

2026

Physician Assistant (PA) Career Start

Program Guidelines

Ministry of Health

2026 Physician Assistant Career Start Program Guidelines

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2026 Physician Assistant Career Start Program Update

2026 Physician Assistant (PA) graduates from Ontario's PA education programs at McMaster University and the Consortium of PA Education—the University of Toronto in collaboration with the Northern Ontario School of Medicine and the Michener Institute of Education at University Health Network—can participate in the 2026 PA Career Start Program.

1.0 Background

1.1 Ontario's PA Initiative

Supervised by physicians and working as physician extenders, PAs provide patient care in a range of settings as members of inter-professional health care teams. PAs help decrease wait times and improve patient access to services.

Since 2010, the ministry has funded the PA Career Start program to help employ PA graduates in high-priority areas, including emergency departments, primary care, and internal medicine.

1.2 Employment Supports for 2026 PA Graduates

The PA Career Start Program advances the sustainability of the PA profession. The program provides time-limited funding to employers who hire new PA graduates and commit to integrating and supporting the PA role within their organizations.

Employment funding is available to approved employers who can recruit and hire a 2026 PA graduate from either McMaster University or the Consortium of PA Education.

1.3 PA Roles and Responsibilities

The PA is a health care provider who works under the supervision of a registered physician. The PA supports the supervising physician, who maintains primary responsibility for patient care as the principal medical decision maker.

PAs graduate as generalists and may develop skills in specialty areas with further training and work experience. PAs work in a variety of clinical settings. The type of work undertaken by a PA may include:

- Conducting patient interviews and taking medical histories,
- Performing physical examinations and procedures,
- Providing counseling on preventive health care,
- Performing controlled acts as delegated by a physician, and

- Performing other tasks within the supervising physician's scope of practice that the physician deems the PA qualified to complete.

All tasks must be assigned or delegated to the PA by a supervising physician. The type of work delegated, and the extent of direct supervision provided to the PA, is dependent on the physician's assessment of the PA's individual competencies, skills, and experience in that practice setting. Further, only work within the physician's own scope of practice can be assigned or delegated to a PA. The College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario establishes the process for delegation of controlled acts that physicians should follow when working with a PA.

The PA role has become an established part of interdisciplinary care teams in Ontario. Adding PAs to the health care team in primary, secondary, or tertiary care settings can be a safe and cost-effective way to improve patient access to care and to improve patient satisfaction.

2.0 Employment Supports

2.1 Funding

Funding is provided to approved employers to assist with the costs of employing a 2026 Ontario PA graduate who is eligible for certification by the Physician Assistant Certification Council of Canada. Funding is to be used to help cover the costs associated with full-time employment, including salary and benefits.

The maximum amount of funding that employers can receive is \$46,000 for a 12 month period. Employers are encouraged to match the funding to cover PA employment costs.

Employment support will be provided for a period of:

- 24 months for PA positions that are in communities with a Rurality Index for Ontario (RIO) score of 40+, or a Northern Urban Referral Centre (NURC) (Timmins, North Bay, Sudbury, Thunder Bay, Sault Ste. Marie); or
- 12 months for all other PA positions.

Approved employers will receive funding once they successfully recruit a 2026 Ontario PA graduate by December 18, 2026 and enter into a Transfer Payment Agreement with the ministry before March 31, 2027.

2.2 Period of Availability

The deadline to submit applications is August 14, 2026.

To receive funding, approved employers are required to notify the ministry of their 2026 PA graduate hire by December 18, 2026, by submitting their **Contact, Recruitment and Financial (CRF) form**.

Funding eligibility may be available for costs incurred as early as September 1, 2026.

Graduates must begin work no later than December 31, 2026.

As above, employers who successfully recruit a 2026 Ontario PA graduate on full-time employment will be eligible to receive funding of up to \$46,000 for a 12 month period or 24 months depending on geographic location.

2.3 Recruitment Incentive

A one-time incentive of \$10,000 is available for PA graduates who accept employment in northern and/or rural geographic areas. 2026 PA graduates employed at a site with a RIO score of 40 or higher, or at a Northern Urban Referral Centre (as identified above) are eligible to receive this funding. The recruitment incentive is intended to increase success in recruiting and retaining PAs to work in northern and/or rural areas and must be provided directly to the PA after 12 months of full-time clinical service.

2.4 Areas of Focus

The priority settings for 2026 Ontario PA graduates are: Emergency Medicine, Primary Care and General Internal Medicine.

In all cases, funding is targeted at priority settings where the majority of the care provided is publicly funded and care is team-based. Organizations that provide non-publicly funded services may not be approved.

