



PRE-PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT ADVISING GUIDE

Is the Physician Assistant profession right for you?

If you enjoy science and want to work directly with patients in a team-based medical practice, then train for this challenging career and have the satisfaction of knowing you are a front-line healthcare service provider. Physician Assistant (PA) programs are master's degrees that educate students in general medicine and the skills to perform a broad range of diagnostic, therapeutic, preventative, and health maintenance services across the field of healthcare.

Physician Assistant is one of the fastest growing occupations in the United States at a 9% projected growth for the next 10 years according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

What does a Physician Assistant typically do?

PAs (physician associates / physician assistants) are licensed clinicians who practice medicine. Trained as medical generalists, they can diagnose and treat in all areas of medicine and for all patients, regardless of age or gender.

- Collect information from patients, families, and medical professionals for a complete medical history.
- Prepare patients for procedures and treatment by interviewing and educating patients and families.
- Order and interpret various tests to diagnose a patient's injuries or illnesses.
- Treats patients through physical, immunological, and pharmaceutical practices.
- Record patient progress and adjust treatments accordingly.
- Prescribe medicine and immunizations in line with patient treatment plans.

Where do Physician Assistants work?

Physician Assistants can work across all patient populations and in any focus area or healthcare setting such as:

- Emergency and surgical/operating rooms
- Psychiatric facilities
- Pediatric care
- Private/Family Practice (Physician's Office)
- Specialty Clinics (Orthopaedic, Cardiology, OB/GYN, Neurology, Dermatology, and others)

What is the difference between a Physician Assistant and Nurse Practitioner?

At the practice level, there are more similarities than differences between PAs and NPs, such as, both can write prescriptions. However, there are a few key differences:

- PAs are trained to practice medicine using a curriculum modeled on medical school education. NPs are trained in the advanced practice of nursing.
- PAs are educated in general medicine, which offers a comprehensive view of all aspects of medicine. NPs must choose a "patient population focus," e.g., pediatric nurse practitioner or women's health nurse practitioner.
- PAs can add to their PA credential by obtaining [Certificates of Added Qualifications](#) (CAQs) in dermatology, emergency medicine, nephrology, OB/GYN, Occupational Medicine, Orthopedic Surgery, Pediatrics, Palliative Medicine and Hospice Care, Psychiatry, and Cardiovascular & Thoracic Surgery. NPs are restricted to the nursing practice within a given patient population and cannot obtain PA CAQs.
- [AAPA PAs & NPs: Similarities & Differences](#)



BECOMING A PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT

Job Outlook

Median wages	\$60.58 hourly, \$126,010 annually
Employment (2022)	148,000 employees
Projected growth	Much faster than average (9% or higher)
Projected job openings (2022-2023)	12,200
Occupational Outlook Handbook	Physician Assistant

Colorado Programs

To become a PA, you must pass the licensure exam [PANCE](#) upon graduating from an ARC-PA accredited Master of Physician Assistant Studies (MPAS) program, which are on average 2 years in length, after having acquired a bachelor's degree. As of 2024, there are four [accredited programs](#) in Colorado.

Links to Programs:

[Colorado Mesa University](#)
[CU Anschutz](#)

[Red Rocks Community College](#)
[Rocky Vista University](#)

Program Requirements

Most MPAS programs require applicants to complete all prerequisite coursework before applying and to have a bachelor's degree conferred before starting the program. Program requirements include completing the [Physical Assistant College Admissions Test](#) (PA-CAT), applying via [Centralized Application Service for Physician Assistants](#) (CASPA), and having several hours of PA job shadowing, health-related volunteer work, and allied healthcare experience. For degree planning, plan early. Pre-PAs need to consult early on with individual institutions about the MPAS program requirements, start taking courses with content applicable to the [PA-CAT material](#), and use the [CASPA application cycle](#) as a guide while completing a four-year degree. Note: Many MPAS programs do not accept CLEP or AP credits for prerequisite courses; physics is not a common requirement.

Degree Sequencing and Course Selection should include [PA-CAT Exam Content](#):

Associate of Science (not required) > Bachelors > Master of Physician Assistant Studies

Common Prerequisites:

Anatomy	General Chemistry	Medical Terminology	Physiology
Biochemistry	English	Microbiology	Psychology
Biology	Genetics	Organic Chemistry	Statistics

Credential Maintenance:

- One certifying body: [National Commission on Certification of Physician Assistants](#) (NCCPA)
- Five two-year cycles of logging 100 Continuing Medical Education (CME) credits
- Submission of a certification maintenance fee
- Recertification exam every 10 years that evaluates general medical knowledge

Additional Resources

[American Academy of Physician Associates](#) (AAPA) | [UCCS Pre-PA Guide](#) | [CU Pre-PA Prerequisite Worksheet](#)
[PA Education Association Programs](#) | [CASPA Fee Assistance Program](#)
[Physician Assistant College Admissions Test](#) (PA-CAT) | [PA CAT Exam Content](#)
O*NET Online Summary: [Physician Assistant](#)