

Chapter 69

SPECIAL PAY FOR ARMY PHYSICIAN ASSISTANTS

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Introduction

Special pay plans are available to enhance the Army's ability to shape the force by using monetary incentives as a means of recruitment and retention of health care professionals with critical wartime specialties and valuable experience. The Consolidation of Special Pay (CSP) programs are available for Army health professions officers (HPOs) in all components. This chapter will describe the relevant types of special pay to Army PAs as of early 2020. The information will cover all components but focus on active duty.

Active Duty Special Pay

The HPO special and incentive pay plans are announced annually based on Department of Defense and Army policy. The Office of the Surgeon General (OTSG) disseminates changes through the Army Medical Department (AMEDD) special pay office.¹ The Army Active Component Health Professions Officer Special Pay Plan, effective January 1, 2020, contains the current active duty Army Medical Specialist Corps (AMSC) officer special pay incentives.² Three types of special pay are currently offered to PAs: (1) HPO board certification pay (HPOBCP), (2) HPO incentive pay (HPOIP), and (3) combined retention bonus/incentive pay (HPORB/IP). This plan is effective for all AMEDD HPOs in the active component or Active Guard Reserve (AGR), and for mobilized reserve component HPOs on active duty for 30 days or more.

US Army Reserve Component Special Pay

Reserve component special pay information is contained in the fiscal year 2020 US Army Reserve (USAR) Health Professions Special and Incentive Pay Plan and the USAR AMEDD incentives policy.¹ USAR incentives are subject to availability of funds and can be suspended at any time under the policy. To control the budget available for execution of contracts, the Army Reserve Headquarters-Fort Bragg issues an incentive control number for every incentive.

Eligibility

To be eligible for these special pay incentives, an Army PA must:

- be a commissioned officer on active duty status, including mobilized PAs and while attending unit assemblies;
- have a post-baccalaureate degree as a PA;
- be certified by the National Commission for Certification of Physician Assistants (licensure is waived in accordance with Health Affairs Policy 04-002³);
- have completed the Army Officer Basic Course or received constructive or equivalent credit from the course proponent for the training (does not apply to USAR officers);
- meet Army height and weight retention criteria;⁴ and
- not be subject to any unfavorable action.

Army National Guard (ARNG) PAs must also be credentialed, privileged, and qualified in the Joint Centralized Credentials and Quality Assurance System through the National Guard Bureau. Civilian credentialing and privileging does not meet this requirement.⁵ Army PAs should contact their career manager for further information.

Types of Special Pay

Health Professions Officer Board Certification Pay

The Health Professions Officer Board Certification Pay (HPOBCP) consists of an annual \$6,000 sum paid in monthly installments of

\$500, noted as “SAVE PAY” on the Army leave and earnings statement (LES). All components offer HPOBCP for eligible PAs. Once a PA meets basic eligibility, they may apply for HPOBCP. Valid certification must be retained to continue receiving this pay. HPOBCP contracts are completed once and remain in effect until one of the eligibility criteria expire (eg, loss of certification, separation, or retirement). The ARNG offers HPOBCP at a 1/30th payment rate. In other words, 1/30th of \$500 dollars is paid out monthly to ARNG PAs.⁶

Health Professions Officer Incentive Pay

The Health Professions Officer Incentive Pay (HPOIP) consists of an annual \$5,000 sum paid in monthly installments of \$416.66, and noted as “SAVE PAY” on the LES. If an officer receives both HPOBCP and HPOIP, they are combined in the same “SAVE PAY” entry on the LES as \$916.66. The HPOIP requires meeting basic eligibility, being credentialed and privileged, and practicing a minimum of 40 hours per year at a facility designated by the Army. HPOIP requires an initial 1-year retainability agreement. Agreements are completed once and remain in effect until one of the eligibility criteria expire (eg, loss of certification, separation, or retirement from active duty), or when realigning with an HPORB agreement, which reduces the need for contract renegotiations every year. HPOIP contracts require renegotiation when a PA signs an HPORB contract.

Health Professions Officer Retention Bonus

The HPORB is a multiyear special pay bonus available for officers who agree to an extended period of service. Currently, the only HPORB contract offered is the 4-year retention bonus, paid at \$20,000 annually, which includes a 4-year active duty service obligation (ADSO). The following basic eligibility criteria and retainability to serve the length of the HPORB contract are required:

- being credentialed, privileged, and practicing a minimum of 40-h/y at an Army-designated facility;
- not in a two-time non-selection status for promotion;
- meeting all Army fitness, height, and weight standards; and
- meeting retention criteria.

The incentive pay (HPOIP) of \$5,000 is additional to the HPORB. The retention bonus is taxed at the time it is paid (noted in deductions on the LES). The retention bonus will be marked on the LES as “Nuc Med Bonus,” and is paid as a lump sum annually on the anniversary of the contract’s effective date or date of signature, whichever is later. Officers currently in another ADSO, such as those for completing the Interservice Physician Assistant Program or long term health education and training, are ineligible for the combined HPORB. A new contract may be requested up to 90 days prior to the completion of the current one, with an effective date the day after the completion of the current agreement.

