



STATE OF WASHINGTON
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
Olympia, Washington 98504

**NOTICE OF ADOPTION
INTERPRETIVE STATEMENT**

Title of Interpretive Statement: Physician Assistants Performing Disability Evaluations,
INS2023-01

Issuing Entity: Washington Medical Commission

Subject Matter: Physicians assistants performing disability evaluations

Effective Date: January 13, 2023

Contact Person: Michael Farrell, JD
Policy Development Manager
16201 E Indiana Avenue
Suite 1500
Spokane Valley, WA 99203
(509) 329-2186
michael.farrell@wmc.wa.gov

OFFICE OF THE CODE REVISER
STATE OF WASHINGTON
FILED

DATE: March 06, 2023

TIME: 11:02 AM

WSR 23-07-023



STATE OF WASHINGTON
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
Olympia, Washington 98504

**NOTICE OF ADOPTION
INTERPRETIVE STATEMENT**

Title of Interpretive Statement: Physician Assistants Performing Disability Evaluations,
INS2023-01

Issuing Entity: Washington Medical Commission

Subject Matter: Physicians assistants performing disability evaluations

Effective Date: January 13, 2023

Contact Person: Michael Farrell, JD
Policy Development Manager
16201 E Indiana Avenue
Suite 1500
Spokane Valley, WA 99203
(509) 329-2186
michael.farrell@wmc.wa.gov

OFFICE OF THE CODE REVISER
STATE OF WASHINGTON
FILED

DATE: March 06, 2023

TIME: 11:02 AM

WSR 23-07-023

Interpretive Statement



WASHINGTON
**Medical
Commission**
Licensing. Accountability. Leadership.

Title:	Physician Assistants Performing Disability Evaluations	INS2023-01
References:	Chapter 18.71A RCW , Chapter 246-918 WAC , Chapter 388-449 WAC , 20 CFR § 404.1502	
Contact:	Washington Medical Commission	
Phone:	(360) 236-2750	E-mail: medical.commission@wmc.wa.gov
Supersedes:	None	
Effective Date:	January 13, 2023	
Approved By:	Jimmy Chung, MD, Chair (signature on file)	

The Washington Medical Commission (Commission) interprets [Chapter 18.71A RCW](#), [Chapter 246-918 WAC](#), [Chapter 388-449 WAC](#), and [20 CFR § 404.1502](#) as authorizing a physician assistant to conduct a disability evaluation to determine whether a person is disabled so long as the physician assistant is competent to perform the evaluation based on education, training, and experience and the evaluation is consistent with the practice agreement.

[RCW 18.71A.010\(4\)](#) provides:

“Physician Assistant” means a person who is licensed by the commission to practice medicine according to a practice agreement with one or more participating physicians, with at least one of the physicians working in a supervisory capacity, and who is academically and clinically prepared to provide health care services and perform diagnostic, therapeutic, preventative, and health maintenance services.

[RCW 18.71A.020\(2\)](#) provides:

(2)(a) The commission shall adopt rules governing the extent to which:

...

(b) Such rules shall provide:

- (i) That the practice of a physician assistant shall be limited to the performance of those services for which he or she is trained; and
- (ii) That each physician assistant shall practice medicine only under the terms of one or more practice agreements, each signed by one or more supervising physicians licensed in this state. A practice agreement may be signed electronically using a method for electronic signatures approved by the commission. Supervision shall not be construed to necessarily require the personal presence of the supervising physician or physicians at the place where services are rendered.

[RCW 18.71A.030](#) provides:

- (1) A physician assistant may practice medicine in this state to the extent permitted by the practice agreement. A physician assistant shall be subject to discipline under chapter 18.130 RCW.
- (2) Physician assistants may provide services that they are competent to perform based on their education, training, and experience and that are consistent with their practice agreement. The supervising physician and the physician assistant shall determine which procedures may be performed and the supervision under which the procedure is performed. Physician assistants may practice in any area of medicine or surgery as long as the practice is not beyond the supervising physician's own scope of expertise and clinical practice and the practice agreement.
- (3) A physician assistant delivering general anesthesia or intrathecal anesthesia pursuant to a practice agreement with a physician shall show evidence of adequate education and training in the delivery of the type of anesthesia being delivered on his or her practice agreement.

[RCW 18.71A.050](#) provides:

...

