

October 5, 2023

## Integration of Physicians Assistants into BC EDs

### Context

On September 27, 2023 it was announced that the Ministry of Health had directed the College of Physicians and Surgeons of BC (CPSBC) to [advance a change to its licensing and regulatory framework](#) for the purpose of enabling qualified Physicians Assistants (PAs) to work in BC emergency departments. Health Minister Adrian Dix first indicated his intention to bring PAs into BC in April 2023 and the proposed [bylaws changes](#) were posted on the CPSBC website for a seven-day public consultation period, which closed October 4, 2023.

PAs work under the delegated authority of physicians. As such, the regulation of PAs falls under the jurisdiction of CPSBC. In posting bylaws associated with the introduction of PAs into BC EDs, the Ministry of Health has signaled a likelihood of further changes. To note, regulation is still being established in some jurisdictions such as Ontario and PEI, while it is already complete in Alberta, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, Nova Scotia, and New Brunswick.<sup>1</sup>

In response to this announcement, NNPBC mobilized immediately to host an open forum on September 29, 2023, for the purpose of ensuring nurses across BC were aware of this change and directed toward the public consultation opportunity while it was still active. We noted that it was a first opportunity for engagement, but not the last.

### Background

In the summer of 2022, the NNPBC Board of Directors identified the potential inclusion of PAs into the BC health system as an area of priority consideration, recognizing that there is a long history of debate and concern in nursing regarding the integration of PAs in BC. They identified that the conversation about PA integration had the potential to come forward rapidly given the depth of the health and human resource crisis in our province. There was also unanimous recognition that BC's nurse practitioners are particularly well versed on the challenges and history of introducing a new health profession to the landscape and could provide expertise and insight on the ways in which emerging professions could be integrated. As PA integration affects all nurses, not only nurse practitioners, board members across every designation brought forward issues from their designations that intersected with the potential introduction of PAs.

Based on this discussion the NNPBC staff developed an [issues brief on PAs](#), which was posted publicly on November 2, 2022. The team also worked to deepen connections with national and local PA groups with the goal of advancing collaboration between health professionals and building understanding of the ways in which nursing and PAs intersect across the health system.

### Current Status

Since Minister Dix signaled his intention in April 2023 to integrate PAs in BC, no broad health system engagement took place on this new direction. However, between April and September 2023, NNPBC raised the issue of PAs across a multitude of platforms including with key partners and at advisory tables and sought clarification on the comments made by Minister Dix in April 2023 through various channels, while also advocating for engagement with nursing on decisions.

NNPBC fostered our collaboration with both the national and BC chapters of the Canadian Association of Physicians Assistants (CAPA) to proactively prepare for the arrival of PAs in BC. NNPBC's professional practice team has been connecting with the national and BC chapter leads of CAPA regularly to discuss collaborative practice and ways of supporting and advancing the nursing voice in healthcare system changes. These conversations include discussions about educational opportunities, as well as opportunities focused on collaborative practice and growing understanding of differing scopes and roles. NNPBC will continue this dialogue with our PA colleagues, and we look forward to announcing joint activities with CAPA and the BC Chapter over the coming weeks.

At this time, the decision to bring PAs into BC emergency departments has been made. Our focus now is to support nursing in working with PAs in ways that support high quality care. NNPBC will continue to advocate for the full breadth of the nursing profession, and we will continue to advance nursing's commitment to working with all members of the health care team for the wellbeing of British Columbians.

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<sup>1</sup> On September 8, 2023 PAs officially became regulated under CPS Saskatchewan. Ontario and PEI have both initiated the process to regulation, but these processes are not yet complete. Newfoundland & Labrador have commenced their three-year plan/pilot project and appear to be waiting until this is done to commence the formal regulatory process. Source: BC CAPA chapter.