Washington Academy of Physician Assistants

NEWSLETTER

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A LETTER FROM THE WAPA PRESIDENT

Dear WAPA Members,

As I near the end of my term as President of the Washington Academy of Physician Associates, I've found myself in a reflective space—grateful to walk with you on a trail blazed by past WAPA leaders and eager for what lies ahead. Time has flown, as it often does when the work carries meaning, and now I have the privilege of looking back with both pride and perspective.

When I began this journey, I shared three intentions: to deepen member engagement, to strengthen the efficiency of our organization, and to empower our committees to realize their potential. These goals weren't simply operational-they were rooted in a deeper belief that when we invest in connection, clarity, and collaboration, we create a foundation for lasting impact. And this year, I've seen that belief affirmed again and again.

A Year of Connection

Membership in WAPA has grown, and with it, the need to create experiences that truly bring us together. This year, we revitalized our CME conferences—not just in format, but in spirit. With themed events, focused discussion tracks, and a focused student professional development track, our gatherings felt more like communities in motion.

The Portland-themed Spring conference, with its quirky swag and food truck crawl, was more than a memorable moment; it was a reminder that learning and joy can coexist.

Our Legislative Day on the Hill also marked a high point. We saw record attendance, and the presence of PA students, including a sizeable cohort from Northwest University's new program, infused the day with purpose and energy. Advocacy came alive—not just as an idea, but as a shared responsibility.

Efficiency as Stewardship

In a volunteer-driven organization like WAPA, how we work matters as much as what we do. Efficiency isn't just about productivity-it's about stewardship of time, energy, and people. This year, alongside Immediate Past President Linda Dale and the other governance work group members, I revised our policies and bylaws. I also reorganized our committees and restructured our board meetings to foster better dialogue. These changes quietly transformed our capacity. Freed from inefficiencies, our committees had the space to think more creatively, act more decisively, and collaborate more deeply.

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The Power of Purposeful Committees

Perhaps nowhere was this transformation more evident than in our committees. By encouraging each to articulate a clear mission, we saw extraordinary outcomes:

- The Continuing Education Committee, under the leadership of Troy Bender and Eileen Ravella, delivered two of our most dynamic conferences in recent memory. The student track I introduced as President-Elect expanded to include five regional PA programs, bringing a new wave of energy and enthusiasm. With strong industry support and sold-out exhibitor space, it was clear we're building something with momentum. Looking ahead, the committee plans to bring back hands-on workshops and raise the bar on lecture quality and has taken the first steps to implement this for our conference at the Tulalip Casino in October.
- The Diversity, Equity, Belonging, and Inclusion Committee, led by Gabriella Romero, reengaged local communities through high school and college pre-PA outreach, focusing on students historically underrepresented in medicine. They provided lectures to the UW MEDEX PA Program on legislative advocacy and contract negotiation that empowered the next generation, and their quarterly social media spotlights on health disparities brought critical issues into the public eye. This committee embodies the spirit of inclusion through joyful action, and in the coming year, they plan to enhance collaboration and skill sharing across the committees.
- The Legislative Committee, guided by Linda Dale, helped pass key legislation—streamlining burdensome prior authorizations, expanding wellness programs for clinicians, and improving access to life-saving medications and Medicaid. We collaborated closely with ARNPs United of Washington and other allied health professionals through Eileen Ravella's new Coalition of United Providers for Patient Access. Although our push for commercial reimbursement parity for PAs and NPs did not pass in the setting of an unexpected state budget shortfall, it reached unprecedented traction and lays strong groundwork for future advocacy for reimbursement parity in 2026.
- Under Agnes Lovell's leadership, the Marketing and Membership Committee refreshed WAPA's identity with a bold, modern look-making our communications as professional and vibrant as the people they represent.They also introduced a 50 percent discount for the first year of WAPA membership, making membership more accessible to new graduates and transfers from out of state. They also redesigned our newsletter format in collaboration with newsletter editors Rhonda Warren and Anna Shoolroy.

"I am confident our next delegation will continue building WAPA's voice on the national stage."

New Paths, Unexpected Opportunities

This year also brought additional wins for WAPA. We launched a student leadership track, intended to provide leadership training to a new generation of PAs, and selected our first participant, Nick Stanton, a clinical-year student from MEDEX and a veteran, who is already leading the revival of our veteran outreach work. We also re-entered the national conversation at AAPA by sponsoring a resolution at the AAPA House of Delegates to advocate for FMLA protections for PAs facing burnout or mental health challenges. I had the privilege of co-authoring this with Cooper Couch, our incoming Chief Delegate Elect, and I am confident our next delegation will continue building WAPA's voice on the national stage.

