



The physician assistant's
complete guide to *locum tenens*

CompHealth.

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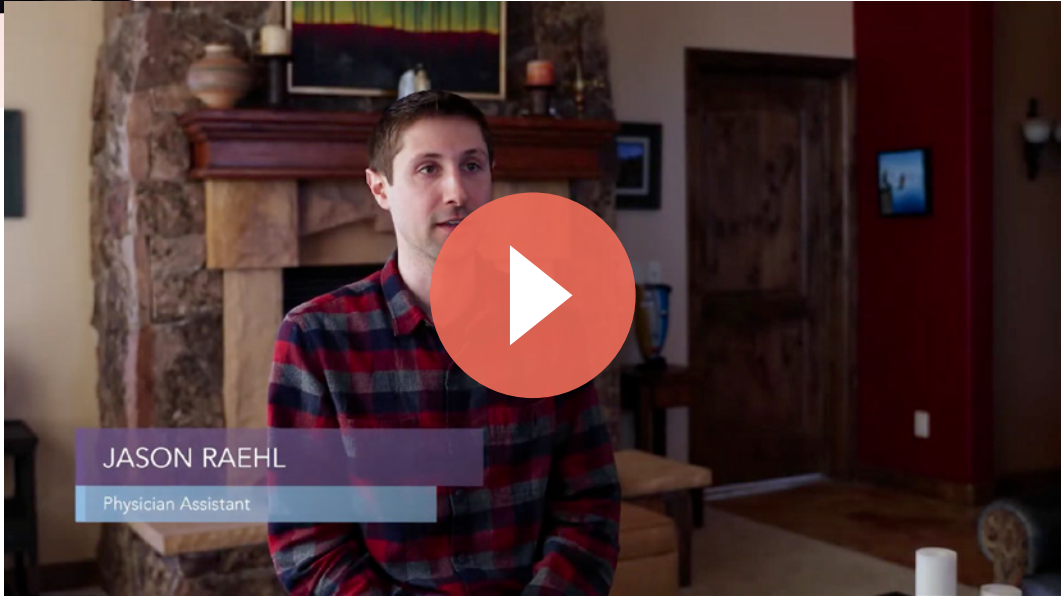
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What is locum tenens?

PART
1



THE FREEDOM AND FLEXIBILITY OF BEING A LOCUM PA

What is locum tenens, and how do I get started?

If you're a physician assistant who's heard the term locum tenens but never fully understood what it means, you're not alone. Many PAs first hear about locums through colleagues, recruiters, or online job searches, and assume it's only for physicians or for people who want to travel nonstop. But it's more than that.

Locum tenens means working temporary assignments to fill a patient care need. For physician assistants, that can mean stepping into a hospital, clinic, surgical practice, emergency department, rural facility, or specialty practice for a defined period of time while the organization covers a leave, fills a vacancy, manages seasonal demand, or adds support during a staffing shortage.

Assignments can be short or long, local or far from home, full-time or occasional. Some PAs take one assignment a year. Others build an entire career around locums. Some use it to travel. Others use it to stay close to home while gaining more control over their schedule.

That kind of flexibility makes it easier to shape locums around your lifestyle, priorities, and career goals.

What locum tenens looks like for PAs

For a PA, locums usually starts with a conversation with a recruiter about your specialty, preferences, schedule, and where you're licensed or willing to work. From there, a recruiter helps match you with assignments that fit your background. Once you accept a role, there's credentialing, licensing support if needed, travel planning, housing coordination, and onboarding before your start date. On assignment, you do the clinical work you were hired to do, then decide whether you want to extend, take time off, or move on to something new.

That balance of flexibility and support is one reason locums appeals to so many PAs.



How PA locums is different from physician locums

At a high level, physician and PA locums share the same core idea: temporary clinical work that fills an immediate need. But for PAs, there are a few practical differences.

First, the scope of practice and onboarding can look different depending on specialty, setting, and state requirements. A PA considering locums needs to think not just about the job itself, but about supervision structures, team dynamics, onboarding expectations, and how quickly they can adapt to a new workflow.

Second, agencies can play an especially helpful role for PAs because they often step in to support credentialing, licensing, paperwork, and logistics that can otherwise eat up a lot of time. That support matters when you're juggling multiple licenses, multiple facilities, and different documentation standards.

Why physician assistants choose locums

There isn't one single reason PAs choose locums. For some, it's about flexibility. For others, it's a break from burnout. Some want to earn more. Others want a change of scenery or the chance to test out different practice settings before committing long-term.

For Catie Hauck, PA in cardiovascular/ cardiothoracic surgery, locums made it possible to keep doing the work she cared about most while opening up new options.

“Locums allowed me to stay in the specialty that I love and still have the opportunity to travel.”

That kind of motivation comes up often among PAs. Locums can create room to keep practicing in a preferred specialty while exploring different regions, facilities, and ways of working.



LEARN ABOUT
PA CAREER
OPTIONS

How the process usually works from the first call to the first day

For someone new to locums, one of the biggest barriers is not knowing what happens next. The process usually looks something like this:

- You speak with a recruiter about your specialty, experience, schedule, and preferences.
- Your recruiter shares assignments that align with your background.
- You review details like setting, scope, schedule, patient volume, and location.
- If you're interested, the facility may interview you.
- Once you accept, credentialing and licensing begin.
- Travel and housing are arranged if needed.
- You receive onboarding information before your first day.
- You arrive, complete orientation, and begin the assignment.

Some of these steps move quickly. Others take time, especially if a new license or extensive credentialing is required.



