

As a ghost-writer for WooContent, I wrote the below article for MUA.

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What is a primary care physician and what do they do?

It can be a daunting task to decide what kind of doctor or physician to specialize as, and with so many options available today it can get confusing and overwhelming. If you are thinking about becoming a primary care physician, then you've come to the right place. It is a popular choice for those who want to provide their patients with all the services required to take care of their overall health.

A primary health physician is essentially a general practitioner and someone who a patient would seek out as the first medical specialist in any situation. This guide will give you more information about what a primary care physician is, what you can expect a primary care physician to do and how you can become one yourself.

What is a primary care physician?

Maintaining one's health goes beyond rushing to the hospital only when you're sick. You need a whole healthcare team who knows your medical history, your routine, and your concerns to not only provide you with the best medical care you need but also take charge of your health in a proactive manner. This is where a primary care physician steps in.

As a primary care physician, you will most often be the first point of contact between the healthcare system and a patient and their family. Plenty of family medicine doctors come under the broad umbrella of primary care and are associated with families and individuals alike for the long term. Patients rely heavily on primary care physicians to manage their health in a comprehensive and thorough manner, even if it means initiating their contact with other specialists and services.

What does a primary care physician do?

According to the American Academy of Family Physicians ([AAFP](#)), primary care physicians are explicitly trained for original contact and sustainable care for patients suffering from undiagnosed signs or symptoms of health concerns. Physicians working in primary care are also not limited to the biological, behavioral, or social origins of the health concern. This means that primary care physicians can care for illnesses, concerns, and health maintenance of nearly everything.

The scope of practice and skills that primary care physicians possess grants them the ability to provide basic diagnosis and treatments of various common ailments and conditions. Some responsibilities of a primary care physician include:

- Act as the first and key point of entry to the larger healthcare system
- Regular full-body and specific checkups to monitor blood pressure, cholesterol levels, and blood sugar
- Aid in early detection of ailments with prevention advice and monitoring
- Check for sexually transmitted diseases, cancers, and abnormal growths both internally and externally
- Mental health management including depression, anxiety, PTSD, and eating disorders
- Help with the management of chronic (long-lasting) conditions
- Manage the patient's overall health care including specialist referrals and hospital coordination with follow-ups and counseling as needed
- Administer primary mental screening and adjustments in medical procedures if required
- Referral and administration of vaccinations, immunizations, and preventative care
- Make sure patients are well attended to and cared for in the long term by building a trusted and strong relationship with them

Many primary care physicians also undertake specific tests and scans like x-rays and blood work, but some refer their patients to a specialist if they are not fully equipped. It is common for families of many generations to see the same primary care physician or primary care center for many years to come. Primary care doctors often work in private office settings or within a practice with other doctors. They may also work for community clinics or in hospitals.

Average primary care physician salary

Primary care physicians across the world are paid different salaries, and it is one of the most adaptable and attractive specialties of medicine for anyone to consider. In 2021, the average primary care physician salary is expected to be anything between [\\$153,940 and \\$201,142](#).

Many different factors can play a role in determining the exact salary like years of experience, certifications, the city you practice in, the economic climate at the time, and the type of practice you work out of. Cities like San Francisco and New York City will usually pay a bit above the \$200,000 mark, and you can expect cities like Mississippi and Atlanta to be on the lower end of the salary spectrum, but there is no fixed salary rate for any city in the world. Some of the highest paying states for primary care physicians include California and New York.

The average primary care physician salary in Canada lies between [\\$162,694 and \\$210,000](#) per year. This is very close to their US counterparts so you will be spoilt for choice once you are qualified. No matter where you are, it is likely that with more years of experience behind your belt the more likely you are to be paid higher.

Alongside an annual salary, primary care physicians also enjoy benefits such as:

- Health insurance for themselves and their family
- Annual paid time off
- Visa sponsorship
- Relocation assistance and housing allowance
- Assistance for loans, licenses, and education

How to choose a primary care physician

When deciding on the best primary care physicians for themselves and their families, patients will want to keep an eye out for specific skills. To be known as a reputable primary care physician it is important that you have unique and excellent interpersonal relationship skills to be able to earn the trust of your patient quickly and for the long term.

Other important skills of a good primary care physician include:

- Excellent communication skills
You should be able to gather the right information from the patient in order to help them accurately in their healthcare plan. Some of this can be highly personal and sensitive information and will require the physician to be a very good listener.
- Ability to work well under pressure
Even under the most stressful and gruesome circumstances, a good primary care physician will be able to make professional decisions with good reasoning and unbiased opinions.
- Good team player
Many times a primary care physician will have to refer their patient to other clinics and specialists and then deal with follow-up appointments and scheduling across multiple people and teams. Maintaining a positive relationship amongst all is key.
- Passion for healthcare
No matter what stage of a healthcare ailment your patient is in, a good primary care physician will show dedication and resilience to be there from start to finish.

How to become a primary care physician

Becoming a primary care physician is often a lengthy process that involves many years of education and training, and starts with completing at least the basic four years of medical school. Once a doctor has successfully graduated from medical school with an MD or DO, many choose to complete a residency or fellowship. You might also need to pass the board exams for either:

- ☐ The United States Medical Licensing Examination (USMLE)
- ☐ Comprehensive Osteopathic Medical Licensing Examination of the United States (COMPLEX-USA)

The state or city you would like to practice in might also have its own licensing procedures. For more information, or if you have questions about becoming a primary care physician you can find out more [here](#). This is your chance to be an invaluable member of your community's healthcare system.