And perhaps most significantly, following overwhelming support from our members in an advisory vote, the board voted to change our organization's name, **The Washington Academy of Physician Associates**, a change that honors our evolving national identity and aligns with the profession's future. We'll explore advocating for this at the legislative and licensing level in years to come, but the member-driven support for this change speaks volumes about who we are becoming. (*For more information on what this means for you as a PA, and constraints on how this title can be used professionally, see the article on this in the newsletter*).

Leaving the Trail Better Than I Found It

There's an old saying among hikers: Leave the trail better than you found it. That simple ethic has guided me throughout this year. In my fall column, I spoke of shared effort. In winter, I urged participation in advocacy. Each time, you responded—not just with words, but with action. And it is that spirit of collective effort that has moved WAPA forward.

As I prepare to pass the torch to President-Elect Bridget Albright, I do so with deep confidence. We've worked closely to ensure a smooth transition, and I know she will lead with wisdom, heart, and impressive resolve.

It has been one of the greatest honors of my professional life to serve as your President. Thank you for your trust, your energy, and your enduring commitment to the PA profession in Washington. Together, we have built something stronger and left it ready for the future. In walking this trail together, you and I have not only honored where we've come from as PAs —we've quietly shaped where we're headed.

Joshua Lumsden
PA-C, MA, MCHS
President, Washington Academy of Physician Assistants

MILITARY VETERANS OF WAPA, ASSEMBLE!

By Nicholas Stanton, PA-S, Veterans Committee Chair

Steel sharpens steel is a motto that has stuck with me since my time as an Air Force Pararescueman. The implication being that those of us striving to accomplish the same mission must rely on each other to increase our skills, pass along the hard-learned lessons of the past, and hold each other to a higher standard, even when it's difficult. The same still holds true for those of us who have traded in our military fatigues for the white coat of a PA.

The WAPA Veteran's outreach is wanting to bring together the skills and camaraderie of military veterans who are also PAs. We're building a community of veteran PAs ranging from those with decades of experience to up-and-coming veteran PAs new to field, and even those vets still in PA school. This new initiative within WAPA is just getting started up, making it a great time to get involved as a PA veteran.

This community aims to unite PA veterans who wish to continue supporting one another in various areas, just as we did while in uniform. At the forefront of our focus will be knowledge sharing, job postings, community outreach, group trips with CME hours, mentorship, and collective empowerment. Developing a bonded consensus for how WAPA can best assist PA vets will also be a priority. Whether hosting vet meetups at the annual conferences or introducing legislature to support veterans in the future, WAPA is currently working to empower PA military veterans. However, this initiative needs more than just a plan. It needs people willing to answer the call of service once again.

To bring more PA veterans together within WAPA and beyond, we will be hosting veteran meetups at the next several conferences. Things are currently in the research and outreach phase. We're communicating with other experienced veteran organizations around the US to glean what insights we can to assist in developing the most capable and inclusive veteran PA organization possible.

If you'd like to be involved in this community, helping to further empower and connect veteran PAs, either for inclusion or planning, please reach out and get involved. Our greatest strength is and always has been our ability to unite.

THE 2025 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

Linda Dale, WAPA Past President

This year the legislature had many bills to work through, but their main consideration was Washington state's projected $12B-to-$16B budget deficit. That set the tone for many legislators to deny any bill that had a fiscal note attached to it. The legislative session ended on April 27th, but the governor will most likely call them back for a special session to finalize the budget.

Even with the budget concerns being omnipresent, the legislators were able to pass bills that are important to PAs and healthcare in general. The following bills passed and have been signed by the governor, or are on their way there:

- HB 1162 - Concerning workplace violence in health care settings.
- HB 1186 - Expanding the situations in which medications can be dispensed or delivered from hospitals and health care entities.
- SB 5372 - Creating the Medicaid access program.
- HB 1640 - Placing licenses issued in chapters 18.71B and 18.71C RCW under the authority of the uniform disciplinary act. (PA compact rules)
- HB 1686 - Creating a health care entity registry. This was pruned down to just be a study and won't affect PA practices at this time. We'll need to watch for the study to come back.
- HB 1706 - Aligning the implementation of application programming interfaces for prior authorization with federal guidelines.
- HB 1718 - Concerning well-being programs for certain health care professionals.

Unfortunately, the ARNP/PA parity bill (HB 1430) died in the Senate Ways and Means committee but will be back next year. In the interim, our lobbyist, and the ARNP United lobbyist, will be talking with key members to make sure the bill can make it over the last hurdle.
If you want to check out any of the above bills in more depth, log on to https://leg.wa.gov/ and enter the number of the bill in the "bills and initiatives" drop down. That will take you to the bill's page where you can read the final bill language and see its path through the legislature.