All prospective employers in all settings must provide a plan for integrating the PA into the organization and demonstrate how they will sustain the PA position after the PA Career Start funding ends. Organizations that have not demonstrated this commitment in the past may not be approved for funding.

Independent of setting, all sites will be required to:

- Support full-time employment of the PA for the funding period;
- Demonstrate that their clinical team and administration is supportive of employing a PA;
- Demonstrate that the majority of care provided is publicly funded;
- Provide adequate space and infrastructure to accommodate a PA;
- Demonstrate a plan to ensure that the PA always has adequate physician supervision;

- Commit to having secured necessary finances to match funding;
- Demonstrate a plan to ensure that necessary enablers to PA practice are in place (such as orientation, medical directives, etc); and
- Commit to funding an additional six-week, full-time position for the PA if the PA is not bridged into permanent full-time employment at the end of the funding.

Family Health Teams (FHT), Community Health Centres (CHC), and Aboriginal Health Access Centres (AHAC) are ineligible to receive PA Career Start funding. FHTs interested in hiring a PA should go through their annual FHT budget submission and approval process as they do for any other Interdisciplinary Health Provider.

2.5 Selection of Approved Employers

Sites are approved for PA employment based on the strength of their application. Employers are assessed and approved based on demonstrated need for the assistance of a PA, the clinical role to be assumed by the PA, the site's readiness to employ a PA, and their plan for sustaining the PA role beyond the funding period. Only approved sites that successfully recruit and employ a 2026 Ontario PA graduate by December 18, 2026, will receive funding.

2.6 Employers Not Approved for Funding

Employers who are not approved to receive funding through this initiative, but who are interested and able to employ a PA, may still recruit an Ontario PA graduate.

Many employers in Ontario have been successful in supporting the costs of employing a PA without targeted funding from the government. For example, some employers have found that employing a PA creates efficiencies for the physician, enabling them to see more patients.

All employers who wish to recruit a PA are encouraged to contact hfojobs@ontariohealth.ca.

3.0 Employer Responsibilities

3.1 Defining the PA Role at your Site

Experience has shown that employers who invest some up-front time in planning how the PA role will be most effective in their clinical setting gain the greatest advantage from employing a PA. Sites that are able to clearly articulate how the PA role will work in their setting and how supervision will occur are typically able to integrate the PA role into the existing clinical team most effectively.

Defining the clinical role for the PA requires that a team understands the PA role and competencies and can define how a PA will assist in the delivery of care in that clinical setting. The PA role should be implemented in a way that will improve access to care or quality of patient care being provided. Employers should contemplate the types of duties the PA will do, how those duties will be assigned and supervised, and how care will be coordinated among team members.

Providing adequate supervision requires that a physician registered with the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario is always available to provide direction and supervision (either direct or indirect, as per the physician's judgment) to the PA. There must always be a physician available to consult with the PA either in person or by phone, and every PA should have a primary supervising physician who has responsibility (administrative and/or clinical) for the PA. That said, supervision will often be shared by more than one physician and sites should identify an alternate physician who can provide supervision when the primary supervising physician is unavailable.

Consideration should be given to how the period of assessment of PA skills will occur at the start of PA employment, as well as to how work, and specifically controlled acts to be performed by the PA, will be assigned and/or delegated.

Links to resources to assist employers in understanding PA practice and supervision requirements can be found on the ministry's PA webpage along with this information package. Applicants are strongly encouraged to familiarize themselves with these resources when considering the integration of a PA.

Planning and integration requires that employers demonstrate their commitment to integrating and sustaining the PA position beyond the funding period.

All prospective employers in all settings must provide a plan for integrating the PA into the organization and demonstrate how they will sustain the PA position after PA Career Start funding ends.

Employers must commit to funding an additional six-week, full-time position for the PA if the PA is not bridged into full-time employment at the end of the funding period.

3.2 Employment Practices

Employers are expected to exercise appropriate employment practices with the PA, as they would with any employee, in accordance with employment standards in Ontario. Usual Human Resource practices for your organization (orientation, performance management, contracting, probationary periods, compensation, and benefits, etc.) should be followed.

3.3 Liability Insurance

Sites employing a PA are advised to understand the liability insurance considerations associated with employing and supervising a PA. Supervising physicians must carry liability protection through the Canadian Medical Protective Association or equivalent.

In most cases, PA professional liability coverage will be included as part of the employer's existing comprehensive liability insurance plan. Employers should confirm this with their insurance carrier. In some cases, PAs may opt to purchase their own professional liability coverage, for example, through the Canadian Association of Physician Assistants.

