

# Frequently Asked Questions About the AAPA Salary Report

BY THE AAPA RESEARCH DEPARTMENT

One of AAPA's most important responsibilities is to support research and collect and analyze data to track growth and change in the PA profession. The 2016 AAPA Salary report includes more detailed PA compensation and benefits information than ever before. We've compiled this list of questions you often ask us—and your employers ask you—and the corresponding answers. Please contact us via email if you have more questions. We're here to help.

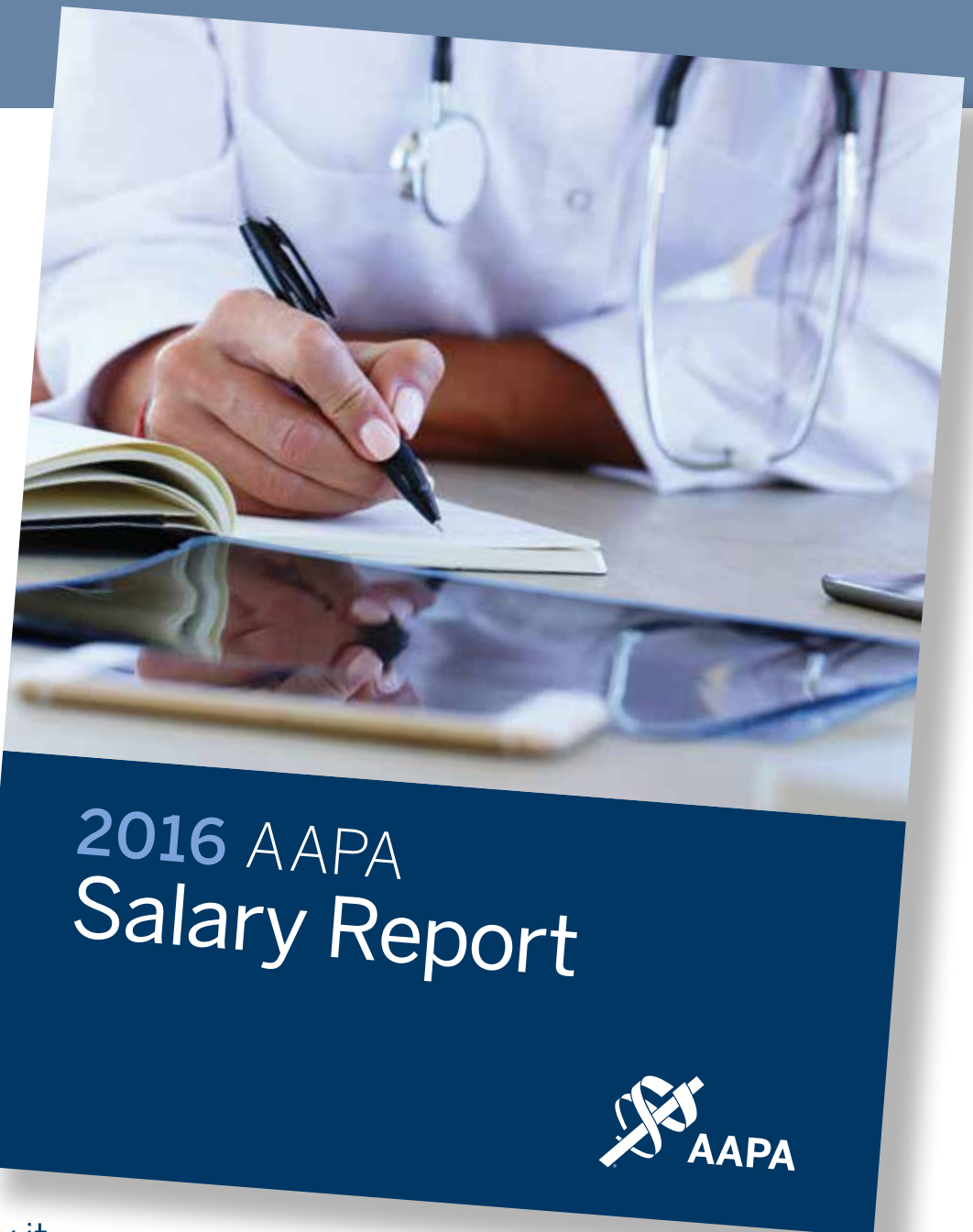
**Q.** There are a lot of salary surveys available. Why should I use the AAPA Salary Report?

**A.** AAPA Salary Report data is based on more than 6,000 responses from full-time clinically practicing PAs. The AAPA Salary Report is the only resource that provides detailed information on salary, bonuses and hourly wages, broken out by state, experience, specialty, setting and employer type. These are all areas that will impact a PA's base salary or hourly wage. The report also provides in-depth national and state-level information on compensation for taking and being available for call, as well as for profit sharing and other kinds of compensation and benefits available to PAs. No

other salary survey will provide the breadth of information contained in AAPA Salary Reports.

**Q.** I am trying to negotiate a higher salary but the employer does not want to accept AAPA data, saying that it is not objective or accurate. Can you help me explain why it is a valid data source?

**A.** AAPA frequently hears that our data cannot be valid as it is self-reported. However, we collect our data at the same time PAs are receiving their W-2s and ask PAs to refer to this information when they respond to the survey, to ensure that they are recalling their information accurately. More importantly, we benchmark our data against other available salary data and have found that we are consistently within a reasonable range of



other salary sources, given the differences in what is considered “salary.” For example, the base salary in the AAPA salary report is within \$1,200 of the NCCPA number, based on employee-reported data, and within \$1,200 of the Bureau of Labor Statistics number, based on employer-reported data. Other PAs reference the Medical Group Management Association as a source of salary benchmarking. However, MGMA data is based on salary data reported to MGMA by a small select group of organizations and therefore the breakouts needed to accurately determine a PA’s base compensation are limited due to the small sample sizes.