WHY WE CHANGED OUR NAME – AND WHAT IT MEANS FOR YOU

Joshua Lumsden, President, WAPA

This year, WAPA's board voted to officially change our organization's name from the Washington Academy of Physician Assistants to the Washington Academy of Physician Associates. This change came after an advisory vote from our members — and the response was overwhelmingly supportive.

Background: Why the Name Change?

The idea of using the "physician associate" title is not new. The AAPA first changed their name to the American Academy of Physician Associates in 1971. They switched back to "physician's assistant" in 1973 following pressure from the American Medical Association (and dropped the apostrophe + 's' in the early 1980s). Some PA programs, including those at Yale and the University of Oklahoma, have continued to use the "physician associate" title for their PA programs since then.

In 2021, after several years of research, the AAPA's House of Delegates approved a resolution that changed their preferred title and organizational name from "physician assistant" to "physician associate". The goal was simple: to better reflect the level of care and responsibility that PAs have — and to move away from the outdated (and often misunderstood) term "assistant." 21 state PA organizations and many AAPA specialty caucuses have formally adopted the name change. In 2024, the Oregon Society of Physician Associates became the first state in the nation to legally change their title via legislation and are in the early stages of implementation.

As the title change has not been without controversy, in December, WAPA's board requested an advisory vote of its members before adopting a stance. Astonishingly, 87.7% of voting members opted to change the organization's name, substantially exceeding national polls that showed rates of 40-50% approval of the new title. At the February board meeting, the board voted unanimously to change WAPA's name, and updated its nonprofit license, correspondence, website, social media accounts, and marketing materials. Costs were negligible (roughly $40), to file an amendment to our nonprofit license; updating our social media and correspondence was included in our negotiated contract with our management organization.

What This Means for You:

While we have changed our organizational name, we have not yet advanced bills to change our title in professional settings. While WAPA has changed its name, the legal title for licensed PAs in Washington remains "physician assistant". That means:

- In clinical and patient-facing settings, you must continue to refer to yourself as a "physician assistant".
- You can still use the abbreviation "PA", regardless of whether we are associates or assistants.
- The name "physician associate" cannot be used in patient care or legal documents until the law changes.

However, by changing our organization's name, we're sending a clear message: Washington PAs are ready for this change. Changing our title via the legislative process will not be easy. The American Medical Association and the Washington State Medical Association have categorically opposed title change, fortifying both their opposition to use of the "physician associate" title in their policy resolutions, and their intent to oppose this title change in state legislatures. The American Medical Association provides substantial lobbying grants to state physician organizations in order to protect their profession.

Their most common objection from physician trade organizations is that the title change "confuses patients". Perhaps we do not give our patients enough credit. Assuming patients do not understand what "physician associate" means, this argument ignores that the "physician assistant" title also confuses patients. Every week, I correct patients who address me as "Dr. Lumsden" and educate them on the role and training of a "physician assistant". One of my patient comments said I was "an exceptional nurse practitioner". Many, if not all of you, have had similar experiences in practice – like our admirable physician and nurse practitioner colleagues, we want good care for our patients, and increasingly busy clinic schedules do not afford us time to pretend to be something we are not.

Member Comments:

"While we have changed our organizational name, we have not yet advanced bills to change our title in professional settings. While WAPA has changed its name, the legal title for licensed PAs in Washington remains "physician assistant"".

After the members voted, we reviewed the comments carefully. The vast majority were supportive, citing the need to align with the American Academy of Physician Associates and Oregon, and the need claim a title that matches the work we actually do. A handful of commenters expressed candid and valid concerns, and I thought I would take a moment to address some of them.

"Shouldn't we wait for legislation before changing the organization's name?"

- One member felt that organizational title change should follow legislative success with title change. While legal title change takes time, changing our organization's name helps normalize the term and shows lawmakers that our members support it. Legislative title change will require dedicated grassroots member efforts, lobbying resources, and money, and the member polling in favor of our organizational title change provides data that differs from national estimates.
- Another member commented that changing our organization's name could alienate our physician and nursing colleagues. Notably, our nurse practitioner colleagues have adopted their own title changes at the legislative level in recent years. While there are physicians who staunchly oppose title change, opinion among physicians is not monolithic. Thurston County Medical Society and Spokane County Medical Society advocated for title change, while King County Medical Society continues to adamantly express their opposition. We respect our physician colleagues, and we hope they respect that PAs have the right to choose the title that best reflects our role — just like others do in their professions.

