

# 2024

## Physician Assistant (PA) Career Start Grant Funding

### Program Guidelines

# 2024 Physician Assistant Career Start Program Guidelines

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## **2024 Physician Assistant Career Start Program Update**

Eligible PA graduates from Ontario's two PA education programs at McMaster University and the University of Toronto Consortium will be able to participate in the 2024 PA Career Start Program which is scheduled to launch on **June 10, 2024**.

### **1.0 Background**

#### **1.1 Ontario's PA Initiative**

PAs were introduced to Ontario's health care system in 2007 through a series of demonstration projects. Ontario also established two university-based PA Education Programs. 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 are helping to decrease wait times and improve patient access to services in high need areas.

Since 2010, the ministry has provided financial supports to facilitate the employment of PA graduates in areas of high priority for the people of Ontario. PA Career Start grants have been provided to support PA employment in a variety of settings including emergency departments, primary care, and internal medicine.

#### **1.2 Employment Supports for 2024 PA Graduates**

Time-limited financial support is being offered to facilitate the employment of new PA graduates as this role is being integrated into Ontario's health care system. The PA Career Start program aims to encourage sustainability of the profession by matching PA graduates with employers committed to the long-term integration and financial support of the PA role in their organization.

Assistance with the application and recruitment process for the 2024 Ontario PA graduates will be centralized through the ministry. Employment support grants will be available to approved employers who are able to recruit and hire a 2024 PA graduate from either McMaster University or The Consortium Program (collaboration of the University of Toronto, the Northern Ontario School of Medicine (NOSM) and The Michener Institute of Education at UHN).

#### **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
- 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.

Additional information on PA competence, PA supervision requirements, liability considerations and delegation concepts can be found at [Physician Assistant Resources](#).

## 2.0 Employment Supports

### 2.1 Financial Support

Financial support will be provided to approved employers to assist with the costs of employing a 2024 Ontario PA graduate who must be eligible for certification by the Physician Assistant Certification Council of Canada. The support is to be used to help cover the costs associated with full-time employment including salary and benefits.

The amount of funding that employers will qualify for is up to \$46,000 per year. Employers are expected to match the grant funding to cover PA employment costs.

Employment support will be provided for a period of:

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

Grant funding will be flowed monthly to successful employers. Prospective PA employers will be expected to agree to the terms of funding prior to participating in the recruitment process.

It is important to note that successful applications do not guarantee recruitment of a PA. Therefore, financial support will only be available to approved employers who successfully recruit a 2024 Ontario PA graduate within the period of availability.

It is expected that the recruitment process will be competitive.

### 2.2 Period of Availability

The deadline to submit applications is **July 31, 2024**.

To receive a grant, employers are required to notify the ministry of their 2024 PA graduate hire by **November 30, 2024**, by submitting their **Contact, Recruitment and Financial (CRF) Form**.

Funding eligibility may be available for costs incurred as early as September 1, 2024.

Graduates must begin work no later than **December 31, 2024**.

As above, employers who successfully recruit a 2024 Ontario PA graduate on full-time employment will be eligible to receive a grant of up to \$46,000 per year for a period of one or two years 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. 2024 PA graduates who are employed at a site with a Rural Index for Ontario (RIO) score of 40 or higher, or at a Northern Urban Referral Centre (as identified above) will be eligible to receive this support. This 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 one year of full-time clinical service.

## 2.4 Areas of Focus

Opportunities for 2024 Ontario PA graduates will be supported in priority settings including Emergency Medicine, Primary Care and General Internal Medicine.

In all cases, support will be targeted to settings where 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 grant 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 have secured necessary finances to match grant 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 grant funding.

**Family Health Teams (FHTs) 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 will be approved for PA employment based on the strength of their application. Employers will be assessed and approved based on demonstrated need for the assistance of a PA, the clinical role to be played by the PA, the site's readiness to employ a PA, and their plan for sustaining the PA role beyond the grant funding period. Only approved sites that successfully recruit a 2024 Ontario PA graduate will receive financial support.

