

Media Guide for Reporting on PAs

The American Academy of Physician Associates (AAPA) values the role the media plays in providing patients and the public with healthcare news and information. Physician associates/assistants (PAs) are committed to working with the media to ensure accuracy in reporting and to provide PA expertise and perspective on key healthcare issues. To assist members of the media, AAPA has prepared this guide to address frequently asked questions about PAs and the PA profession and to provide style rules to use when writing about PAs.

For more information, please email media@aapa.org.

PA Title Change

In 2021, AAPA's governing body voted to change the profession's title to physician associate; following this decision, AAPA changed its name to American Academy of Physician Associates. PAs will continue to use physician assistant or PA as their title in clinical settings and with patients, until the jurisdiction governing their licensure and practice has formally adopted the title of physician associate.

During this time of transition, AAPA is encouraging the media to use physician associates on first reference when referring to the profession at large, followed by PA in subsequent references.

It is important to note that the PA title change does not impact a PA's scope of practice. PAs are committed to team-based care where each provider is allowed to practice medicine to the full extent of their education, training, and experience. More information on the title change can be found at aapa.org/title-change.

Please note that **there is no possessive apostrophe in the title of the profession**, and physician should not be plural, i.e., it is inaccurate to write the title as physician's associate or physicians' associate.

PA Value to Healthcare

PAs are licensed clinicians who practice medicine in every specialty and setting. Trusted, rigorously educated and trained healthcare professionals, PAs are dedicated to expanding access to care and transforming health and wellness through patient-centered, team-based medical practice.

In today's healthcare delivery, PAs collaborate with physicians and other healthcare providers as part of a modern healthcare team committed to providing the best patient outcomes. Today, there are more than 178,700 PAs in the U.S. PAs account for more than 500 million patient visits each year. According to the BLS, the PA employment is expected to grow by [28% between 2023 and 2033](#), much faster than the 4% average for all occupations.

PAs are playing an increasingly important role in today's healthcare as the nationwide physician and healthcare workforce shortages worsen. According to [U.S. Department of Health and Human Services](#), 76 million Americans lack adequate access to primary care services, and 122 million Americans lack adequate access to mental healthcare. PAs are part of the solution to improving access to care and addressing today's pressing healthcare issues.

According to a [2023 Harris Poll survey](#), 91% of patients agree that PAs are part of the solution to address the shortage of healthcare providers. In many rural and underserved areas, a PA may be the only healthcare provider for hundreds of miles. The 2023 Harris Poll found that 90% percent of patients said that PAs make it easier to obtain a medical appointment, and more than two in three patients would trust a PA to serve as their primary health provider.

A 2025 [Morning Consult survey](#) found that more than half (55%) of physicians say removing barriers to PA practice would reduce patient wait times, and 68% of those who support modernizing PA laws believe doing so would help ease provider shortages.

PAs are not "mid-level providers," "physician extenders," or "non-physician providers." The PA profession is a distinct healthcare profession whose value in delivering high-quality, team-based, patient-centered care has been demonstrated and documented.

More information on the PA profession can be found at aapa.org/about/what-is-a-pa/.

PA Education

PAs are educated at the master's degree level. There are more than 300 accredited PA programs in the country and admission is highly competitive, requiring a bachelor's degree and completion of courses in basic and behavioral sciences as prerequisites.

Accreditation standards ensure PA students receive a robust foundation for clinical practice through requirements for supervised clinical practice experiences in family medicine, emergency medicine, internal medicine, surgery, pediatrics, women's health including prenatal and gynecologic care, and behavioral and mental healthcare.

PA programs are approximately 27 months (three academic years) and include classroom instruction and more than 2,000 hours of clinical rotations with an emphasis on primary care in ambulatory clinics, physician offices, and acute or long-term care facilities.

Once a student has graduated from an accredited PA program, they are eligible to take the Physician Assistant National Certifying Exam (PANCE) administered by the National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants (NCCPA). Licensing boards ensure that applicants for PA licensure meet the rigorous standards set by the state. Licensing is a requirement for practicing medicine as a PA.

PAs are committed to lifelong learning. To maintain national certification, PAs must complete 100 hours of continuing medical education credits every two years and take a recertification exam every 10 years.

Grouping PAs with Other Providers

In some settings, the terms advanced practice providers (APP) or advanced practice clinicians (APC) are used to refer to different clinicians as part of group. For example, one institution may refer to all providers with advanced degrees (advanced practice registered nurses, PAs, nutritionists, psychologists, etc.) as advanced practice providers or clinicians; another institution may intend to refer only to APRNs and PAs. These terms are imprecise, are often applied inconsistently, and do a disservice to patients who deserve to understand the unique value and role of all healthcare providers.

AAPA encourages the media to avoid these terms in your reporting; however, if these terms cannot be avoided, it is best to indicate the provider groups that the terms represent in parenthesis after first use. For example: Green Hospital believes that advanced practice providers (PAs and APRNs) expand access to care and are critical to the delivery of healthcare in the community.

It is acceptable to use the terms APP and APC when referring to a specific title, department, or organization, for example: Director of Advanced Practice, Department of Advanced Practice Providers, Advanced Practice Provider Executives, etc.