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**PA Week 2022: Op-ed Template**

When dealing with a medical issue, not being able to receive timely healthcare treatment can have serious and often life-altering consequences. Whether a patient is seeking a routine appointment or in need of critical emergency care, they should have the confidence in their community healthcare system that the diagnosis and treatment for their situation is readily accessible.

If you have tried to make a medical appointment recently, though, you likely know that it isn’t always as easy as it should be. Patients across the country often struggle to find a provider who can see them when they need care.

To ensure every patient has access to and receives the high-quality care they need *when* they need it, it is essential that our existing healthcare workforce can practice to the full extent of their education, training, and experience. Physician associates, also known as PAs, are part of this healthcare workforce that must be utilized fully in order to meet the demands of today’s modern healthcare needs.

Our healthcare system is facing a “perfect storm”: Demand for healthcare providers is outpacing supply, which has left patients suffering. More than [96 million Americans](https://data.hrsa.gov/topics/health-workforce/shortage-areas) lack adequate access to primary care and more than [155 million Americans](https://data.hrsa.gov/topics/health-workforce/shortage-areas) lack access to mental health care. These are staggering numbers. On top of that, our nation is facing a shortage of up to [3.2 million healthcare workers](https://www.aha.org/fact-sheets/2021-05-26-fact-sheet-strengthening-health-care-workforce) by 2026. Combine that with a growing aging population, significant percentages of the U.S. population experiencing chronic diseases like obesity ([42% of adults aged 20 and over](https://www.cdc.gov/obesity/data/adult.html)) and diabetes ([more than 37 million Americans](https://www.cdc.gov/diabetes/library/spotlights/diabetes-facts-stats.html)), and the lingering effects of COVID-19, and we have reached a tipping point.

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America’s more than 159,000 PAs are licensed clinicians who practice medicine in every specialty and setting and in every state. In [STATE] alone, there are [NUMBER] licensed PAs – each a trusted, rigorously educated and trained healthcare professional. PAs are dedicated to expanding access to care and transforming community health and wellness through patient-centered, team-based medical practice.

A [2022 study](https://www.nccpa.net/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/2022-and-2018-Public-Perception-Report-Final.pdf) from the National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants (NCCPA) found more than 66% of patients received care provided by a PA, demonstrating that the demand for PAs has never been higher. With more than 500 million annual patient visits, PAs are a crucial part of the solution to today’s workforce shortages which are crippling healthcare and they are critical to ensuring patients have access to quality healthcare when and where they need it. With a projected [31% increase](https://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/physician-assistants.htm) in PA employment between 2020 and 2030, it is evident that the growth of this profession has an essential role in healthcare sustainability.

Today’s healthcare challenges require modern solutions. To limit PAs – highly educated and trained medical professionals – from providing care is not only nonsensical, but directly impedes a patient’s ability to access quality healthcare.

Next time you seek out a medical appointment, ask whether a PA is available. You’ll experience, firsthand, the excellent patient care PAs provide. Isn’t it time you made an appointment with a PA? 

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