



**Statement for the Record
Submitted to
U.S. Senate Special Committee on Aging
February 12, 2020
On Behalf of the American Academy of PAs**

On behalf of the more than 140,000 PAs (physician assistants) practicing in the United States, the American Academy of PAs (AAPA) welcomes the opportunity to submit a statement regarding the February 12, 2020, hearing held by the U.S. Senate Special Committee on Aging on “There’s No Place Like Home: Home Health Care in Rural America.”

AAPA thanks Chairman Collins and Ranking Member Casey for holding this important hearing, and for continuing to shine a spotlight on an issue that impacts so many individuals and communities in the United States. Access to quality home health care is critical to ensuring patients receive personal care that is appropriate for them in the privacy and comfort of their own homes. Rural patients often depend on home health services to retain their independence and to avoid or delay hospitalization or a move to a nursing home or assisted living facility that may be a considerable distance from their community.

AAPA thanks the witnesses for both their testimony and their work in providing care to rural and underserved communities.

AAPA also thanks Chairman Collins for her years of dedication to improving access to home health services, particularly through her and Senator Cardin introducing S.296, the Home Health Care Planning Improvement Act of 2019. This legislation currently has 43 bipartisan cosponsors, including Ranking Member Casey, and would authorize PAs and other advanced practice providers to certify and manage home health care services for Medicare patients.

For many patients who face barriers to leaving the home and accessing care, home health services are the only way that they are able to receive lifesaving health care and maintain their independence. According to the Medicare Payment Advisory Commission (MedPAC), about 3.4 million Medicare beneficiaries received home care in 2017, which represents a significant increase since 2000. As America’s population continues to age, it is critical for policy makers to ensure quality home health care services are available.

According to the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC), the U.S. will be facing a shortage of up to 122,000 physicians by 2032, with the shortage of primary care physicians ranging from 21,100 to 55,200. At the same time, the AAMC is projecting that the supply of PAs and advanced practice registered nurses will continue to increase. Per the National Rural Health Association (NRHA), “existing federal programs do not do enough to close this physician shortfall” and “additional actions must be taken to increase the supply of medical professionals in rural areas as the demand for their services is projected to increase in the future.” Given their education and training, PAs are a vitally important part of the solution to this provider shortage.

Enacting the Home Health Care Planning Improvement Act, S.296, would significantly improve access to home health services in rural and underserved communities, as well as promote continuity of care for the rapidly growing population of Medicare beneficiaries who rely on PAs and other advanced practice providers as their principal health care providers.

PAs are one of three types of health care professionals, including physicians and advanced practice registered nurses, who are recognized by the Medicare program to provide primary medical care in the United States. PAs are medical professionals who diagnose illness, develop and manage treatment plans, prescribe medications and serve as principal health care providers. PAs practice in every state, every medical setting and every specialty, and they are especially critical in ensuring access to care for rural and medically underserved areas. According to AAPA data, as of 2018 about 16% of all practicing PAs are located in a rural county, and multiple independent studies have shown that PAs practice in rural areas at higher percentages than many other providers. According to MedPAC, in 2017, 21% of Medicare beneficiaries in rural areas reported seeing a PA or NP for all or most of their primary care (versus 16% for the nation as a whole).

AAPA appreciates the important work being done in Congress, as well as the relevant federal agencies, to improve access to home health services in the United States. Far too many people in the United States face barriers to accessing home health services, with those in rural and underserved communities being particularly disadvantaged. PAs can play a vital role in ensuring that these rural and underserved communities are able to access home health services, along with a wide variety of other health care services.

AAPA is committed to working with Congress and all relevant federal agencies to improve access to primary care for underserved communities in the United States. Thank you for the opportunity to submit a statement for the record on this important issue, and please do not hesitate to contact Tate Heuer, AAPA Vice President, Federal Advocacy, at (571) 319-4338 or theuer@aapa.org with any questions.