The supervising physician and physician assistant shall each retain professional and personal responsibility for any act which constitutes the practice of medicine as defined in RCW 18.71.011 or the practice of osteopathic medicine and surgery as defined in RCW 18.57.001 when performed by the physician assistant.

[RCW 18.71A.090](#) provides:

- (1) A physician assistant may sign and attest to any certificates, cards, forms, or other required documentation that the physician assistant's supervising physician or physician group may sign, provided that it is within the physician assistant's scope of practice and is consistent with the terms of the physician assistant's practice agreement as required by this chapter.
- (2) Notwithstanding any federal law, rule, or medical staff bylaw provision to the contrary, a physician is not required to countersign orders written in a patient's clinical record or an official form by a physician assistant with whom the physician has a practice agreement.

[RCW 18.71A.120](#) provides:

- (1) Prior to commencing practice, a physician assistant licensed in Washington state must enter into a practice agreement with a physician or group of physicians, at least one of whom must be working in a supervisory capacity.
- ...
- (2) A practice agreement must include all of the following:
 - (a) The duties and responsibilities of the physician assistant, the supervising physician, and alternate physicians. The practice agreement must describe supervision requirements for specified procedures or areas of practice. The practice agreement may only include acts, tasks, or functions that the physician assistant and supervising

physician or alternate physicians are qualified to perform by education, training, or experience and that are within the scope of expertise and clinical practice of both the physician assistant and the supervising physician or alternate physicians, unless otherwise authorized by law, rule, or the commission;

(b) A process between the physician assistant and supervising physician or alternate physicians for communication, availability, and decision making when providing medical treatment to a patient or in the event of an acute health care crisis not previously covered by the practice agreement, such as a flu pandemic or other unforeseen emergency. Communications may occur in person, electronically, by telephone, or by an alternate method;

(c) If there is only one physician party to the practice agreement, a protocol for designating an alternate physician for consultation in situations in which the physician is not available;

....

[WAC 246-918-005\(6\)](#) provides:

"Physician assistant" means a person who is licensed under [Chapter 18.71A RCW](#) by the commission to practice medicine to a limited extent only under the supervision of a physician or osteopathic physician.

[WAC 246-918-005\(7\)](#) provides:

(7) "Practice agreement" means a mutually agreed upon plan, as detailed in WAC 246-918-055, between a supervising physician and physician assistant, which describes the manner and extent to which the physician assistant will practice and be supervised.

[WAC 246-918-005\(8\)](#) provides:

(8) "Supervising physician" means any physician or osteopathic physician identified in a practice agreement as providing primary clinical and administrative oversight for a physician assistant.

[WAC 388-449-0010](#) provides:

(1) To determine whether a medically determinable impairment exists, we consider medical evidence from "acceptable medical sources." "Acceptable medical sources" include the following:

(a) For a physical impairment, a health professional licensed in Washington state or where the examination was performed:

...

(v) Physician assistant (PA) for impairments within their licensed scope of practice;

....

[20 CFR § 404.1502](#) provides:

As used in the subpart—

(a) Acceptable medical source means a medical source who is a:

...

(8) Licensed Physician Assistant for impairments within his or her licensed scope of practice (only with respect to claims filed (see § 404.614) on or after March 27, 2017).

Under Washington law, a physician assistant may practice in any area of medicine and perform any service so long as the practice is not beyond the supervising physician's own scope of expertise and clinical practice and the practice agreement. The practice agreement is a plan between the supervising physician and the physician assistant describing the manner and extent to which the physician assistant will practice and the extent to which the physician will supervise the physician assistant's practice. Supervision means providing clinical and administrative oversight to the physician assistant, but does not require the presence of the physician where the care is rendered.

The Commission interprets [Chapter 18.71A RCW](#), [Chapter 246-918 WAC](#), [Chapter 388-449 WAC](#), and [20 CFR § 404.1502](#) as authorizing a physician assistant to conduct a disability evaluation to determine whether a person is disabled for the purposes of receiving social security benefits, so long as the physician assistant is competent to perform the evaluation based on education, training, and experience and the evaluation is consistent with the practice agreement. While a physician assistant works under a practice agreement, for the purposes of clinical decision-making, including the conducting of a disability evaluation, a physician assistant is an autonomous practitioner. Authority of a physician assistant to conduct disability evaluations does not need to be specified in a practice agreement.