THE NEED FOR CHANGE BROUGHT ONE PA TO LOCUM TENENS

What kinds of settings can PAs work in?

One of the most appealing parts of locums is the range of settings available. Depending on your experience and interests, locum tenens PA jobs can include:

- Primary care clinics
- Urgent care centers
- Emergency medicine settings
- Surgical practices
- Inpatient hospital services
- Rural and underserved facilities
- Specialty clinics

That range can be especially valuable if you want to deepen your experience, stay in a specialty you love, or figure out which environment fits you best.

[Browse locums PA jobs](#)

“

I get to meet new people and reconnect with people I already know as I travel. I love the flexibility and the chance to see how healthcare works in different hospitals.

—Jennifer Brown, orthopedic surgery

Who locums tends to work well for

Locums can work well for a lot of different PAs, but it tends to be an especially good fit for people who:

- Want more schedule flexibility
- Are open to new environments
- Can adapt quickly to different workflows
- Want to earn more or be paid more directly for the hours they work
- Are exploring a career transition
- Want variety without leaving patient care

It can also work well for PAs who are looking for a reset. Sometimes the appeal isn't adventure. Sometimes it's simply breathing room.

Who may want to think carefully before jumping in

Locums isn't a bad fit if you value stability. But if you strongly prefer predictability, a deeply established team routine, or a long ramp-up period before starting somewhere new, it may feel more challenging at first.

That doesn't mean you should rule it out. It just means you should go into it with a clear understanding of your own working style and what kind of support you may need to succeed.

Common questions PAs have when they're just getting started

Q: Do I have to travel far to work locums?

A: Not always. Some PAs take assignments in entirely different states. Others work within driving distance. Locums can involve major travel, but it doesn't have to.

Q: Do I need years of experience first?

A: That depends on the role, specialty, and facility. Some assignments require a clinician who can step in with minimal ramp-up. Others may be more open. In general, the more independently you can practice within your role and specialty, the more options you may have.

Q: Is locums only for people who don't want a permanent job?

A: No. Some PAs use locums for a short period. Others use it to explore future permanent opportunities. And some stick with it because they genuinely prefer the flexibility.



Locums vs. a permanent PA role

A permanent PA role can offer consistency, a familiar team, and a long-term home base. For many people, that’s exactly the right fit.

Locums offers something different. It can give you more control over your schedule, let you work in new settings, help you avoid feeling stuck, and create breathing room between assignments. It can also help you answer questions you may not be able to answer in one permanent role alone: Do I want a rural or an urban setting? Do I want full-time work year-round, or time off built into my schedule? Am I in the right specialty, or do I want more variety?

That doesn’t mean one path is better than the other. It means locums gives physician assistants another option, and for the right person, it can be a very good one.

[Browse locums PA jobs](#)

Questions to ask yourself before exploring locums

Before you start applying, it helps to be honest about what you want. Ask yourself:

- Do I want more flexibility, more pay, more variety, or all three?
- Am I open to travel, or do I want to stay closer to home?
- How comfortable am I with change?
- What kind of support would I want from a recruiter or agency?
- Am I looking for a short-term shift or a bigger career change?

Those answers can help guide the kind of assignments you explore and the kind of recruiter relationship that’ll serve you best.

[Contact us](#)

Why locums is worth considering

Locum tenens isn’t just a backup plan or a short-term stopgap. For physician assistants, it can be a practical, flexible way to build a career that better fits real life. Whether you want travel PA jobs, more control over your time, or a way to stay in a specialty you love, locums is worth understanding.

Talk to a recruiter about physician assistant locum tenens jobs today.

**KEEP YOUR
CAREER OPTIONS
OPEN**





Why choose locum tenens?

PART
2

TAKE THE
LOCUMSTORY
QUIZ: IS LOCUMS
RIGHT FOR YOU

Why PAs choose locum tenens: Pay, flexibility, and benefits explained

If you're seriously weighing locum tenens, you're probably asking a simple question: Is it actually worth it?

For many physician assistants, the answer is yes—but not because locums is perfect. It's because the tradeoffs can work strongly in your favor when you want better control over your time, stronger earning potential, more variety, or relief from the pressures that come with a traditional permanent role.

