

Physician Assistants in Canada

Author Profile:

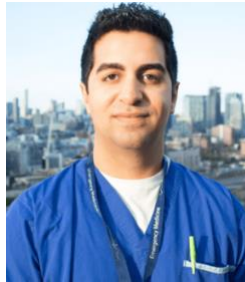
Contact: Leslie St. Jacques, Canadian Certified Physician Assistant
President, Canadian Association of Physician Assistants (CAPA)
lstjacques@capa-acam.ca; leslie.stjacques@mail.utoronto.ca

Contributing authors: Leslie St. Jacques, CCPA, Richard Tsang, MD, Sahand Ensafi, CCPA, Maitry Patel, CCPA

Author Profiles:

Sahand Ensafi, BHSc (PA), CCPA

Sahand Ensafi has been an Emergency Medicine PA at UHN in Toronto, Ontario, Canada since 2013. He has taken part in numerous quality improvement initiatives within the Department of Emergency Medicine at UHN and continues to pursue opportunities in health policy and leadership. Outside of his clinical duties, Sahand is actively involved in PA Education as an Assistant Clinical Professor (adjunct) at the McMaster University PA Program and a Course Facilitator at the University of Toronto PA Program. He is also the Ontario Director of CAPA and the Vice-President of the Ontario Physician Assistant Association. Sahand has focused on PA integration initiatives in Canada over the last 6 years and was recognized as the CAPA "Physician Assistant of the Year" in 2019 for his strong clinical work as well as his efforts in PA leadership and advocacy.



Maitry Patel, CCPA, BHSc (PA)

Maitry Patel is a Radiation Oncology Physician Assistant at UHN, working in multiple disease sites within oncology clinics since her graduation from the McMaster Physician Assistant Education Program in 2014, while being actively involved in the PA community. She is an Instructor within the Department of Family Medicine at McMaster University. Since 2019, she has served as the Alternate Director of the Ontario Chapter on the CAPA Board of Directors. She is active in multiple capacities within the Association of PAs in Oncology. Maitry has been the recipient of CAPA honor roll for her work in progressing the PA profession nationally, Excellence in Patient Experience, and Excellence in teaching support awards. Maitry has a special interest in developing easily accessible patient education material and advocating for equal delivery of care across the board. Maitry is now pursuing an Global Executive MBA at the

Rotman School of Management at the University of Toronto with a focus on Healthcare and the Life Sciences.



Leslie St. Jacques, CCPA, BA, BHSc PA, G. Dip. Clin. Epi., MES, MSW, RSW

Leslie St. Jacques is the President of CAPA and is the discipline Co-lead for PAs at UHN. She is the PA Education Stream Lead for the province of Ontario's COVID Care Learning Education Task Force and Education Lead for PAs at UHN. Leslie holds a Graduate Diploma in Clinical Epidemiology from McMaster University and her research interests include evidence based medicine and knowledge translation in acute and critical care, psychosocial oncology and pituitary tumours. She has been active in policy development enabling PA practice. Leslie works in peri-operative neurosurgery for the oncology team at the Krembil Brain Institute. She is also a registered social worker (MSW) and holds a Master's in Environmental Studies in Planning.



Richard W. Tsang, MD, FRCPC

Richard W. Tsang, MD, is a Staff Radiation Oncologist at the Princess Margaret Cancer Centre, at UHN. He is also Professor at the Department of Radiation Oncology, University of Toronto. He has been active staff at Princess Margaret Cancer Centre since 1990. His clinical and research interests are in hematological malignancies, thyroid cancer, and precision radiation therapy. His administrative roles in the Department of Radiation Oncology have included: Clinical Programs Director and Lymphoma site group leader. He is a Steering Committee member for the International Lymphoma Radiation Oncology Group (ILROG). He is also co-Lead for Physician Assistants at UHN. His education includes an M.D. from the University of Ottawa, Residency in Internal Medicine and in Radiation Oncology, University of Toronto, FRCP(C) and a Research fellowship at Gray Laboratory, Cancer Research Campaign in London, England.



General Information:

Physician assistants (PAs) began working in the Canadian Armed Forces over 50 years ago and were initially called “medical assistants”. The name changed to physician assistants in 1991 (1).

PAs work in team settings, with an individualized scope of medical practice similar to their supervising physicians. PAs are flexible and nimble in the work assigned based on clinical needs, patient volumes, wait times, and gaps in the clinical care process. PAs may work shifts and participate in on-call activities. Specialized roles are adopted by PAs who have had the requisite training and experience as determined by the supervising physician(s). This includes performing procedures and assisting in the operating room.

PAs work under the supervision of physicians and can have multiple supervisors. Supervisors in academic hospitals may delegate some aspects of the supervisory role to physicians in post-graduate training programs such as residents and fellows. Experienced PAs can achieve a high level of autonomy but are not independent practitioners. Legislation governing the medical acts PAs perform is determined at the provincial level and may involve the use of a scope of practice document or medical directives.

