



Evaluating and Certifying Health Status

As licensed medical providers, PAs conduct health assessments and certify the health status of individuals. Many school districts, athletic organizations and state and federal laws recognize PAs as providers who are qualified to evaluate and certify health status and fitness for duty. PAs can complete and sign physical exam forms for students of all ages and perform pre-participation examinations to certify the health of student athletes. Many also authorize PAs to perform specialized certifications such as clearing a student athlete to return to play following an injury or concussion. State laws commonly authorize PAs to examine and certify the health of school bus drivers, other transit workers, foster and adoptive parents, and law enforcement personnel.

The federal government also recognizes the ability of PAs to evaluate and certify health status. In the U.S. Army, PAs perform flight physicals for aviation personnel and can recommend grounding personnel due to medical problems they identify. More broadly, PAs in the military perform physical examinations for personnel transporting and handling nuclear weapons and cargo. The U.S. Department of Transportation authorizes PAs to perform and sign the medical examiner's certification for commercial motor vehicle drivers.

PA BACKGROUND AND EDUCATION

A broad, generalist medical education gives PAs the skills needed to evaluate and certify health status. PAs take medical histories, perform physical examinations, order and interpret laboratory tests, diagnose illness, develop and manage treatment plans for their patients, prescribe medications, and assist in surgery.

The intensive PA program curriculum is modeled on the medical school curriculum. The typical PA program extends over 27 continuous months and begins with classroom instruction in basic medical sciences. This is followed by rotations in medical and surgical disciplines including family medicine, internal medicine, general surgery, pediatrics, obstetrics and gynecology, emergency medicine, and psychiatry.¹ PA students complete at least 2,000 hours of supervised clinical practice in various settings and locations by graduation. Almost all PA programs now award master's degrees, and by 2020 all programs must do so.

PAs must graduate from an accredited PA program, pass the Physician Assistant National Certifying Examination developed by the National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants, and be licensed by a state in order to practice. To maintain their national certification, PAs must complete 100 hours of continuing medical education every two years and take a recertification exam every 10 years.²

SAMPLE POLICIES

[Suggested Guidelines for Management of Concussion in Sports, National Federation of State High School Associations](#)

[California Education Code, §49458](#)

[United States Ski and Snowboard Association Concussion Policy](#)

FOR MORE INFORMATION

For more information about PAs, including PA education and PA scope of practice, visit AAPA.org.

ABOUT AAPA

AAPA is the national organization that advocates for all PAs and provides tools to improve PA practice and patient care. Founded in 1968, AAPA represents a profession of more than 140,000 certified PAs across all medical and surgical specialties in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, the U.S. territories and the uniformed services. Visit AAPA.org to learn more.

REFERENCES

- ¹ Physician Assistant Education Association. *Program report 33: By the numbers, Data from the 2017 program survey*. Alexandria, VA: PAEA; 2018.
- ² American Academy of PAs. *What is a PA?* <https://www.aapa.org/what-is-a-pa/> Accessed April 2, 2020.

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