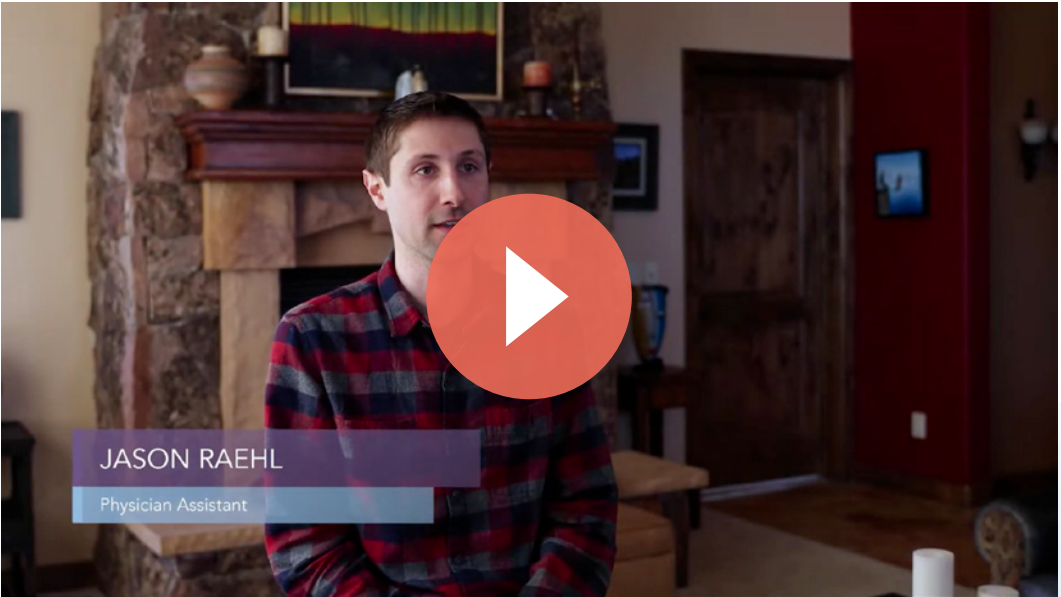
How locum tenens pay works for PAs

One of the biggest reasons PAs explore locums is compensation. Locum tenens physician assistant jobs are typically paid hourly, which can feel very different from salaried permanent work. That matters because your time is more visible.

For physician assistants working longer shifts or heavier weeks, that difference can feel even more concrete. "If you work more than 40 hours, then you get paid time and a half for that work," shares Jason Raehl, orthopedic surgery PA.

That kind of pay structure can be especially appealing to PAs who are used to going above and beyond in salaried jobs without seeing a meaningful difference in compensation.

HOW DOES
LOCUMS PAY
WORK FOR PAs?



HOW DOES PAY WORK FOR A LOCUM PA?

Looking at the full compensation picture

For many PAs, locums pay isn't just about the hourly rate. It's about the overall compensation picture. That includes:

- How many hours are guaranteed
- Whether overtime is possible
- Whether call is involved
- Whether travel time affects your schedule
- What expenses are covered
- Whether benefits are included
- How much unpaid time you plan to take between assignments

A high hourly rate can look less impressive if the schedule is inconsistent or if you're responsible for major out-of-pocket costs. On the other hand, a rate that looks average at first can become much more attractive when housing, travel, licensing support, malpractice coverage, and benefits are built in.

Beyond the paycheck: CompHealth benefits for locum PAs

W-2 vs. 1099: Why it matters for PAs

One of the biggest questions PAs have about locums is whether they'll be treated as W-2 employees or independent contractors.

Some locum clinicians work as independent contractors, which means handling their own

tax planning and often sourcing their own benefits. But CompHealth's current PA model is W-2 employment, which alters the experience in meaningful ways.

That structure was a deciding factor for one veteran locum PA:

“With CompHealth, I work as a W-2 employee. Somebody else takes care of my withholding and taxes, and that takes a huge amount of stress off me.”—Terry Rand, cardiovascular/ cardiothoracic surgery

For PAs who don't want extra tax complexity on top of clinical work and travel logistics, that matters.



CONCERN ABOUT WORKING AS A 1099

What about benefits?

Many people assume that working as a locum means giving up benefits. That can be true in some situations, but not all locum roles work that way.

CompHealth offers a range of benefits for eligible physician assistants that begin on day 30 of an assignment, including:

- Medical, dental, and vision coverage
- Life and disability insurance
- Employee assistance program
- 401(k) with employer match

That can be a meaningful difference for a PA who wants flexibility without feeling like they're cobbling together the basics on their own.

“One of the reasons I chose CompHealth is because I’m an employee as opposed to an independent contractor. They’ll keep those benefits for 30 days in between assignments, which gives me time to travel and do other things. You also feel like you’re a part of a team and have company resources behind you and a group that’s supporting you.”—Jason Raehl, orthopedic surgery

What's covered and what you should plan for

One of the smartest things a PA can do before accepting an assignment is ask exactly what's covered and what isn't.

Areas to clarify include:

- Travel to and from the assignment
- Housing or housing stipend
- Rental car or local transportation
- Licensing fees
- Credentialing support
- Malpractice coverage
- Health benefits eligibility
- Retirement benefits
- Any expenses you may need to pay upfront and later get reimbursed for

Even when an agency provides strong support, it helps to know what your own budget may still need to cover.

MORE BENEFITS OF WORKING WITH COMPHEALTH

Flexibility isn't just a buzzword

For many PAs, control over their schedule is one of the biggest benefits.

Locums can give you the ability to take time between assignments, choose where you want to go next, and build more intention into your year. That can be especially valuable if you're burned out, balancing family priorities, or simply tired of feeling like you have no room to breathe.

“I don't know many jobs in the medical field where you can take a month off and not have to ask anyone for that time off. That's pretty special.”
—Jason Raehl, orthopedic surgery

For some PAs, that kind of autonomy is just as important as the pay.

“

Being a locum, I'm able to step back and plan things. I can take a little more time off and a little more time for me.

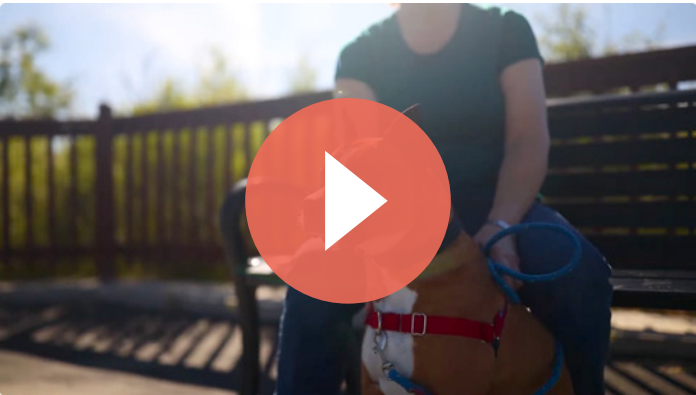
—Terry Rand,
cardiovascular/cardiothoracic surgery

How locums can affect family life and work-life balance

Flexibility sounds appealing in theory, but it can also raise practical questions. What if you have kids? What if you're caring for a parent? What if you want more control over your calendar but less disruption overall?