For USAR officers, current incentives are the Reserve Component Health Professions Loan Repayment Program (RC HPLRP) (\$20,000/year, \$60,000 lifetime), Reserve Component Accession (\$25,000) and Retention Bonuses (\$25,000/year), incentive pay (IP), Board-Certified Pay (BCP). IP/BCP is professional specialty pay for AMEDD officers and is eligible during periods of active duty, battle assembly weekends, and annual training. The retention bonus requires a 2-4 year contract and the Army PA is not eligible in conjunction with RC HPLRP or the RC Accession Bonus.⁶

The traditional ARNG PA receives \$5,000 per year as IP for the newly accessed PA and \$25,000 per year as a retention bonus when eligible. The HPLRP and BCP are also available to ARNG PAs, but the HPLRP is not offered to AGR PAs.⁶ For Title 32 and Title 10 ARNG PAs, the HPORB/IP has 2- and 3-year rates. This is an exception to policy for those ARNG officers in an AGR (Active Guard Reserve) status or one-time occasional tour status. The 2-year HPORB/IP is \$10,000 per year, and the 3-year HPORB/IP is \$15,000 per year.⁶

Application Process

To initiate the process of requesting special pay, active component PAs in a garrison environment should visit the special pay office in their credentialing military treatment facility. For most active duty officers, a special pay contract must be prepared in the Medical Operational Data System (MODS), AMEDD special pay module. Contracts may be submitted up to 90 days prior to the effective date and no later than 30 days after the effective date. Edited copies of someone else’s contract will be rejected if submitted. The approval authority for special pay

agreements is the applicant's first line field-grade-level commander or the credentialing facility's commander or director. Any agreement outside the 120-day execution window will require a letter of lateness signed by the applicant's field-grade commander, or as designated by the commander in writing.

Once a contract is completed and reviewed, it is submitted, along with any supporting documentation, by the local special pay office to the OTSG AMEDD special pay office. The OTSG office in turn reviews the contract again, checking for errors, validating dates, and ensuring that any ADSOs have been satisfied with the assistance of the Army special pay office at the Army Human Resources Command. Upon final verification, the contract is submitted for upload to the officer's Army Military Human Resource Record (AMHRR) through the Interactive Personnel Records Management System (iPERMS) and forwarded to Defense Financing and Accounting Service (DFAS) for processing and disbursement of entitlements to the applicant. This process may take up to 90 days to complete, and inquiries on status of the process should be submitted to the point of contact who prepared the contract.

Eligible USAR officers can request IP and BCP via the Reserve Incentives Management Sub-System (RIMS).⁶ Budget shortfalls affecting other incentive programs do not affect these types of pay. The Reserve Component Manpower System (RCMS) Request Incentive self-service website is <https://selfservice.rcms.usar.army.mil/Selfservice/RequestIncentive>. See instructions to activate this incentive on the US Army Reserve Physician Assistants milBook page at <https://www.milsuite.mil/book/docs/DOC-723544>).

Eligible ARNG officers can request IP and BCP through state incentive managers, who complete all the required documentation and submit it via the Guard Incentive Management System (GIMS) for review and approval.⁵ The application process for the AGR PA is the same process as COMPO1 (active Army component).

Blended Retirement System

The blended retirement system (BRS) that went into effect January 1, 2018, reflects significant changes to the military retirement system. Service members entering service after that date are automatically enrolled under the new retirement system.⁷ Those with 12 or fewer years of service as of January 1, 2018, had a transfer option to the BRS.⁸

Among the differences in pay for officers in the BRS is continuation pay (CP). This pay is not specific to PAs and available to service members enrolled in BRS. CP is an incentive to retain personnel beyond their 12th year of service with a one-time payment of 2.5 to 13 times their basic pay for active duty members, or 0.5 to 6 times the basic pay for reserve component members. Eligible regular Army officers will complete 11 years of service, but not more than 12 years of service, during calendar year 2020, as computed from their pay entry basic date (PEBD). The US Army's CP rate for 2020 is 2.5 times base pay for active component and 4 times base pay for reserve component, based on current pay grade and years of service. Agreement to receive CP incurs an obligation of an additional 4 years of service.⁹ The service obligation commences upon approval of the CP request, and current implementation allows for concurrent obligation with any HPO special pay, including retention bonuses.

Points of Contact

For soldiers enrolled in BRS, contracts are generated for those interested in claiming CP by their organization's appointed official and routed by their S-1 (personnel office) to the local finance office.⁸ There are many differences in BRS compared to the previous retirement system, and incentives are fluid. Officers seeking information should contact their local pay or finance office, or see <https://militarypay.defense.gov/BlendedRetirement/>. Officers may also contact the Army Medical Specialist Corps future readiness officer at the Human Resources Command. Other contact information is as follows:

- The OTSG AMEDD special pay office is located at the OTSG, Human Resources (DASG-HR-P), AMEDD Special Pay Branch, 7700 Arlington Boulevard, Suite 5144, Falls Church, VA 22042-5144. Phone: 703-681-1209; DSN: 471-1209; Fax: 703-681-0482.
- The point of contact for reserve special pay inquiries is the AMEDD incentives program manager, US Army Reserve, G-1, at 910-570-8784 or usarmy.usarc.usarc-hq.mbx.incentives@mail.mil.
- The point of contact for ARNG special pay inquiries is National Guard Bureau Human Resource Management (HRM-I), AMEDD Incentives Office, 111 South George Mason Drive, Arlington, VA 22204, or ng.ncr.ngb-arng.mbx.amedd-incentives@mail.mil.

Exceptions to Policy and Special Cases

Backdated contracts that are requested with a date before the current fiscal year, or with any extenuating criteria beyond those mentioned above, may require submission to the Army Review Boards Agency for an Army Board of Correction of Military Records. For further information about this process, please refer to the agency's website at <https://arba.army.pentagon.mil/abcmr-overview.html>. Cases may be submitted on the advice of the OTSG AMEDD special pay office.

Conclusion

Various types of monetary incentives are available to PAs, from HPOBCP and IP early upon accession, to retention bonuses offered after initial service obligations. With the advent of the BRS, other options may also influence financial decisions made by Army PAs. The best way to maximize eligibility for these options includes careful career planning to integrate access to HPO special pay with ADSOs incurred by additional service incentives or training obligations. Policy guidance is continuously reviewed, so PAs must remain connected with Army leaders and peers to remain abreast of changes.

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