This lack of representation among graduates impacts the ability of the future workforce to deliver culturally competent care, and breaking down barriers to a diverse PA student body is a top priority for PAEA. In alignment with this goal, PAEA has endorsed the Black Maternal Health Momnibus Act - critical legislation that would work to address maternal health disparities by expanding perinatal health professional programs and providing scholarships to students interested in pursuing careers in obstetrics and gynecology. **As part of a broader health workforce strategy, PAEA supports the continued advancement of the Black Maternal Health Momnibus Act in the 118th Congress.**

PA Higher Education Modernization Act

Fully leveraging the capacity of the PA profession to mitigate health workforce shortages requires reforms that address long-standing exclusions of the profession from key federal programs. As such, PAEA has endorsed the PA Higher Education Modernization Act. This comprehensive legislation would address key components of the Higher Education Act, including investments in program development at historically Black colleges and universities, Hispanic-serving institutions, and other minority-serving institutions that have previously excluded PA programs. The bill would further reduce financial barriers to students by restoring access to subsidized direct loans for PA and other graduate-level health professions students to limit long-term borrowing costs. **As a final component of a comprehensive workforce solution, PAEA urges the HELP committee to support the PA Higher Education Modernization Act.**

PAEA appreciates the opportunity to provide the Association's perspective on effective policy interventions to respond to national health workforce shortages and looks forward to serving



as a resource to members and staff throughout the 118th Congress. Should you require additional information or have questions, please contact Tyler Smith, Senior Director of Government Relations, at tsmith@PAEAonline.org or 703-667-4356.