

A Brief History of the Emerging PA Profession in Canada

Physician Assistants have been active in the Canadian military since the 1950s and in civilian US healthcare since the 1960s, but were only introduced to civilian healthcare in Ontario in 2006. As of 2016, over 50 civilian PAs graduate annually in Ontario, and there are over 600 Canadian Certified PAs in the country.

The Early Years

1950s and 1960s

The Canadian military begins using mid-level healthcare providers. These providers are recognized under a variety of terminologies (e.g. group 3 medics, 6B medical assistants).¹

The first civilian PA program is established at Duke University in the United States in 1965.²

1984

The first class of “Physician Assistants” graduates from the Canadian Forces Medical Services; they are recognized as the first trained PAs in Canada.³

1999

Canadian Certified Clinical Assistants are regulated by the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Manitoba (CPSM).⁴ Under the Medical Act, clinical assistants, and later physician assistants, could be licensed.⁵ The recognition of the need for national cohesiveness of the profession culminates in the creation of the national Canadian Association of Physician Assistants (CAPA).⁶

2001

With help from the Canadian Forces Medical Services Schools, a national Occupational Competency Profile (OCP) is developed for civilian PAs. This profile was later adopted by the Canadian Forces as well.

2003

The Canadian Medical Association (CMA) recognizes Physician Assistants as health professionals and the PA Certification Council (PACC) is formed. The CMA’s accreditation process this year included PAs.⁷ The provincial Medical Act in Manitoba recognizes the employment of clinical assistants in surgical and medical specialties.⁸

2004

Canadian Forces Health Services School PA education program becomes the first accredited PA program in the country.⁹

2005

The first Physician Assistant Entry to Practice Certification Exam (PA Cert Exam) is conducted, confirming a national standard for quality for PAs in Canada.¹⁰

¹ Physician Assistant Toolkit: A resource for Canadian Physicians, Dec 2012, CMA and CAPA

<https://www.cma.ca/En/Pages/SearchPage.aspx?k=pa%20toolkit>

² <http://www.pahx.org/period02.html>

³ <https://capa-acam.ca/about-pas/history/>

⁴ <https://capa-acam.ca/about-pas/history/>

⁵ <https://capa-acam.ca/pa-employers/legislation/>

⁶ <https://capa-acam.ca/about-pas/history/>

⁷ <https://www.oma.org/resources/documents/2009paomastatement.pdf>

⁸ <https://www.healthforceontario.ca/UserFiles/file/AHP/Inside/PA-toolkit-april-2007-en.pdf>

⁹ <https://capa-acam.ca/about-pas/history/>

¹⁰ http://www.caopa.net/en/Definition__51/

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2006

The Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care for Ontario (MOHLTC) includes PAs in Ontario's healthcare system.

2007

MOHLTC begins Phase I of a Demonstration Project to evaluate the impact of PAs, Nurse Practitioners (NPs), and acute care nurse specialists on the Ontario health care system. PAs join teams in hospital Emergency Departments and contribute to the positive outcomes of shorter wait times. Phase II of the PA demonstration project places more PAs in a greater variety of areas (physician offices, hospitals, long-term care facilities, and community health centres) to evaluate their effectiveness in the Ontario healthcare system.

The Manitoba Medical Association releases a policy statement on Physician Assistants, indicating support of the role of the Physician Assistant.¹¹

2008

Two civilian PA programs are opened: McMaster University (Hamilton, Ontario)¹² and University of Manitoba (Winnipeg, Manitoba).¹³

2009

An updated form of the National Competency Profile and Scope for Canadian physician assistants (CanMEDS-PA) is released and Manitoba amends the legislation to identify certified Clinical Assistants as "Physician Assistants". New Brunswick announces the licensing of PAs by the College of Physicians and Surgeons under the Medical Act.¹⁴

2010

The third civilian PA program in Canada is launched at the University of Toronto. The Consortium of PA Education (University of Toronto, Northern Ontario School of Medicine, and the Michener Institute of Education at UHN) welcomes its first class of students. The PA programs at the University of Manitoba and McMaster University are accredited by CMA Conjoint Accreditation Services¹⁵ and graduate their first cohort of students.^{16,17} New Brunswick releases Regulation 14, which allows the provincial government to dictate PA terms of practice.¹⁸

2011

The BScPA Program at the University of Toronto is accredited by CMA Conjoint Accreditation Services.

2012

The Consortium of PA Education celebrates the convocation of the first cohort of students in the BScPA Program at the University of Toronto.

¹¹ <http://www.winnipeghealthregion.ca/careers/careersinhealth/pa.html>

¹² <http://fhs.mcmaster.ca/physicianassistant/>

¹³ <https://www.docsb.org/physician-assistants>

¹⁴ <https://capa-acam.ca/about-pas/history/>

¹⁵ <https://capa-acam.ca/about-pas/history/>

¹⁶ <https://www.docsb.org/physician-assistants>

¹⁷ <http://fhs.mcmaster.ca/physicianassistant/>

¹⁸ <https://capa-acam.ca/pa-employers/legislation/>