

Career Description

- Physician assistants provide diagnostic, preventive and therapeutic care as designated by a licensed physician.
- PAs are trained as generalists but can also work in specialty areas. They perform physical exams, diagnosing and treating illness, ordering and interpreting lab tests, prescribing medication, suturing wounds, assisting in surgery, providing patient education and counseling, and making rounds in hospitals.
- Nearly 40% of PAs practice in hospital settings. An equal number work in group and solo-physician offices. The rest are found in rural and community health centers, nursing homes, surgical facilities, school and college-based health centers, industry, and correctional facilities.
- Originally PA programs were created to train former military corpsmen to practice medicine and provide care for people with limited access to health care.
- In recent years, the field has included students directly from undergraduate studies as well as practitioners from a variety of healthcare fields.

Becoming a Physician Assistant

- To attend one of the accredited PA programs, a bachelor's degree with any major of choice along with appropriate prerequisite courses (see below).
- **Considerable health care experience** (generally hands-on patient care) is needed to be admitted to most programs. Some require as many as 2,000 hours.
- PA students spend more than 2,000 hours in clinical rotations including specialties in family medicine, pediatrics, emergency medicine, internal medicine, general surgery, psychiatry, and obstetrics/gynecology.
- Training is competency based. Once clinical training is finished, students must pass the national PA certification exam to become a PA-C and then be licensed in their state.

Preparation

- Observe a PA to make sure this the right field and that you truly understand what a PA does.
- The most significant hurdle to a competitive application is the hands-on patient care requirement. Schools have different opinions on the experiences they value. Generally you will need additional training so you can work in a health care setting.
- Course requirements can vary substantially between programs, you should look at possible programs to which you would like to apply early in your academic career to make sure you meet their requirements.

Common Prerequisite Courses (pre-reqs determined by each PA school & may vary from this list)

Requirement	Course	Purdue Equivalents (specific courses may vary by major)
Biology	Intro Biology with lab	BIOL 11000-11100 or BIOL 13100 & BIOL 23100 & 23200 (lab)
	Anatomy & Physiology with lab	BIOL 20300-20400 or BIOL 30100-30200
	Microbiology with lab	BIOL 22100 or BIOL 43800 & 43900 (lab)
Chemistry	General with lab	CHM 11500-11600 or CHM 12500-12600 or CHM 12901 & CHM 11500 credit exam (not accepted at all schools)
	Organic with lab	CHM 25500-25600 or CHM 26100-26200 or MCMP 20400-20500
	Biochemistry	BCHM 30700 or BCHM 56100 or CHM 33300 or CHM 33900 or CHM 53300 or MCMP 20800
Psychology	General	PSY 12000 (may need abnormal psych [350] and/or developmental psych [230])
English	Composition	ENGL 10600 or 10800 (some schools require a second English course)
Additional courses	Statistics	STAT 30100 or STAT 50300 or PSY 20100 or SOC 38200
	Communications	COM 11400 or COM 21200
	Medical Terminology	HSCI 13100
	Nutrition	NUTR 30300 or NUTR 31500
May need		Physics, Ethics or other courses; <i>additional Bio (with lab) may be required</i>
Pre-Medical Planning Seminar (Optional)		BIOL 39600 is a 0 credit 10 week class covering how to apply to PA school and other health professions programs

Student Organizations: Pre-PA Club, Caduceus Club

Researching Programs

Physician Assistant Education Association [Program Directory](http://directory.paeaonline.org/) <http://directory.paeaonline.org/>

Applying

- Some programs require the Graduate Record Exam (GRE).
- The initial application to most PA programs is through an online application service called the Central Application Service for Physician Assistants (CASPA).
- The competitive applicant will have:
 - Strong academic performance including a grade pointaverage of 3.5 or better
 - Scores above the national average on the GRE
 - Leadership, teamwork, and communication skills
 - Undergraduate research experience is a plus
 - Volunteer and shadowing/observation experience
 - Significant hands-on patient care hours
 - Strong positive letters of recommendation (mostly from science faculty and physicians or PAs)
- Early application is important as most programs are relatively small.

Fee Assistance

- [CASPA Fee Assistance Program](https://help.liaisonedu.com/CASPA_Applicant_Help_Center/Starting_Your_CASPA_Application/Getting_Started_with_Your_CA_SPA_Application/3_CASPA_Application_Fees) https://help.liaisonedu.com/CASPA_Applicant_Help_Center/Starting_Your_CASPA_Application/Getting_Started_with_Your_CA_SPA_Application/3_CASPA_Application_Fees
- [GRE Fee Reduction Program](https://www.ets.org/gre/revised_general/about/fees/reductions/) https://www.ets.org/gre/revised_general/about/fees/reductions/

Employment Outlook

- According to the *Bureau of Labor Statistics* (BLS), “Physician Assistants rank among the fastest growing occupations, as physicians and health care institutions increasingly utilize Physician Assistants to contain costs.” The BLS predicts 37% job growth through 2026.
- Some studies have shown PAs save as much as 20% of the costs of medical care and can perform at least 80% of the functions in an ambulatory care practice.
- Median pay for a PA was \$104,860 in 2017.

Programs in Indiana

- [IUPUI](https://shrs.iupui.edu/academics/physician-assistant/) Indianapolis, IN <https://shrs.iupui.edu/academics/physician-assistant/>
- [University of Saint Francis](http://pa.sf.edu/) Ft. Wayne, IN <http://pa.sf.edu/>
- [Butler University \(Standard Admission Pathway for those entering with an undergrad degree\)](https://www.butler.edu/physician-assistant/pa-admission-information) Indianapolis, IN <https://www.butler.edu/physician-assistant/pa-admission-information>
- [University of Evansville](https://www.evansville.edu/majors/physicianassistant/) (new program-provisional accreditation) Evansville, IN <https://www.evansville.edu/majors/physicianassistant/>
- [Indiana State University](http://www.indstate.edu/health/program/pa) (new program-on probation) Terre Haute, IN <http://www.indstate.edu/health/program/pa>
- [Trine University](http://www.trine.edu/academics/majors-and-minors/graduate/master-physician-assistant-studies/index.aspx) (new program beginning August 2018) Angola, IN <http://www.trine.edu/academics/majors-and-minors/graduate/master-physician-assistant-studies/index.aspx>
- [Franklin College](http://franklincollege.edu/academics/division-of-natural-science/health-professions/master-of-science-physician-assistant/) (new program beginning June 2019) Franklin, IN <http://franklincollege.edu/academics/division-of-natural-science/health-professions/master-of-science-physician-assistant/>
- [Valparaiso University](http://www.valpo.edu/college-of-nursing-and-health-professions/physician-assistant/) (new program-not yet accredited-combined undergrad/grad program) Valparaiso, IN <http://www.valpo.edu/college-of-nursing-and-health-professions/physician-assistant/>

More Information

- [American Academy of Physician Assistants](https://www.aapa.org) <https://www.aapa.org>
- [Physician Assistant Education Association](http://www.paeaonline.org/) <http://www.paeaonline.org/>
- [CASPA](https://caspa.liaisoncas.com/applicant-ux/#/login) (application service) <https://caspa.liaisoncas.com/applicant-ux/#/login>

Other Careers to Consider

- Nurse Practitioner
- Physician

Information for this career guide came from the above websites, [Explore Health Careers](https://explorehealthcareers.org/career/medicine/physician-assistant/) <https://explorehealthcareers.org/career/medicine/physician-assistant/>, and the [Bureau of Labor Statistics](http://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/physician-assistants.htm) <http://www.bls.gov/ooh/healthcare/physician-assistants.htm>.



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