



**Te Kaunihera Rata
o Aotearoa**

Medical Council
of New Zealand

Section 5: Professional title - Consultation on regulation of physician associates/ assistants (PAs)

Closes 16 February 2026

Overview

Council needs to decide the most appropriate title for PA scopes of practice in Aotearoa New Zealand. It is important that the title clearly describes what PAs do and is easy for the public to understand. The Council is currently exploring options for this title, and the feedback from this consultation is likely to assist in identifying an appropriate te reo Māori title.

Physician assistant title

Some stakeholders, including consumers, have told the Council that the 'physician associate' title is not ideal for Aotearoa New Zealand as it is confusing and not well understood. These stakeholders prefer the title 'physician assistant.'

The Leng Review in the UK recommended that physician associates should be renamed as 'physician assistants.' It reported that most UK stakeholders, particularly patient groups, expressed concern that the name 'physician associate' is confusing and leads to people mistakenly thinking they are consulting a doctor. This occurred even if the physician associate clearly said, 'I am not a doctor.'

Physician associate title

Advocates for the title 'physician associate' prefer this option because they believe it:

- reflects the training and experience PAs have
- reflects the nature of the working relationship they have with doctors.

There are also views that the title 'physician assistant' is not the right title because it:

- diminishes the profession's skill and postgraduate training
- incorrectly suggests that the role 'assists' another role, which can be confusing for patients
- does not reflect the role that the PA plays within the multidisciplinary team.

Use of titles around the world

The table below shows which title is used in regulated jurisdictions around the world. Both 'physician associate' and 'physician assistant' are used internationally, but with some countries adopting other titles.

Country	Current prevailing title
United States	Physician Assistant / Physician Associate (state dependent) ¹
Canada	Physician Assistant
Netherlands	Physician Assistant
Ghana	Physician Assistant
Germany	Physician Assistant
Australia	Physician Assistant
Israel	Physician Assistant
Liberia	Physician Assistant
United Kingdom	Physician Associate ²
Republic of Ireland	Physician Associate
India	Physician Associate (prior to 2021, both titles were used)

¹ The American Academy of Physician Associates (AAPA) has been leading advocacy to formally change the title from 'Physician Assistant' to 'Physician Associate' in the US. This will require each state to change its legislation. To date, three states have officially enacted the legislation to change the title. A further five have legislation in process.

² A decision has not been formally made by the UK government or GMC in relation to the recommendation from the Leng Review to change from 'Physician Associate' to 'Physician Assistant'.