That's where it helps to get specific. For some PAs, locums means building work around family schedules and major life events. For others, it's choosing assignments closer to home or avoiding work that spills into evenings and weekends.

The real benefit isn't that locums looks the same for everyone. It's that it can be shaped around what matters most to you.



TRAVELING WITH DOGS

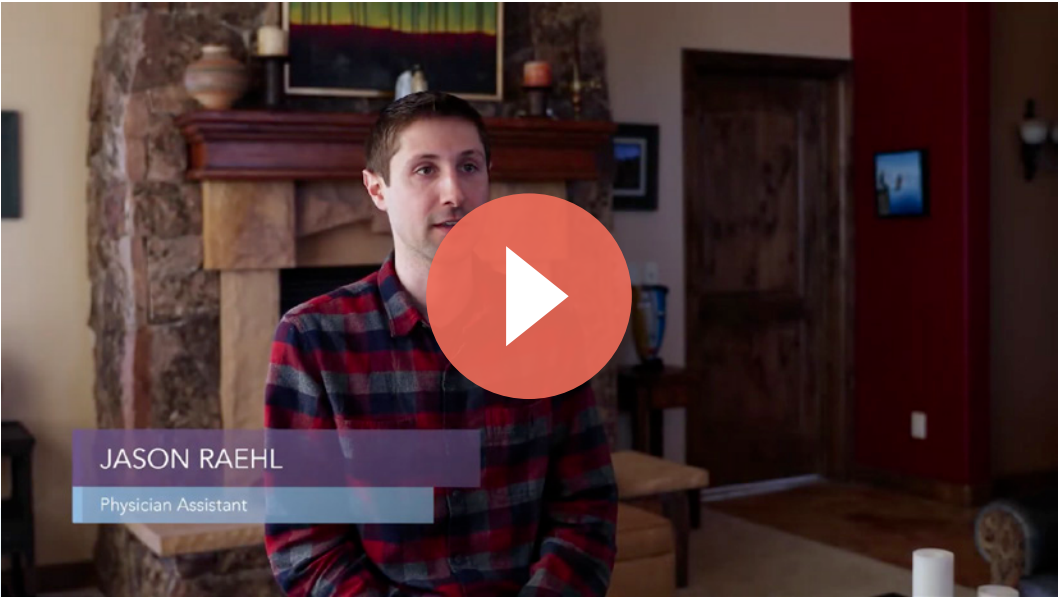
New places, broader experience

Locums can open the door to new locations while helping you build a more diverse clinical background.

For some PAs, that means traveling to parts of the country they've never lived or worked before. For others, it's an opportunity to stay closer to home while still experiencing different practice settings, patient populations, and care models.

Along the way, many PAs build new skills, gain confidence in unfamiliar environments, and expand the range of cases they've managed. Over time, that experience also brings perspective—helping them get clearer on the kind of culture, leadership, and workflow they want.

That clarity can be valuable whether you stay in locums long term or eventually return to a permanent role.



GETTING USED TO NEW ENVIRONMENTS ON LOCUMS ASSIGNMENTS

“

The biggest benefit is that it affords you experiences in different practices in different locations. It gives you exposure to different ways of doing the same work, and that's incredibly valuable.

—Jennifer Fluke,
cardiovascular/cardiothoracic surgery

LEARN ABOUT
RURAL PA LIFE

Locums or permanent: What's right for you?

If you're weighing locums against a permanent role, consider the trade-offs among flexibility, compensation, and day-to-day experience.

Potential upsides of locums

- Higher hourly earning potential
- More control over schedule and time off
- Geographic flexibility
- Exposure to new teams and practice environments
- A way to reduce burnout or reset your career path
- A chance to be compensated more directly for the hours you work
- A try-before-you-buy job

Potential tradeoffs of locums

- Credentialing and licensing can take time
- New environments require adaptability
- Some assignments may feel less predictable than a long-term role
- Being away from home can feel isolating for some clinicians
- Breaks between assignments require planning
- You may need to be more intentional about budgeting and scheduling



When locums may make more sense than a permanent role

Locums may make more sense if you:

- Want more flexibility and less long-term commitment
- Are interested in exploring a new region or practice setting
- Want a reset without leaving clinical work
- Prefer variety
- Value being paid hourly for the work you do

A permanent role may make more sense if you:

- Want a fixed team and predictable year-round schedule
- Strongly value routine and continuity
- Prefer a workplace where long-term relationship-building is a major priority
- Don't want to manage any level of transition between roles

Questions to ask before deciding whether locums is worth it for you

- Am I drawn more to pay, flexibility, travel, or variety?
- How important is predictability to me?
- Would I feel energized by change, or drained by it?
- Do I want to work continuously, or build in time off?
- What would I need in place to make this feel financially and personally sustainable?

The bottom line

For many PAs, locum tenens is worth it because it offers higher pay potential, more flexibility, and meaningful support without giving up benefits. It isn't the right fit for everyone, but it's far more stable and practical than many people assume.

Talk to a recruiter about physician assistant locum tenens jobs today.



