



What is a Physician Assistant?

Physician Assistants (PA) are academically prepared and highly skilled health care professionals who provide a broad range of medical services. PAs are physician extenders and not independent practitioners; they work with a degree of autonomy, negotiated and agreed on by the supervising physician and the PA. PAs can work in any clinical setting to extend physician services. PAs complement existing services and aid in improving patient access to health care. A relationship with a supervising physician is essential to the role of the PA.

The PA's scope of practice is determined on an individual basis and formally outlined in a practice contract or agreement among the supervising physician, the PA and often the facility or service where the PA will work. Activities may include conducting patient interviews, histories and physical examinations; performing selected diagnostic and therapeutic interventions or procedures; and counselling patients on preventive health care.

In Canada, 250 PAs currently work in health care settings, primarily in Manitoba and Ontario. PAs are gradually being introduced in other provinces, and evaluation of their impact on access, wait times, quality of care and both patient and provider satisfaction is ongoing.

The profession's national organization, CAPA, endorses PAs practising in all parts of Canada. CAPA advocates for the physician-PA model as a means to improve access and decrease wait-times for quality health care.