

Rhode Island Board of Licensure for Physician Assistants 2021 Annual Report

FEBRUARY 2022



Introduction

The United States continues to find itself in a syndemic, where the interaction of the pandemic, overdose crisis, behavioral health crisis, in the context of a nation struggling with addressing systemic racism continues to deeply affect all aspects of all of our lives.

The pandemic continues to define many aspects of life in Rhode Island including healthcare. As Rhode Island approaches 2 years of the pandemic, every aspect of health care has been affected. Although safe and effective vaccines have been in place for over a year and widely available since April 25th, 2021, the vaccine uptake has been less than needed to quell the pandemic. As the Board of Licensure of Physician Assistants (Board) continues to navigate its mission to protect the public and ensure high professional standards, it does so in the overwhelming shadow of the impact of the pandemic.

In spite of working under extraordinary conditions, the Board only had to cancel its October meeting in 2021. Staffing continues to be an issue for the Board as continued erosion of funding has challenged extant staff with increased workload and diminishing resources. The staffing issues in 2021 were exacerbated by increased staff turnover in licensing as this position is a “temporary position” and has been so the last 7 years.

The efforts of licensing Boards are often unnoticed and perhaps more so during a pandemic, yet licensing Physician Assistants was more important than ever, as hospitals, ambulatory care centers and other physician services struggled to find qualified staff. Assurance of a competent workforce is one the 10 essential public health services recognized by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC)¹. Board members possess unique technical expertise and function within a Just Culture as they exercise this duty.

The mission of the Board is to protect the public through enforcement of standards for medical licensure and ongoing clinical competence. The Board has seven members—three of whom are physician assistants (PA), two are physicians, and two who are members of the public who are not physicians. Board members receive no compensation of any type for their hours of service annually.

| PA Board Members | |
|-------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Aleko Kimbouris PA-C | PA member |
| Victoria Miller PA-C | PA member |
| Philip Zingale PA-C | PA member |
| Guy Nicastrri MD | Physician member |
| Victor Pinkes MD | Physician member |
| James Carney | Representative of the General Public |
| Rosemary Sheets | Representative of the General Public |

There were no changes in Board membership in 2021.

The Board met January 12th, April 13th, July 13th, September 1st and December 7th, 2021, Via Zoom and at RIDOH. Any member of the public can attend the open session.

The Board is housed entirely within RIDOH and is staffed by RIDOH employees who divide their time to effectively ensure the Board has the resources it needs to function at the highest level.

| RIDOH Staff | |
|----------------------------|------------------------------|
| James V. McDonald, MD, MPH | Chief Administrative Officer |
| Bruce Todesco, Esq. | Senior Legal Counsel |
| Jessica DeSanto | Board Manager |
| Linda Julian | Board Investigator |
| Shannon Sullivan | Licensing Officer |

The Board staff thanks Lauren Dixon-Lasso for her 30 years of service to the Board as she departed for other opportunities at RIDOH. The Board staff extends its thanks to Morgan Goulet who left RIDOH in November 2021. The Board staff also extends its gratitude to Alexandra Bernard and Ryan Clark who each served as a Licensing Aide this year.

Licensing

Licensing of PAs by examination or by endorsement represents one of the essential functions of the PA Board. Ensuring that PAs who are allowed to practice medicine in Rhode Island are competent, ethical, and professional is critical to the licensing process.

| Physician Assistant Licensing | | | | |
|--|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 |
| Licenses issued | 88 | 98 | 101 | 217 |
| License applications withdrawn | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| License applications denied | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Average number of days to receive license | 16 | 17 | 16 | 24 |
| Percentage of licenses approved in less than three days after receipt of final documents | 100% | 100% | 100% | 100% |

| Physician Assistant Licenses, By Type | | | |
|--|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|
| | As of 12/31/2019 | As of 12/31/2020 | As of 12/31/2021 |
| Physician Assistant | 627 | 737 | 754 |
| Physician Assistant with a Controlled Substance Registration | 547 | 625 | 659 |

Just Culture

The Board continues its framework of Just Culture originally adopted in September of 2019 embracing the RIDOH values of equity and justice.

Rules and Regulations for Licensure of Physician Assistants

There were changes to the Rules and Regulations for PAs in 2021; however, these changes are effective on January 4, 2022.

Complaints and Disciplinary Actions

An essential role of the Board is to investigate and adjudicate complaints. Complaints come from a variety of sources, including patients, patient advocates, notices of litigation, licensed facilities, pharmacists, physicians, and other healthcare professionals. Each complaint is reviewed prior to being opened for complete investigation. The complaint process for PAs is detailed at <https://health.ri.gov/complaints/>

| Summary of Annual Complaint Activity | | | | |
|--|-------------|-------------|-------------|-------------|
| | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 |
| Complaints received | 15 | 14 | 12 | 18 |
| Complaints opened for investigation | 8 | 6 | 1 | 13 |
| Complaints adjudicated by full Board | 7 | 3 | 1 | 7 |
| Suspensions | 1 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Voluntary agreements not to practice medicine/surrender of license | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| License reinstatements/ activations with disciplinary actions | 1 | 0 | 0 | 1 |
| Reprimands and related sanctions | 3 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Revocations | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Public adverse actions | 5 | 0 | 0 | 1 |

Revenue

License fees account for the majority of revenue for the state as reflected in the table., all revenue is deposited in the General Treasury account. PA licenses are renewed by the thirtieth (30th) day of June of every odd-numbered year, so revenue varies significantly between renewal cycles. Revenue is also generated by fees paid to renew controlled substance registrations. There is a fee for verification of a Rhode Island PA license which sends real-time license verification to state medical boards as requested. RIDOH does offer primary source verification at no charge, at <https://healthri.mylicense.com/verification/>

The Board is not authorized to issue fines for disciplinary actions and is one of the few states in the country that lacks this authority. The Board does have the authority to issue administrative fees which reflect the actual cost of investigating a complaint.

| Annual Revenue from Physician Assistant Related Fees | | | | | | | |
|--|------------------|-----------------|------------------|-----------------|------------------|-----------------|------------------|
| | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | 2021 |
| Physician Assistant License Fees ¹ | \$53,520 | \$10,720 | \$62,370 | \$14,820 | \$74,780 | \$16,090 | \$84,480 |
| Physician Assistant Controlled Substance Registrations Fees ² | \$84,000 | \$16,400 | \$100,650 | \$14,000 | \$113,200 | \$19,000 | \$133,400 |
| Total Annual Fees | \$137,520 | \$27,120 | \$163,020 | \$28,820 | \$187,980 | \$35,090 | \$217,880 |

Conclusion

The weight of the syndemic falls heavy on all who live in Rhode Island and the United States. We are living in a critical time, where the value of public health delivered in a just, objective manner is more important than ever, yet continues to face the perpetual challenges of staffing and resources to accomplish its mission. The Board, as part of RIDOH endeavors to effectively protect the public in a dynamic health care environment.

The Board looks forward to 2022, where another year of extraordinary service is expected.

¹ Source: L2K – Revenue Reports – Physician Assistant.

² Source: L2K – Revenue Reports – CSR-Physician Assistant.

i “CDC - Public Health System and the 10 Essential Public Health Services - OSTLTS.” *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention*, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 26 June 2018, <https://www.cdc.gov/publichealthgateway/publichealthservices/essentialhealthservices.html>.