PERMANENT HEALTHCARE JOBS VS. LOCUMS



Choosing a locums agency

PART
3

Choosing the right locums agency

Many physician assistants are interested in locums until they hit one sticking point: choosing an agency.

That hesitation makes sense. If you've never worked with a recruiter before, it's easy to

wonder whether an agency is just a middleman. But for PAs, the right locum tenens agency can do much more than send job leads. It can save time, reduce stress, protect your income, and help you avoid preventable headaches.

What a locum tenens agency actually does

A good agency helps match you with physician assistant locums jobs that fit your specialty, schedule, and location preferences. But that's just the beginning.

Agencies can also help with:

- Credentialing paperwork
- Licensing support
- Travel planning
- Housing coordination
- Interview prep
- Contract guidance
- Ongoing troubleshooting before and during an assignment

That kind of support matters because the logistics behind locums can get complicated quickly.

Why agencies matter even more for PAs than physicians

Physician assistants often need an agency that understands the specifics of PA practice, including specialty expectations, onboarding realities, facility culture, and licensing requirements.

That support becomes more valuable as your career gets more mobile.

Licensing, credentialing, and paperwork support

This is one of the least glamorous parts of locums and one of the biggest reasons agency support matters. Credentialing and licensing can be time-consuming, especially if you're applying across multiple states or facilities.

If you're new to locums, this is where a good recruiter can protect your time and your sanity.

“
CompHealth does a lot of the paperwork for me, so a lot of that is prefilled in.
—Catie Hauck, cardiovascular/
cardiothoracic surgery

LEARN HOW
LOCUMS
AGENCIES
STACK UP

Housing and travel help aren't small perks

Housing sounds like a side detail until you realize how much time it can take to coordinate short-term furnished living on your own.

“

CompHealth knows me personally—they know I travel with my dog, they help find housing that works for that, and they already know what locations I'm interested in.

—Catie Hauck,
cardiovascular/cardiothoracic surgery

That kind of personalized attention can take a lot of pressure off before an assignment even begins.

“Our housing is taken care of. When we show up, it's like checking into a hotel or Airbnb—everything is set up.”
—Jason Raehl, orthopedic surgery

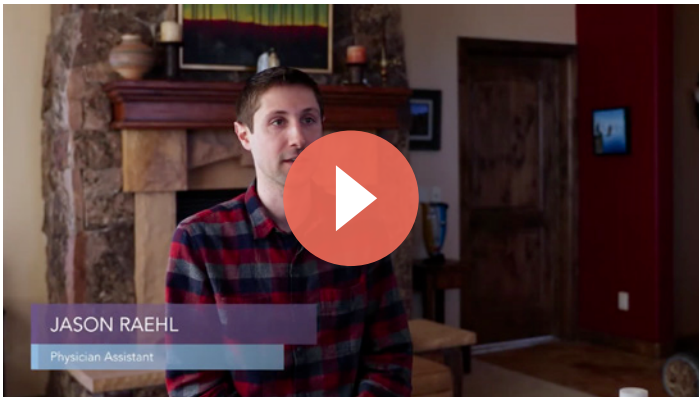
That makes it easier to arrive focused on the assignment instead of stressed about the logistics.

What makes a good PA locums recruiter?

A good recruiter should understand your specialty, communicate clearly, be transparent about an assignment, and advocate for you when something needs to be addressed. You should feel supported, not pressured.

“I trust my recruiter to do what's right for me and go to bat for me if needed.”—Terry Rand, cardiovascular/cardiothoracic sugery

That kind of relationship matters. The best recruiters aren't just filling roles. They're helping you build a workable career.



HOUSING PROVIDED ON LOCUM TENENS ASSIGNMENTS

What to ask a recruiter on the first call

A first conversation can tell you a lot. The right questions will help you understand not only the opportunities available but also how the recruiter works and what kind of support you can expect.

Good questions to ask include:

- Have you placed PAs in my specialty before?
- What kinds of assignments are most common for someone with my background?
- What support do you provide with licensing and credentialing?
- How are housing and travel handled?
- Will I be a W-2 employee or an independent contractor?
- What benefits are available?
- How transparent can you be about schedule, patient volume, and workflow?
- How do you handle problems that come up during an assignment?
- Who do I contact if something feels off once I arrive?

WHAT IT'S
LIKE WORKING
WITH
COMPHEALTH

Signs you've found a strong recruiter

A strong recruiter usually:

- Listens before pitching jobs
- Understands your specialty and concerns
- Explains processes clearly
- Is direct about timing, paperwork, and expectations
- Respects your boundaries
- Gives you enough detail to make a real decision
- Follows through

You should feel like the recruiter is helping you think clearly, not pushing you toward the fastest yes.

“

I like the consistency of CompHealth and appreciate the teamwork that goes on behind the scenes to help get things done.

—Jennifer Fluke, cardiovascular/
cardiothoracic surgery

Recruiter red flags to watch for

Not every recruiter or agency relationship will be a good fit. Be cautious if:

- You feel rushed to commit
- Questions about pay or scope are answered vaguely
- Details about the schedule, call, or workload stay fuzzy
- You get inconsistent answers
- Your concerns are minimized
- You're pressured to take roles that don't align with your goals

A good recruiter should reduce confusion, not add to it.

Common myths about locums agencies

Myth: Agencies only care about filling jobs

Not every agency operates that way. The right partner takes time to understand your goals and helps you evaluate fit, timing, compensation, and long-term direction.

