

# What is a PA?

## Fact Sheet



PAAs are medical professionals who diagnose illness, develop and manage treatment plans, prescribe medication, and often serve as a patient's principal healthcare provider. With thousands of hours of medical training, PAs are versatile and collaborative. PAs practice in every state and in every medical setting and specialty, improving healthcare access and quality.

### **PAs are trusted medical providers.**

PAs are trusted healthcare providers. A 2014 Harris Poll\* found extremely high satisfaction rates among Americans who interact with PAs: 93% regard PAs as trusted healthcare providers and 91% believe that PAs improve the quality of healthcare. The PA-patient relationship is critical to improving the nation's health: 95% of a typical PA's patients have two or more chronic conditions, and 50% have four or more, according to the 2015 AAPA National Survey.

### **PAs increase access to healthcare.**

PAs are essential to addressing healthcare provider shortages in the U.S. There are more than 131,000 PAs practicing in all 50 states and D.C. An estimated 15% of PAs practice in rural areas, where provider shortages are most pronounced. Patients also attest to the important role that PAs play in improving access to care: 92% of respondents to a 2014 Harris Poll\* said that having a PA makes it easier to get a medical appointment. As a result of increased demand, the Bureau of U.S. Labor Statistics projects that the number of PAs will increase 37% from 2016 to 2026.

### **PAs offer high quality medical care.**

Every year, more and more studies are published demonstrating that PAs provide high quality care. Recently, researchers at George Washington University compared PAs, NPs, and primary care physicians' patterns of practice and quality of care in community health centers. This first-of-its-kind study found that PAs and NPs delivered quality of care, services, and referrals in community health centers similar to that provided by physicians (*Kurtzman and Barnov, 2017*). You can find this and other studies [here](#).

### **PAs have comprehensive training & education.**

PAs are educated at the master's degree level in programs that are approximately three academic years in length, and include more than 2,000 hours of clinical rotations. Their training as medical generalists provides PAs with diagnostic and treatment skills in all areas of medicine and for all patients, regardless of age or gender. Their education also positions PAs to treat the "whole patient," meaning a PA working in cardiology – in addition to discussing a patient's heart issues – is likely to notice a skin condition and either treat it or provide a referral to a dermatology practice.