PAs are involved in research, knowledge translation, and academic pursuits, including education and the development of patient, learner education materials. PAs attend scientific meetings, and also present as faculty at conferences. PAs may be instructors or faculty in the PA education programs, and are involved in interprofessional education. Many PAs are preceptors to students for core and elective clinical rotations. PAs provide clinical teaching for medical students, residents, international fellows, nursing staff and allied health disciplines. They may also provide educational presentations for patients and families.

PAs hold hospital leadership positions, serve on committees, and are involved in quality improvement projects within their departments. PAs may also hold leadership positions in professional organizations.

Funding and remuneration models differ by province, and may include funding through provincial or regional health authorities, through hospital operating budgets, by individual physicians or physician groups (i.e., “practice plans”), hospital foundations, contracts, research grants, or pay-for-results programs. Many PAs are funded through a combination of these models (2) .

Entry Criteria:

Canada has three civilian PA education programs, two at the undergraduate level, and one at the Master's level. Prior to 2021, there was also a separate training program within the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF).

The undergraduate PA education programs at McMaster University and the PA Consortium are second-entry programs, meaning that at least two years of undergraduate course work is required prior to admission to the PA education program. The PA Consortium requires a minimum of 100 hours of clinical experience. For the University of Manitoba Master's program, a Bachelor's degree with courses in anatomy, physiology and chemistry are prerequisite.

There are no entrance exams required to enter the Canadian programs. To be successful, applicants require a competitive grade point average and supplementary application. Subsequently, the top applicants will be invited for an interview and are offered acceptance based on their performance on all components of the application process.

The former Canadian Armed Forces PA training program had required candidates to achieve Level 6 Medical Technician, the rank of Sergeant, completion of the Junior Leadership course or Professional Level and be merit-listed for promotion to Warrant Officer. Candidates would typically have 12-15 years of service in the CAF before entering the PA training program (3).

Education:

At this time, Canadian PA education programs include:

- McMaster University Physician Assistant Education Program (4)
- The Consortium of PA Education: University of Toronto, Northern Ontario School of Medicine and the Michener Institute for Education at the University Health Network (UHN) (BScPA) (5)
- The University of Manitoba Master of Physician Assistant Studies (MPAS) (6)

All four Canadian PA education programs (including the CAF program) received their six-year accreditation status through the Canadian Medical Association Conjoint Accreditation Group between 2017 and 2018. The programs are 24 months in duration and include 12 months of clerkship rotations in core and elective medical specialties. McMaster University offers a Bachelor of Health Sciences Physician Assistant (BHScPA) and the PA Consortium offers a Bachelor of Science Physician Assistant (BScPA). The University of Manitoba offers a Master of Physician Assistant Studies (MPAS).

PA education is modeled after MD education, and includes anatomy, physiology, pathophysiology, epidemiology, pharmacology, clinical reasoning, and communication skills.

In 2020, 15 PAs graduated from the University of Manitoba, 24 from McMaster University, 26 from the Consortium of PA Education and 19 from the CAF training program.

Between 2004 and 2019, 319 PAs graduated from the CAF PA education program. University-based civilian PA education programs in Canada started in 2008 and 572 PAs have graduated from those programs between 2010 and 2019. At the start of 2021 there were 975 PA graduates from Canadian programs.

Financing Education:

Canada's PA education programs receive some provincial funding. Students pay tuition and may apply for subsidies, grants and scholarships.

Accrediting/Regulatory Bodies:

The Canadian PA education programs have previously been accredited through the Canadian Medical Association. In 2021 the new accrediting body will be Accreditation Canada.

PAs in the Canadian Armed Forces practice under federal legislation. Outside of the Canadian military each province determines individually whether and how they will regulate PAs. The provinces of Manitoba, New Brunswick and Alberta have regulated PAs through their existing College of Physicians and Surgeons (CPS) and the Ontario government is moving forward with regulation of PAs through the CPS. The province of Nova Scotia started a pilot project with PAs in orthopedic surgery in 2020 (7).

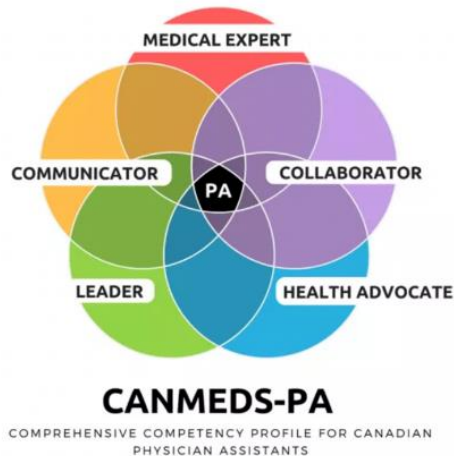
Professional Licensure:

The Physician Assistant Certification Council of Canada (PACCC) is a Council of the Canadian Association of Physician Assistants (CAPA) and oversees the accreditation and certification process, including creating and adjudicating the certification exam (8). PAs typically write the PA Entry to Practice Certification Examination upon graduation from an accredited PA program. The Canadian Certified Physician Assistant designation is CCPA. American Certified PAs (PA-C) from accredited programs in the U.S. may also apply to write the Canadian certification exam and work in Canada, although being a CCPA is not a requirement for PA-Cs to work in Canada.