“With CompHealth, you feel like you’re working with an established company—not a fly-by-night operation.”—Hugh Degannes, orthopedic surgery

Myth: You can do everything yourself more easily

It's possible, but many PAs find the administrative lift is heavier than expected—especially when it comes to licensing, credentialing, and coordinating logistics across assignments.

Myth: All agencies understand PAs equally well

They don't. Look for one with real experience placing physician assistants in your specialty and who understands the nuances of your role.

Myth: You'll have less control working with an agency

In reality, locums is built around choice. You decide which opportunities to pursue, where you want to work, and when you're available—with an agency helping surface options that align with your preferences.

Myth: You'll earn less because the agency takes a cut

Compensation is structured differently in locums, but it's often competitive—and in many cases higher—than permanent roles. Agencies also negotiate on your behalf and help ensure you're compensated fairly for your time and expertise.

What transparency should look like

Before saying yes to an assignment, you should have a reasonably clear picture of:

- What your daily work will involve
- What support is available on-site
- What documentation system is used
- Whether on-call responsibilities are part of the role
- What orientation looks like
- How long the assignment is expected to last
- What happens if the facility wants to extend
- Who to contact if something is off once you arrive

No assignment will come with perfect certainty. But you shouldn't have to walk in blind.

How a locums agency supports you at every stage

Agency support isn't just about getting the job. It shapes the whole experience.

Before the assignment, it can save hours of admin work and reduce confusion around paperwork and logistics. The assignment provides a point of contact if expectations shift or problems arise. After the assignment, it can help you evaluate whether to extend, move on, or use what you learned to find a better fit for your next assignment.

What happens if an assignment isn't the right fit?

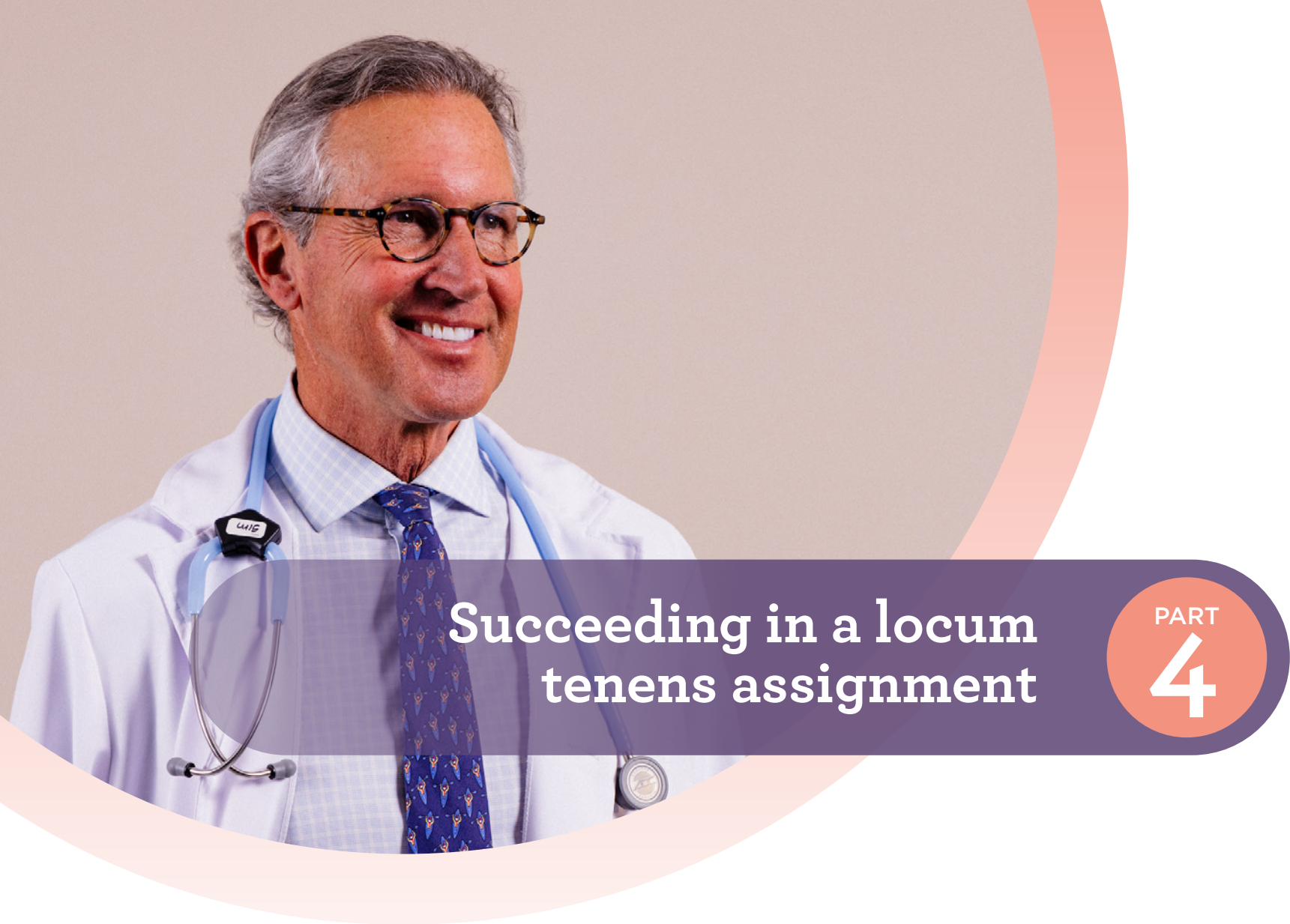
Even with the right preparation, not every assignment will feel like the right fit once you're on the ground. That doesn't automatically mean anyone did something wrong—but it does highlight why your recruiter relationship matters.

