



## get on the medical provider path

### Is this the job for me?

Take this quick quiz to find out if physician assistant is a good direction for you:

- 1 Are you interested in practicing medicine?  
 YES  NO
- 2 Do you have a desire to help people?  
 YES  NO
- 3 Are you a good communicator?  
 YES  NO
- 4 Do you like to problem solve?  
 YES  NO
- 5 Do you enjoy math and science?  
 YES  NO
- 6 Do you like to be part of a team?  
 YES  NO
- 7 Are you willing to invest four to six years in education after high school?  
 YES  NO

If you answered yes to several of these questions, you may be on the right track!

### What's it all about?

Physician assistants (PAs) are highly skilled members of the health care team, who are licensed to practice medicine with the supervision of a licensed doctor. In urban areas, a PA may work side-by-side with their supervising physician, while in rural areas, PAs often work independently, while keeping in close communication with their supervisor.

PAs complete a wide range of duties, ranging from performing an exam to prescribing medicine, and running tests to handling medical emergencies. PAs can be found in many different settings, including hospitals, doctors' offices, nursing homes, prisons, community health clinics and rehabilitation centers. They work in primary care areas, such as family medicine, general practice or pediatrics, as well as specialty areas, such as surgery, emergency medicine and geriatrics.

### What do PAs do?

PAs complete a variety of tasks, including:

- Interview patients, and record patients' health history, progress and test results.
- Perform physical exams.
- Order and analyze diagnostic tests, including electrocardiograms, lab tests and X-rays.
- Explain test results to patients.

- Consult with supervising physician, as needed.
- Make diagnoses.
- Develop and monitor patient treatment plans.
- Perform therapeutic procedures, such as injections, suturing and cast application.
- Prescribe medicine.
- Respond to medical emergencies.
- Counsel patients about medications, preventative care, family planning, emotional problems and risk management.
- Manage doctors' offices.
- Order supplies and equipment.
- Supervise technicians and other assistants.
- Assist physicians during surgery and other medical procedures.

### How much money can I make?

In Alaska, PAs earn an average hourly wage of \$41.41, and have an average annual salary of \$86,130. For additional information on PA salaries, visit the American Academy of Physician Assistants Web site at [www.aapa.org](http://www.aapa.org).

### How do I become a PA? How long does it take?

To become a PA, you must:

- Have a high school diploma or GED.
- Complete at least two years of undergraduate coursework in the sciences; some PA programs require a bachelor's degree prior to admission.
- Graduate from an accredited PA program.
- Pass the Physician Assistant National Certification Exam.
- Obtain a PA license from the Alaska State Medical Board.

Earning a bachelor's degree typically takes four to five years, and PA programs take an additional two years to complete. Near the end of your training, you'll participate in supervised work experience.

It's important to note most PA programs require applicants to have previous health care experience. Some PAs begin their careers as community health aides, another health care "hot job."

Following graduation, you must take continuing education courses to renew your PA certification. You may also pursue post-graduate work if you want to specialize in a particular field, such as surgery, pediatrics or emergency medicine.

Learn more about PA programs in Alaska by reviewing the "training providers" section later in this publication.

### Attention high school students!

If you think you might want to become a PA, the time to start planning is now. In general, you should take four years of English, three years of math, three years of social studies, two years of science and possibly two years of a second language. You should also consider taking college preparatory or advanced placement (AP) courses. Other recommended classes and electives include:

- Anatomy and physiology
- Health education
- Introduction to health care
- Emergency medical technology
- Advanced biology courses
- Advanced chemistry courses
- Psychology
- Leadership
- Computer applications
- Keyboarding

You should also discuss your plans with a teacher, counselor or parent, and check to see what work-based learning opportunities, such as field trips, job shadowing and internships, are available in your community.

### Are there jobs available?

There are currently many opportunities for PAs in Alaska, and that number is expected to grow substantially in the coming years. For example, according to the Alaska Physician Supply Task Force, Alaska will need to increase the number of PAs in the state by 240 during the next 20 years.

### Where are the jobs?

In Alaska, PAs work in both rural and urban settings. A majority of PAs work in clinics and physicians' offices. Other settings in Alaska include tribal health organizations, hospitals and nursing homes.

### What else is on this pathway?

Want to learn about other possible opportunities on the medical provider career pathway? Be sure to read about community health aide and family physician – other health care "hot jobs" in Alaska!