## **2.6 Employers Not Approved for Financial Support**

Employers who are not approved to receive a grant 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.

Some sites receiving other ministry incentive funding, such as ED wait times incentives, have used this funding to support PA employment costs. Some employers who see high value in the PA role have funded employment through their global budget.

Employers who are not approved for a grant, but who still wish to recruit a PA are encouraged to contact [hfojobs@ontariohealth.ca](mailto: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 participate in, 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.

[There are some links to resources](#) that will help employers understand PA practice and supervision requirements which are posted on the ministry's PA website 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 grant 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 should demonstrate that support (e.g., organizational, Ontario Health Team, community, clinical team, etc.) exists for the PA position including letters of support as relevant. Employers must prove that they have secured the necessary finances to supplement the grant funding during the funding period and to fund the position after the funding period concludes.

**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. More information pertaining to liability can be found at [Physician Assistant Resources](#).

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 regulated and as such 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. Resources to assist sites in understanding delegation and to develop authorizing mechanisms are available along with this application package on the ministry's PA website.

### **3.5 PA Compensation**

The employer is responsible for determining appropriate compensation rates for new PA graduates. The ministry's program allows for reimbursement of up to \$46,000. The ministry's contribution to salary through PA Career Start is based on the understanding that the suggested starting salary level for a newly graduated PA would be a minimum of \$76,000 per year.

### **3.6 PA Vacancies and Termination**

In some circumstances, if the PA leaves before the contract end date, the position may 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 2024 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 hand written) for clarity, and
3. Be saved in pdf format.

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. Once a PA has accepted a position, they are strongly discouraged from backing out of the agreement as this could put the employer in a difficult position to find another candidate before the ministry's deadline.

### **3.7 Transfer Payment Agreement**

As a condition of funding, PA employers will be required to enter into a transfer payment agreement which will include:

- Funding schedules
- Reporting requirements including:
  - Monthly employment confirmations
  - Progress on PA integration and role sustainability
  - Quarterly expenditures
  - Final and post funding evaluation

### **3.8 Reporting Requirements**

Further details regarding reporting requirements will be specified in the transfer payment agreement provided to employers who successfully recruit a 2024 Ontario PA

graduate.

**Please note:** Employers are required to notify the ministry of their 2024 PA graduate hire by **November 30, 2024**, by sending their completed **Contact, Recruitment, and Financial Form (CRF forms)**. PAs must commence employment by **December 31, 2024**. Funding may be available from **September 1, 2024**.

## 4.0 The Application Process

### 4.1 The Application Process

The 2024 PA Career Start Application Form, Program Guidelines, Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs), and Contact, Recruitment, and Financial Form are posted on the ministry's PA website at:

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

All applicants will be notified of the status of their application by August 20, 2024.

### 4.0 Timeline

<b>July 31, 2024</b>	Deadline for employers to submit applications
<b>August 20, 2024</b>	Ministry notifies employers of approval decision
<b>August 23, 2024</b>	PAs start to apply for posted positions
<b>November 30, 2024</b>	Deadline to submit CRF forms
<b>December 31, 2024</b>	PA Graduates must begin work by this date

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

### 4.1 Application Checklist:

- Review the 2024 PA Career Start Program Guidelines
- Review Physician Assistant resources available online at: [Physician Assistant Resources](#)
- Internal discussions (senior and administrative staff) re: PA role
- Complete Application Form
- Sign Terms of Funding Acknowledgement (Appendix A)

Include job posting (Appendix B)

Submit completed electronic application to [PACareerStart@Ontario.ca](mailto:PACareerStart@Ontario.ca)

#### **4.2 Further Information:**

Email: Website:

[PACareerStart@Ontario.ca](mailto:PACareerStart@Ontario.ca)

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