A searchable database of certified PAs in Canada is available at: <https://capa-acam.ca/paccc/list-of-ccpas/>.

Scope of Practice:

CAPA developed the Scope of Practice and National Competency Profile for PAs in 2009 (9) and the CANMEDS-PA framework to describe the competencies expected of a newly graduating PA in Canada in 2015 (10).



(10)

PAs in Canada work with a physician in a team-based model of care. PAs engage in a wide range of medical activities such as performing physical exams, assessments and procedures, ordering diagnostic tests and medications, and assisting in surgery. They counsel on preventative medicine and provide information about diagnoses and treatment plans. The growing number of PAs in Canada contribute to increased access to high quality medical care.

Maintaining Role:

All CCPAs must annually renew their CAPA membership to maintain their designation title, and are required to track their Continuing Professional Education credits through their personalized Mainport ePortfolio through the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada.

The requirements are:

- o 400 credits over the course of a five-year cycle by participating in educational activities that meet the identified needs of their professional practice
- o 40 credits of CPD activities per year, even if the PA has already reached the 400-credit minimum requirement (11)

Job Opportunities:

There are more than 650 certified PAs currently working in Canada, with approximately 400 working in Ontario (12). Funding to pay PA salaries varies by province through the Ministry of Health (MOH), and may include government grants, pilot projects, block funding and direct funding by physicians (13). In Ontario, there is also MOH government funding through the PA Career Start Program to hire a new graduate from McMaster University or the PA Consortium (14)

References:

1. Jones, Ian W. MPAS, CCPA, PA-C; Hooker, R. 2011. Physician Assistants in Canada Update on Healthcare Policy Initiatives. Canadian family physician Medecin de famille canadien 57(3):e83-8

2. Prada G, Dinh T, Brichta J, Grimes K, James G. 2017. The Conference Board of Canada. Funding Models for Physician Assistants: Canadian and International Experiences. <https://www.conferenceboard.ca/e-library/abstract.aspx?did=9090>
3. Canadian Association of Physician Assistants. 2020. Issue Brief: Physician Assistants. https://capa-acam.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/CAPA-Information-Brief-on-Physician-Assistants_December-2020.pdf. Accessed Mar. 4, 2021.
4. McMaster University Physician Assistant Education Program. <https://fhs.mcmaster.ca/physicianassistant/index.html>
5. PA Consortium <https://www.paconsortium.ca/>. Accessed Mar. 4, 2021
6. University of Manitoba Master of Physician Assistant Studies. Accessed Mar. 4, 2021
7. Canadian Association of Physician Assistants. Issue Brief: Physician Assistants. December 2020. https://capa-acam.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/CAPA-Information-Brief-on-Physician-Assistants_December-2020.pdf. Accessed Mar. 4, 2021
8. The Canadian Association of Physician Assistants. PACCC. <https://capa-acam.ca/paccc/>. Accessed Mar. 4, 2021.
9. The Canadian Association of Physician Assistants. 2009. Scope of Practice and National Competency Profile. http://capa-acam.ca/wp-content/uploads/2012/12/NCP_en_sept20092.pdf. Accessed Mar. 4, 2021.
10. The Canadian Association of Physician Assistants. 2015. CANMEDS-PA <https://capa-acam.ca/about-pas/canmeds-pa/>. Accessed Mar. 4, 2021.
11. Canadian Association of Physician Assistants. 2020. News. <https://capa-acam.ca/pa-news/page/2/>. Accessed Mar. 6, 2021
12. The Canadian Association of Physician Assistants.. PA Facts. <https://capa-acam.ca/about-pas/pa-fact-sheet/#:~:text=There%20are%20approximately%20650%20certified,more%20than%20400%20in%20Ontario>. Accessed Mar. 4, 2021
13. Desormeaux M, Stewart M, Grimes K and Prada G. Conference Board of Canada. Increasing the Use of Physician Assistants in Canada. 2016. https://www.conferenceboard.ca/temp/86de0e84-db28-4d58-a0e2-ee411f3a6096/8347_PhysiciansAssistants_RPT_.pdf Accessed Mar. 4, 2021
14. Ontario Ministry of Health and Long Term care. http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/hhrsd/physicians/physician_assistant_career_start.aspx. Accessed Mar. 4, 2021.