- A third member expressed concern that the change would be premature and noted we have been advised by the American Academy of Physician Associates not to refer to ourselves as “physician associates” … until the name change has been officially updated. While this is partly true, the official AAPA guidance on title change reads as follows:

  > *“The strength of our professional brand is paramount to the success of legal title change efforts at both the state and national levels, which is a long-term process. AAPA has officially changed its legal name to reflect the “physician associate” title. It’s important not to appear ahead of legislatures and regulators at local or federal levels, as doing so could have adverse consequences for PAs, including regulatory challenges, disciplinary actions, and malpractice issues. Further, we do not want to jeopardize any aspect of implementation, including the passage of legislation in states that are actively pursuing title change at this time.”*

This guidance applies to how PAs in Washington and other states and territories may refer to themselves in clinical settings, especially when facing patients. Given this directive, I worked closely with the AAPA to implement this, and they are in support of state organizations changing their name.

I greatly appreciate the thoughtful feedback that came from our members who voted.

Final Thoughts:

Before I was a PA, I had other job titles that included the word “assistant”. In high school, I was a “production assistant” for a play at the Columbia Theatre in Longview, an “assistant manager” at a video arcade in college in Ellensburg, and “assistant manager” of a program for people with developmental disabilities in Bellevue. An “assistant manager” is seen as a “manager” in training, and both times, I was promoted to manager. My current role as a “physician assistant” does not allow for eventual “promotion” to become a “physician”. The working relationships I had with the stage director and the two managers were very different from those with physicians in outpatient primary care: I do not proofread their notes; I could not tell you how they take their coffee and have never been asked to pick up their dry cleaning. Rather, it is a fruitful and productive association that has led to great patient care while working within the constraints of my scope and license.

While legislative change will be a heavy lift for WAPA in the coming years, organizational name change is long overdue and consistent with the will of our members. In my opinion, it is high time to update our title to reflect the work we do.

Further information on the AAPA’s stance on title change is available at this link. If you have questions about the vote, you may contact us at wapa@wapa.org.

FINDING INSPIRATION AT THE WAPA/OSPA JOINT SPRING CONFERENCE

Kayla Young, PA-S1, Northwest University

Attending the WAPA/OSPA Joint Spring conference was a memorable experience that reminded me why I chose this career path in the first place. From the moment I arrived, I was surrounded by a diverse group of practicing PAs, faculty, and fellow students, all eager to learn and connect. The student track was very helpful in giving us all the tips and tricks to thrive in PA school as well as educational to provide meaningful information on disparities in healthcare and how we can combat those. One of the highlights was participating in the Challenge Bowl, where students and practicing PAs had the chance to collaborate on a team to test their medical knowledge in a fast-paced, competitive setting.

Between sessions, I explored exhibitor booths filled with medical equipment, PA programs, and career resources, which gave me insight into the many opportunities available after graduation. Networking with seasoned PAs and hearing their stories of patient care and professional growth was both inspiring and motivating. By the end of the conference, I felt more confident in my knowledge, more connected to the PA community, and even more excited for the future that lies ahead in my journey to becoming a certified PA.

THE DEFINITION OF COALITION

Eileen Ravella, PA

WAPA's primary goal is advancing legislation that improves PA practice. It is an arduous painstaking task with strong opposition from many special interest groups. It takes time, money and education. Legislators are tasked with reviewing hundreds of bills each session and in a short session it becomes more challenging and it requires a strong voice. So how do we anticipate the opposition? A coalition. The definition of a coalition is a group of people or organizations who come together, often temporarily, to work towards a shared goal. The coalition of unified professionals for patient access (CUPPA) was formed a year ago. Current members are CRNAs, optometrists, dental hygienists, pharmacists, nurse practitioners and PAs.

The shared goal of the coalition is to collaborate with other like minded organizations and utilize resources to advance legislation that improves patient access and care. We work in tandem with each organization's lobbyists, and share information and resources on upcoming bills, collaborate and endorse bill language, and mobilize constituents to educate legislators on bills impacting healthcare. During the last session, we tracked multiple bills and responded to legislation impacting primary care parity billing, anesthesia billing that limited billing for anesthesia time and legislation requiring a physician presence for contrast infusion impacting access negatively. Collectively and individually, we supported legislation through consensus building.

We ended the session by building relationships amongst our members and with legislators. We were instrumental in defeating HB 1812 impacting anesthesia billing. Some legislation "died" in committee such as the parity bill. We will build on our experience and develop language to overcome opposition for the next session. The coalition can and will support name change legislation if WAPA decides to tackle that initiative next session. As the saying goes, it takes a village.

MEDEX STUDENT SCHOLARSHIPS

We are pleased to announce the recipients of the 2025 MEDEX Northwest Student Scholarships. There are seven scholarship categories, each named after an individual of particular importance to the MEDEX Northwest PA program and its history. Decisions are based primarily on the evaluation by MEDEX leadership of short essays submitted by the students with stated interests in specific scholarships. Congratulations to all!

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