



***AAPA Statement for the Record to the House Committee on Veterans' Affairs
Subcommittee on Health Legislative Hearing***

June 12, 2025

Subcommittee Chairman Miller-Meeks, Subcommittee Ranking Member Brownley, and Members of the Committee on Veterans' Affairs:

On behalf of the approximately 190,000 physician associates/physician assistants (PAs) throughout the United States, including more than 2,500 PAs employed by the Veterans' Health Administration to serve veterans, the American Academy of Physician Associates (AAPA) thanks the Subcommittee on Health for its continued leadership on veterans' health issues. We appreciate the opportunity to comment on H.R. 3767, the Health Professionals Scholarship Program Improvement Act of 2025 (HPSP Improvement Act of 2025), which was introduced by Reps. Abraham Hamadeh (R-AZ) and Nikki Budzinski (D-IL).

The PA profession proudly maintains a close connection to the VA, as the founding class of PA students in 1965 were veterans. These first PA students were former Navy hospital corpsmen and Army combat medics with considerable medical training from their military service. The VA was the first employer of PAs in 1967 and today is the largest single employer of PAs in the nation. Eleven percent of all practicing PAs and 24 percent of PAs employed by the VA are veterans, active-duty military, or serve in the National Guard and Reserves. PAs maintain a strong, personal desire and dedication to serve veterans and AAPA fully supports efforts, such as the law enacted in 2018 that provided funding for HPSP scholarships for PAs, to strengthen the workforce at the VA and expand access to care for veterans.

Last year, AAPA commented on a proposed rule to implement requirements in the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2023 for the VA to "specifically award scholarships to applicants pursuing degrees or training in mental health disciplines, including advanced practice nursing (with a focus on mental health or substance use disorder), psychology, and social work," and to provide no fewer than 50 additional awards to such applicants beginning in academic year 2022. In its comments, AAPA noted that while it appreciated the VA specifying that PAs should be eligible for the additional HPSP scholarships, it also formally requested that the VA specifically list PAs in the Code of Federal Regulations as

well to minimize any future confusion.¹ In its final rule, the VA responded that “PAs are eligible to apply for and receive HPSP scholarships for mental health disciplines under proposed § 17.603(b)(2),” but that it would not be making changes based on AAPA’s comments because, “the list of mental health disciplines in proposed § 17.603(b)(2) is not an exhaustive list” and “VA determined that it should maintain a non-exhaustive list in the regulation to permit flexibility so that new mental health professions can be included without the need to amend the regulations.”² AAPA continues to support efforts that encourage and support PAs to practice in mental or behavioral health and psychiatry to help address national provider shortages.

AAPA has heard from some PAs working for the VA that even after completing the HPSP, there are many problems with communication and administrative delays that have prevented HPSP beneficiary PAs from being able to treat veterans. Some PAs have faced delays as long as 6 months from the time of their interview until they began work at a VA facility. These unnecessary delays impose the burden of an income gap on PAs and other health care providers who would like to care for veterans, while also compounding the problem of student debt. The HPSP Improvement Act of 2025 would address this problem by requiring the Secretary of the VA to ensure that HPSP participants receive a contract for full-time employment within 90 days of the completion of their training.

The HPSP Improvement Act of 2025 is an important step towards ensuring that the VA is able to hire qualified health care professionals for which recruitment or retention is difficult. However, as the VA and Congress work to strengthen the Veterans Health Administration workforce, it is essential that PAs are included in these efforts. Despite previous inclusion in VA’s HPSP, and despite the most recent OIG Determination of Veterans Health Administration’s Severe Occupational Staffing Shortages listing numerous severe shortages of PAs, mental health care providers, and primary care providers,³ the VA has not made PAs eligible for the current round of HPSP.⁴ It is important for VA recruitment and retention efforts and for veterans’ access to care that PAs be eligible for HPSP, and we believe it is critical to ensure that PAs and other health care providers for which there are severe shortages at VA facilities are included in HPSP.

¹ American Academy of Physician Associates. [Comments on Proposed Rule-VA Health Professional Scholarship Program](#). October, 2023.

² Federal Register. [38 CFR Part 17, RIN 2900-AR98, VA Health Professional Scholarship Program](#). June, 2024.

³ Veterans Health Administration. [OIG Determination of Veterans Health Administration’s Severe Occupational Staffing Shortages Fiscal Year 2024](#). August, 2024.

⁴ Department of Veterans Affairs. [HPSP](#). Retrieved June 17, 2025.

With clinical expertise, medical training, the initiative to help, and unique connection to our veteran population, PAs are on the ground in local communities and especially positioned to increase access to care in areas of health care in which VA has acute shortages.

AAPA thanks the Subcommittee for this opportunity to provide comments on H.R. 3767, the HPSP Improvement Act of 2025, and welcome any comments or questions you may have for us. Please contact AAPA Vice President of Federal Advocacy Tate Heuer at theuer@aapa.org.