A strong recruiter can help you talk through what's happening and whether it's a fixable communication issue, a mismatch in expectations, or a sign that the assignment shouldn't continue long term. That kind of support can make a challenging situation much easier to navigate.

The bottom line

The right agency isn't just a convenience. For many PAs, it's what makes locums successful long term. When an agency understands physician assistants, handles the heavy logistics, and advocates for you, it helps protect your time, income, and peace of mind.

Talk to a recruiter about physician assistant locum tenens jobs today.



Succeeding in a locum tenens assignment

PART
4

How PAs can succeed in a locum tenens assignment

Getting the assignment is only the beginning. What makes a locum tenens PA successful is what happens after the contract is signed.

The good news is that success in locums doesn't require being perfect. It requires preparation, adaptability, and strong communication. If you can walk into a new environment ready to learn, ready to help, and clear about your scope, you're already in a strong position to succeed.

Start preparing before day one

Before you arrive, make sure you understand:

- The patient population
- Your expected responsibilities
- Workflow and documentation systems
- Orientation details
- Who your go-to contacts are
- What the team expects from a locum PA

This is also the time to be honest about your experience and comfort level. Locums isn't about pretending you know everything. It's about stepping in with clarity and professionalism.

What to ask before you arrive

A lot of first-assignment stress can be reduced by asking practical questions early. For example:

- How long is orientation?
- What charting system will I be using?
- What does a typical day look like?
- Who is available for clinical questions?
- What procedures or patient types are most common?
- What are the expectations around productivity, call, and handoffs?
- Is there anything the team wishes locum clinicians knew before arriving?

These questions help you prepare and signal that you want to be useful from day one.

Get oriented quickly, but don't rush trust

Every site has its own rhythm. Even if the clinical work is familiar, the workflow may not be.

Successful locum PAs pay close attention during onboarding. They ask how the team communicates, where common bottlenecks happen, what's expected after hours, and when to escalate. They learn the charting system as quickly as possible and make a point of understanding not just the medicine but how things work on the ground.

“When you go into a locums job, they're really happy that you're there; you're there to help.”—Jason Raehl, orthopedic surgery

That perspective can help settle first-assignment nerves. You aren't intruding. You're there because you're needed.



How to build trust quickly with a new team

You don't need to become everyone's favorite person in two days. But it helps to build trust early by:

- Showing up prepared
- Asking thoughtful questions
- Respecting local workflows
- Being clear about what you know and what you need
- Following through
- Treating support staff with respect
- Staying calm when the pace picks up

Teams usually notice very quickly whether a locum clinician is collaborative, defensive, flexible, or checked out. A little professionalism goes a long way.

Communicate your scope and expectations early

One of the smartest things a locum PA can do is clarify expectations early and often. That includes:

- What cases or responsibilities are yours
- What requires physician consultation
- How call works
- What productivity expectations look like
- Where the team may assume knowledge that needs to be explained

That isn't being difficult. That's being professional.

Adapt without overextending yourself

Locums requires flexibility, but flexibility doesn't mean saying yes to everything. A strong locum PA adapts to new teams and workflows while still being honest about boundaries, training, and patient safety.

“Flexibility is the name of the game. You’ll have experience and knowledge, just be prepared to be able to think about it differently.”—Jennifer Fluke, cardiovascular/cardiothoracic surgery

That's the balance to aim for. Be open. Be useful. But don't confuse adaptability with self-sacrifice.

What to do if expectations are unclear

Sometimes the challenge isn't the medicine. It's the ambiguity.

If you find yourself thinking, *“I'm not sure what they expect from me here,”* don't wait for that confusion to resolve itself. Ask for clarity. Confirm roles. Restate what you're hearing. Loop in your recruiter if needed. Problems tend to get easier when addressed early and harder when ignored.

Handling unfamiliar workflows without spiraling

One of the most common first-assignment stressors is not knowing the local system. Even experienced PAs can feel thrown off by a new charting platform, a new referral process, a new triage style, or different assumptions around handoffs.

The goal isn't to look like you've worked there for years right away. The goal is to learn quickly without getting rattled. Stay curious. Write things down. Ask the same question twice if you need to. Most teams would rather answer a clear question than clean up a preventable mistake later.

Practical habits that make assignments smoother

A few small habits can make a big difference:

- Arrive early until you understand the pace
- Keep a running list of workflow questions
- Confirm handoff expectations
- Learn the names of key people quickly
- Review the next day before you leave, if possible
- Be cautious about making assumptions based on how your last facility did things

These aren't flashy strategies, but they often separate a rough assignment from a smooth one.



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SEE HOW.**

Mistakes first-time locum PAs should avoid

Common mistakes include:

- Acting like every facility should work the same way
- Avoiding questions because you want to look confident
- Agreeing to responsibilities you don't fully understand
- Waiting too long to raise a concern
- Overextending yourself to prove your value
- Ending the assignment casually instead of professionally

None of these mistakes makes someone a bad clinician. But being aware of them can help you avoid unnecessary stress.



LEARNING FROM OTHERS AS A LOCUM PA

Avoid burnout while you're on assignment

Locums assignments can ease burnout, but only if you don't recreate the same habits that burned you out before.

That means paying attention to warning signs:

- Taking on extra responsibilities that were never part of the agreement
- Skipping recovery time
- Feeling pressure to prove yourself by overworking
- Letting small workflow frustrations build into larger resentment

Give the assignment your best effort, but also protect your energy.

