CAAs vs CRNAs
Two Paths, One Goal—Safe Anesthesia

Both Certified Anesthesiologist Assistants (CAAs) and Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetists (CRNAs) are highly trained anesthesia professionals who work within the Anesthesia Care Team (ACT) under the supervision of physician anesthesiologists.

Equal Recognition

Both are recognized by **CMS** as qualified non-physician anesthesia providers.

Proven Outcomes

Studies show no difference in patient outcomes, length of stay, or cost based on ACT composition.*

Rigorous, Specialized Training

Both complete **comprehensive anesthesia-focused education** covering all subspecialties, including pediatrics, obstetrics, cardiothoracic, and regional anesthesia.

Key Similarities

Postgraduate Clinical Hours: Thousands of hours across all anesthesia specialties.

Advanced Skills: Regional and neuraxial anesthesia, invasive line placement, crisis management.

Recertification: Ongoing continuing education and periodic examinations to maintain certification.

Myth: 'CRNAs are more autonomous.'

Autonomy is a **legal** distinction, not a measure of training depth.

CAAs are highly trained anesthesia professionals whose education focuses **exclusively** on anesthesia—without the need to transition from another role.

*Sun, E. C., Miller, T. R., Moshfegh, J. M., & Baker, L. C. (2018). Anesthesia Care Team Composition and Surgical Outcomes. Anesthesiology, 129(4), 700–709. https://doi.org/10.1097/ALN.0000000000002275

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Differences in Training Philosophy

CAAs are trained under the **medical model**—similar to physicians and PAs—with a focus on biomedical sciences, diagnostics, and clinical decision-making aligned with physician anesthesiologists.

CRNAs are trained under the **nursing model**, building on prior experience as critical care nurses and expanding into anesthesia practice.

	Anesthesiologist Assistants	Nurse Anesthetists
Distribution of Providers	4000+ Certified AAs in 24 jurisdictions (Including District of Columbia and Guam) and Veterans Health Administration	36,000 CRNAs in all 50 states and Veterans Health Administration
Number of Programs	23 (see ARC-AA for additional and most up to date information)	120 (in 37 states, plus DC and PR)
Program Length	24-29 months	24-36 months
Program Accreditation	Commission for Accreditation of Allied Health Education Programs (CAAHEP) Accreditation Review Committee for Anesthesiologist Assistants (ARC-AA)	Council on Accreditation of Nurse Anesthesia Programs
Certifying Body	National Commission for Certification of Anesthesiologist Assistants in collaboration with National Board of Medical Examiners	Council on Certification of Nurse Anesthetists
National Organization	American Academy of Anesthesiologist Assistants (AAAA)	American Association of Nurse Anesthetists (AANA)
Clinical Education	Minimum of 2000 clinical hours (average > 2500)	Minimum of 600 cases (average ~2000+ hours – including Master or DNAP trained)
Clinical Rotations	All sub-specialties of anesthesia	All sub-specialties of anesthesia
Recertification	50 CMEs submitted biennially + sit for Continued Demonstration of Qualifications Exam (CDQ) after initial 4 years and every 10 years thereafter	8 year-two-part recertification process began August 2016 • First Four Years – Submission of 40 CMEs • Second Four Years – Inclusion of recertification exam (first exam to commence in 2024 with no pass/fail. First pass/fail exam to administered in 2032).

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