

# Frequently Asked Questions About the AAPA Salary Report

One of AAPA's most important responsibilities is to collect and analyze data to track growth and change in the PA profession. The 2017 AAPA Salary Report includes more detailed PA compensation and benefits information than ever before. We've compiled this list of questions PAs often ask us — and employers ask PAs — and the corresponding answers. Please contact us via email with more questions at [research@aapa.org](mailto:research@aapa.org). We're here to help.

## **There are many salary surveys available. Why should I use the AAPA Salary Report?**

Salary Report data are based on thousands of responses from full-time PAs. The 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 factors that can affect 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 provides the breadth of information contained in the AAPA Salary Report.

## **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?**

AAPA frequently hears that its data cannot be valid as they are 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 very small range of other salary sources, given the differences in what is considered "salary."

For example, the base salary in the Salary Report is within \$3,000 of the NCCPA number, which is based on employee-reported data over a three-year time period, and within \$520 of the Bureau of Labor Statistics number, which is based on employer-reported data. Some employers reference the Medical Group Management Association (MGMA) as a source of salary benchmarking. However, MGMA data is based on salary data reported

to MGMA by a small group of organizations, and the breakouts needed to accurately determine a PA's base compensation are limited due to the small sample sizes.

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

The AAPA Salary Survey collects actual salary data rather than asking respondents to select a range in which their salary falls. 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 (\$95,000, \$105,000, etc.) represent the actual salaries of the PAs who responded in that category. The advantage to this approach is that participants may feel more comfortable providing information. The disadvantage is the lack of accuracy. AAPA, on the other hand, asks that salary be reported to the nearest whole number, such as \$91,425 or \$113,750. AAPA data are also collected at the beginning of the calendar year, when W-2s are released and PAs may refer to them for accuracy. While we may deter some from responding due to the sensitive nature of the information collected, the data we collect is more accurate.

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

No, we report salary data for each calendar year. Other organizations (such as NCCPA) report average salaries over the past four 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 PAs using AAPA's Salary Report.



## Frequently Asked Questions About the AAPA Salary Report, continued

### What is a percentile? When do I use them?

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% of the respondents fall — a 10th percentile salary of \$80,000 means that 10% of all the respondents made \$80,000 or less. Conversely, the 90th percentile salary of \$120,000 means that 90% of the respondents made at least \$120,000. You can use percentiles to approximate an appropriate value on any given table. For example, if you are a PA with 25 years' experience and are looking at a table that lists only state and specialty, you may want to use the 90th percentile to determine your ideal salary since the data is not broken out by experience. Similarly, if you have one year of experience, you may want to use the 10th percentile, while the 50th percentile may be more appropriate for those with 10 years' experience.

### Where is the average salary listed?

We find that the median, or 50th percentile, 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 the mean or “average” salary, but instead report the median, which is the value at which 50% of PAs are compensated less than, and 50% of PAs are compensated more than.

### Why do you list salary and bonuses separately?

#### What is the total compensation I should expect?

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 keep these separate to facilitate the negotiation process.

### Do base salaries differ between people who have and who have not received a bonus?

AAPA Research is commonly asked this question to help PAs while they are interpreting the tables in the AAPA Salary Report. Bonus is listed, but base salaries are not reported separately for PAs who received a bonus and those who did not. Some PAs wonder if this matters when considering a fair salary.

We have analyzed the 2017 AAPA Salary Survey data extensively — beyond the tables included in the Salary Report — and found that both mean base salary and median base salary are statistically equivalent for PAs who do and who do not receive a bonus.

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

Salary information is presented by specialty, setting, experience, and other categories to provide the most detailed information possible for PAs. But, in order to maintain the trust and anonymity of those who take our surveys, as well as the integrity of the percentiles we calculate, we do 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 not available through AAPA.

### I am a PA in Scottsdale, Arizona and I have been in a urology practice for two years. I do not see this information in the AAPA Salary Report. Is there any way I can use the salary report to understand whether I'm being paid appropriately?

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

Table 9 cont. Hourly Wage From Primary Clinical Employer by State and Experience

STATE	EXPERIENCE	N	10TH PERCENTILE (\$)	25TH PERCENTILE (\$)	50TH PERCENTILE (\$)	75TH PERCENTILE (\$)	90TH PERCENTILE (\$)
Massachusetts	0 to 1 year	5	45.00	50.00	53.00	65.00	65.00
	2 to 4 years	<5	*	*	*	*	*
	5 to 9 years	6	50.00	50.00	59.50	67.00	80.00
	10 to 14 years	<5	*	*	*	*	*
	15 to 19 years	<5	*	*	62.08	65.00	66.26
	20 or more years	6	55.00	61.00	*	*	*
New York	0 to 1 year	<5	*	*	51.65	60.00	70.00
	2 to 4 years	14	45.00	47.76	58.00	61.25	67.50
	5 to 9 years	20	47.00	54.61	60.00	62.00	75.00
	10 to 14 years	9	50.00	58.00	67.88	71.32	85.00
	15 to 19 years	6	52.12	55.00	65.58	73.50	80.00
	20 or more years	24	50.00	56.00	*	*	*
North Carolina	0 to 1 year	<5	*	*	*	*	*
	2 to 4 years	<5	*	57.00	60.00	62.57	70.00
	5 to 9 years	5	44.14	59.00	63.50	75.25	85.00
	10 to 14 years	6	52.00	*	*	*	*
	15 to 19 years	<5	*	58.50	66.04	67.50	107.00
	20 or more years	8	50.00	*	*	*	55.00
				40.00	52.00	75.00	