Leave the assignment on good terms

The end of an assignment matters just as much as the beginning. Finish strong by:

- Communicating clearly about your end date
- Closing loops on outstanding patient care responsibilities
- Leaving documentation in good order
- Thanking the team
- Sharing useful feedback with your recruiter

Leaving on good terms protects your reputation and makes extensions or future placements easier.



The bottom line

Locums success isn't about being the loudest or the most experienced person in the room. It comes from being prepared, adaptable, communicative, and steady. When you approach an assignment that way, you make life easier for the team, better for patients, and smoother for yourself.

Talk to a recruiter about physician assistant locum tenens jobs today.



Long-term career with locum tenens

PART
5

Can PAs build a long-term career with locum tenens?

There's a common misconception that locum tenens is only a temporary fix, something you do between permanent jobs or something you try for a season before you settle down.

For some physician assistants, that's true. But for others, locums becomes a long-term, satisfying career path—not because they couldn't find something permanent, but because they found something that fit better.

Locums can be a real answer to burnout

Many experienced PAs reach a point at which the traditional model no longer feels sustainable. The schedule is rigid. The workload keeps expanding. Time off feels hard to take. The job starts to crowd out the rest of life.

That's one reason long-term locums can be so appealing.

“Flexibility is the name of the game. Being a locum has helped me step back, take time off, and really address burnout.”—Terry Rand, cardiovascular/cardiothoracic surgery

For some physician assistants, that kind of breathing room isn't a luxury. It's what makes it possible to keep practicing well.

“I feel like I have less stress in my life and more time to focus on patients and actually enjoy where I am.”—Jason Raehl, orthopedic surgery

Financially, locums can support long-term goals

Long-term locums can also make sense financially. Higher hourly compensation, paid travel and housing on many assignments, and access to benefits through the right employer structure can make locums more sustainable than people expect.

That can give PAs room to pay down debt, save more aggressively, or make career choices with more clarity and less pressure.

It can also function like a career test drive

One of the smartest uses of locums is to explore before committing.

“

If it's someplace that doesn't fit, you get to leave, but if it is a good fit, maybe you can extend or even go permanent there.

—Terry Rand, cardiovascular/
cardiothoracic surgery

That's a powerful career advantage. Locums lets you test regions, facilities, schedules, and team cultures in real life, not just in an interview.

How locums can fit different life stages and career goals

One of the reasons locums can work so well long term is that it's flexible enough to evolve with you.

For some early-career PAs, locums can be a way to build experience, strengthen adaptability, and get clearer on what kind of setting, schedule, or specialty feels like the right fit. For mid-career PAs, it can offer a reset, more autonomy, or a way to step back from the pressure and rigidity of a traditional permanent role.

For PAs with family responsibilities, locums can provide greater control over timing, workload, and time off. For those nearing retirement, it can be a way to keep practicing without staying tied to a full-time permanent schedule.

That flexibility also shows up in how PAs structure their work.

“

Locums enables me to have freedom—freedom to choose my assignments, vacation time, and where I live.

—Jason Raehl, orthopedic surgery



Long-term locums can look like:

- Taking back-to-back assignments with planned breaks in between
- Combining locums with part-time permanent work
- Using locums to supplement household income
- Taking assignments during certain seasons of the year
- Working locums while deciding where to settle long-term
- Using locums as a bridge into semi-retirement

The model doesn't have to look the same from one year to the next. That's part of what makes it sustainable. As your priorities change, locums can change with them.

Financial planning matters more when you want locums to last

If you want locums to be a long-term career path, it helps to think strategically. That includes planning for:

- Time between assignments
- Savings goals
- Retirement contributions
- Insurance needs
- Travel-related logistics
- Seasonal changes in workload or preferences

This doesn't mean locums is financially unstable. It means it works best when approached with intention.

How to maintain growth and continuity over time

One concern some PAs have is whether locums can feel too fragmented over time. But many long-term locum clinicians build continuity in other ways. They stay focused on a specialty they know well, return to facilities they like, work with the same recruiter over time, and choose assignments that support the kind of career they want.

Career growth doesn't only come from staying in one place. It can also come from seeing enough environments to get clearer, sharper, and more selective about where you do your best work.

Can locums lead to permanent opportunities?

Yes, and that's one of the more practical advantages. Some PAs use locums specifically to try out a facility, region, or specialty arrangement before making a long-term decision. If the fit is strong, a temporary assignment can sometimes become something more permanent. If it isn't, you leave with more information and less regret.

That makes locums a useful strategy for both freedom and clarity.

What makes locums sustainable over time?

Usually, it comes down to a few things:

- Choosing assignments carefully
- Protecting time off between roles
- Partnering with a recruiter you trust
- Staying realistic about your energy and goals
- Using locums strategically, not reactively

PAs who do well long term tend to treat locums as a career design tool, not just a job format.

Questions to ask if you're considering locums long term

- Do I like variety, or do I mostly want flexibility?
- What kind of assignment rhythm feels sustainable to me?
- How much time off do I want to build into my year?
- Do I want locums to replace permanent work or complement it?
- What financial systems would help me feel secure doing this long term?
- What kind of recruiter relationship would support me best over time?



HOW A TWO-YEAR PLAN BECAME A FULL-TIME EXPERIENCE



The bottom line

Yes, locum tenens can absolutely be a long-term career for physician assistants. It can be stable, flexible, and deeply rewarding when it aligns with your priorities. For some PAs, that means using locums for a season. For others, it means building an entire career around freedom, variety, and control.

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