3.4 Authorizing Mechanisms

PAs are not independently authorized to perform acts that are controlled under the *Regulated Health Professions Act*, 1991. All clinical work completed by a PA must be assigned by the supervising physician. Clinical work involving controlled acts must be delegated in accordance with the policy for delegation established by the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Ontario.

It is important that the clinical team understands how the assignment and/or delegation of clinical work to the PA will occur. Sites should be prepared to invest some time defining this, as well as developing appropriate mechanisms for delegation to facilitate PA practice, such as medical directives.

3.5 PA Compensation

The employer is responsible for determining appropriate compensation rates for new PA graduates. The maximum amount of funding that employers can receive through the PA Career Start program is \$46,000 for a 12-month period. Employers are encouraged to match the funding to cover PA employment costs.

3.6 PA Vacancies and Termination

If the employment relationship between the employer and the PA ends, the employer must notify the ministry immediately. In some circumstances when the PA leaves before the contract end date, the employer may request the position be backfilled. The length of the backfill cannot exceed the balance remaining on the original contract and must be completed within the same period as the original contract. Backfills must come from the same graduating group as in the original contract.

3.7 Recruiting Assistance

The ministry will coordinate the recruitment process for PA graduates. Available PA jobs will be provided only to 2026 Ontario PA graduates.

Employers are required to submit a job posting along with their application form.

All job postings should:

1. Contain all information found on the job posting template attached to the application form,
2. Be typed (not handwritten) for clarity,
3. Be reviewed using the job posting checklist; and
4. Be saved in pdf format.

Please note, it is the responsibility of the employer to submit a completed job posting. The ministry will review the job posting checklist only to confirm completeness; the job posting itself will not be reviewed for completeness. If the checklist or posting is incomplete, there is a risk that the job posting will be posted as submitted, even if information is missing.

Employers will be required to manage the recruitment and hiring process at their site, complete applicant screening, interviews, reference checks, etc., as they find appropriate.

All hiring decisions are made by the employer, and employers have no obligation to hire a PA if they do not find one whom they feel is a suitable candidate. Similarly, there is no guarantee that an approved employer will be successful in finding a PA who wants to work for them.

While employment decisions are at the sole discretion of the employer and the PA, the ministry strongly encourages both parties to consider their options before either making or accepting an offer for a position.

3.8 Transfer Payment Agreement

As a condition of funding, PA employers will be required to enter into a transfer payment agreement (TPA). The TPA sets out the terms and conditions associated with funding and will include funding schedules and reporting requirements, including monthly confirmation of employment, progress on PA integration and role sustainability, and quarterly expenditures. Details regarding reporting requirements will be specified in the TPA provided to each employer who successfully recruits a 2026 Ontario PA graduate. Funding will only begin to flow once the TPA is completed and signed before the end of the fiscal year, March 31, 2027.

3.9 Reporting Requirements

Further details regarding reporting requirements will be specified in the TPA provided to employers who successfully recruit a 2026 Ontario PA graduate.

Please note: Employers are required to notify the ministry of their 2026 PA graduate hire by

December 18, 2026, by sending their completed **CRF forms** to PACareerStart@Ontario.ca. PAs must commence employment by December 31, 2026. Funding will be available from September 1, 2026.

4.0 The Application Process

4.1 The Application Process

The 2026 PA Career Start Program Guidelines, Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs), Application Form, and CRF Form are posted on the ministry's PA webpage at:

<https://www.ontario.ca/page/health-human-resources>

All applicants will be notified of the status of their application by September 3, 2026.

4.2 Timeline

August 14, 2026	Deadline for employers to submit application
September 3, 2026	Ministry notifies employers of approval decision
September 9, 2026	PAs start to apply for posted positions
December 18, 2026	Deadline to submit CRF forms
December 31, 2026	PA Graduates must begin work by this date

Please note that this is an anticipated timeline and dates are subject to change.

4.3 Application Checklist:

- ☐ Review the 2026 PA Career Start Program Guidelines
- ☐ Internal discussions (senior and administrative staff) regarding planning for PA role
- ☐ Complete Application Form
- ☐ Sign Terms of Funding Acknowledgement (Appendix A)
- ☐ Include job posting (Appendix B) and completed and signed job posting checklist (Appendix C)
- ☐ Submit completed electronic application to: PACareerStart@Ontario.ca

4.4 Further Information:

Email: PACareerStart@Ontario.ca

Webpage: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/health-human-resources>