**Q.** Do you collect salary and data in ranges like other salary surveys do?

**A.** The AAPA Salary Survey collects data on a scale rather than asking respondents to select a range in which they fall. Many salary surveys collect data in terms of categories, such as \$90,000 to \$99,999, \$100,000 to \$109,999, etc. They then assume that the midpoints of \$95,000, \$105,000, and so on are the salaries for the PAs who responded to that respective category. The advantage to this is that participants may feel more comfortable providing their information in this manner. The disadvantage is the lack of accuracy. AAPA, on the other hand, asks for the nearest whole number in terms of salary, such as \$91,425 or \$113,750. AAPA data is also collected at the start of the year, when W-2s have been released and PAs may refer to them for accuracy. While collecting on a scale means that we may get fewer responses due to the sensitive nature of the information collected, it also means that our data is the most accurate.

**Q.** Do you average your salary data over time like other salary surveys?

**A.** No, we report salary data for each calendar year. Other organizations will average salaries over the past two to three years. With the year-over-year increase in PA salaries consistently exceeding the rate of inflation, we believe that collecting and presenting data year-by-year will benefit the PAs using AAPA’s Salary Reports.

**Q.** What is a percentile? When do I use them?

**A.** A percentile is the point at or below which a given percentage of respondents fall. For example, the 10th percentile is the value at or below which 10 percent of the respondents fall—a 10th percentile salary of \$80,000 means that 10 percent of all the respondents in that category will make \$80,000 or less. Conversely, the 90th percentile salary of \$120,000 means that 90 percent of all respondents in that category will make \$120,000 or less.

You can use percentiles to approximate an appropriate value within any given table. For example, if you are a PA with 25 years’ experience and are looking a table that lists only state and specialty, you may want to use the 90th percentile to determine your ideal salary due to the lack of data broken out by experience. Conversely, if you have one year of experience, you may want to use the 10th percentile, while the 50th percentile may be more appropriate for 10 years’ experience.

**Q.** Where is the average salary listed?

**A.** We find that the median is a better measure of the “middle salary” than the mean, as it is not affected by outliers—those responses that are on the far extremes of a normal response. We do not report out the mean or “average” salary, except to compare our data to NCCPA and BLS data, where there is only a mean salary in common.

**Q.** Why do you list salary and bonuses separately? What is the total compensation I should expect?

**A.** When negotiating for a job, PAs need to know what salary or hourly wage is appropriate for their position, separate from whatever bonus might also be offered. Because salary is generally negotiable, along with some benefits, while bonus is typically not, we have elected to keep these separate to facilitate this process.

**Q.** I am a PA in Montana working in a critical access hospital. I do not see my information in the Salary Report. Why not? And who has that information for me?

**A.** Salary information is presented by specialty, setting, experience and other categories to provide the most detailed information possible for PAs. But, in order to main the trust and anonymity of those who take our surveys, as well as the integrity of the percentiles we calculate, we will not show any data points based on fewer than five respondents. So for PAs in states with relatively few PAs, or in uncommon settings or specialties, this detailed information is sometimes not available through AAPA. In those circumstances we would refer you to your state PA association.

**Q.** I am a PA in Arizona and I have been in a urology practice for two years. I do not see this information in the AAPA Salary Report? Why not? And who has that information for me?

**A.** In this example, we have information on PAs in Arizona with two to four years of experience, PAs in urology with two to four years of experience, and PAs in Arizona in all surgical specialties combined. Using the percen-

tiles available within the report, you can approximate a reasonable salary range for negotiating the best rate of pay.


In Arizona, salaries are higher than in the U.S. overall. Where we would normally recommend that someone with fewer years of experience compare themselves to the 10th to 25th percentiles, with the higher salaries in Arizona, one might estimate a negotiating salary at closer to the 50th to 75th percentiles for any national tables, at the 25th for the Arizona tables as a whole, and at the 50th for PAs in Arizona with two to four years of experience. Using this example, when looking at each of the relevant tables, we can determine an approximate range of \$95,000 to \$100,000 for a PA in Arizona with two years of experience in urology. 

Table 8 cont. Base Salary and Bonus From Primary Clinical Employer by State and Experience

STATE	EXPERIENCE	N	10TH PERCENTILE (\$)	25TH PERCENTILE (\$)	50TH PERCENTILE (\$)	75TH PERCENTILE (\$)	90TH PERCENTILE (\$)
Montana	0 to 1 year	Base salary	<5	*	*	*	*
		Bonus	<5	*	*	*	*
	2 to 4 years	Base salary	5	69,000	84,000	91,000	100,200
		Bonus	<5	*	*	*	*
	5 to 9 years	Base salary	9	89,000	95,000	97,500	111,000
		Bonus	<5	*	*	*	*
	10 to 14 years	Base salary	8	88,000	94,338	100,000	118,500
		Bonus	<5	*	*	*	*
	15 to 19 years	Base salary	<5	*	*	*	*
		Bonus	<5	*	*	*	*
20 or more years	Base salary	5	15,000	89,292	94,000	103,000	
	Bonus	<5	*	*	*	*	
Nebraska	0 to 1 year	Base salary	5	80,000	85,000	93,800	124,000
		Bonus	5	291	500	2,500	95,000
	2 to 4 years	Base salary	23	72,000	85,000	93,800	124,000
		Bonus	<5	*	*	*	*