



Applying to Medical School

Learn where to start...and what to expect

The medical school application process might be the first significant challenge of your prospective medical career. We're here to help you prepare for what is to come.

Check out our [Applying to Medical School and Thinking about Medical School? workshops](#).

Before the Application

Do what you love – you'll tend to thrive! Choose a university program that interests you since you will usually attain better marks learning something that fascinates you. Be aware that you do not have to be enrolled in a health sciences program in order to apply to medical school. Most (but not all) schools require specific pre-requisite courses—however, they can be completed in conjunction with any degree program.

Check out the profession by conducting *information interviews* with doctors, medical students and residents. Ask your family physician for an appointment to discuss your career goals and his or her experiences in the field. Know the realities of the day-to-day work and how it fits with what you know about yourself. Be realistic and informed by exploring other career options in addition to the role of physician.

Meet the pre-requisites at any time before you apply. To test out your fit with the medical school curriculum and to enable you to apply to many schools, you may want to consider including the desired pre-requisites for a variety of schools in your program. Each medical school has slightly different pre-requisites so always check the specific schools to ensure that these general suggestions will allow you to meet the most up-to-date admission requirements. As of this writing, more and more medical schools seem to be dropping specific course pre-requisites.

Aim high academically to keep the doors open. The reality of medical school applications today is that undergraduate grades (even if you have continued your education beyond undergrad) are an extremely important part of the process. A few programs calculate GPA in unique ways (e.g. best two years or without lowest three grades) so check each program to help you strategize about where (or when) to apply.

Stay involved with your community and activities that mean something to you. Physicians are active and visible members of their communities, despite very busy working lives. The ability to balance academics with employment, volunteer work, sports, community and extra-curricular interests is a trait that application committees are looking for in prospective medical students. Successful candidates often show a commitment long-term to some activities and showcase their ability to progress to leadership positions. They also try new things that test out and allow them to demonstrate diverse interests, too.

Decide (if and) when you will write the MCAT (Medical College Admission Test). Many students elect to take the MCAT the year prior to the year they actually apply. This can give time to re-take, if necessary and also to know your score before you actually submit an application (factors into your application strategy). Not all medical schools consider the MCAT as part of the process but most do. MCAT is an exam that takes place roughly 20 times each year. If you elect to write it, decide whether your learning style is more conducive to an MCAT preparatory course or to self-study. Both methods have worked for students in the past. Accommodations for disabilities are also possible. Make sure to read up on the test day rules before going in for the exam!

Application Basics

Useful Books

Stop by Career Services to borrow these (and other) books:

The Black Book on Canadian Medical Schools

Brett Ferdinand, Ruvene Co.

So You Want to be a Doctor, eh?

Anne Berndt, Writing on Stone Press

Medical School Essays That Made a Difference

Princeton Review

Essays That Will Get You Into Medical School

Barrons

Although the application for each medical school differs, the following items often form part or all of the application process. It is estimated that depending on the number of schools to which you apply, the process can take anywhere from 10 to 30 hours to complete so planning ahead is essential for success.

Deadlines for each school differ but applicants using the Ontario Medical School Application Service (OMSAS), which is required for applying to Ontario medical schools, must usually create an account by mid-September and the final deadline to submit has historically been October 1. There is also a final date that you can “attach” your MCAT results with your submitted applications. VERIFY ALL DEADLINES for the year you wish to apply. Schools outside of Ontario each have their own dates and deadlines, as do those outside of Canada. Some schools require an intent to apply for registration.

Transcripts – Whether you are applying through a central application service like OMSAS or directly to the school, you will likely need to arrange for transcripts. There is generally a fee associated with this so, factor that into your application budget. If required, contact your current and former educational institutions early to avoid last-minute problems at deadline time.

MCAT – Schools that use the MCAT as part of the assessment process may have minimum criteria for each sections of the exam as well as an overall score. Check with the schools each year for that year’s specifics about minimum requirements. It is not uncommon for students to write the MCAT more than once and each school treats this differently. For example, some programs will only consider your highest mark, while others consider the most recent mark submitted. As of this writing, students are permitted to write the MCAT up to three times per year but, may want to discuss the best strategy for this with others. In 2015, the MCAT changed its format and content, with new sections being added and some removed. Take this into account when studying. Most schools set an expiry date for MCAT results (often 3-5 years) so it is wise to check the program’s guidelines early to ensure that you do not need to re-write the exam, if you took it in the past.

Autobiographical Sketch/Resume/CV – Many schools will ask for an itemized list (with descriptions) of activities. This can include employment, volunteer work, education, awards and accomplishments, extra-curricular, research and other activities. You may also be asked to include the name and contact information of a person who can verify the activity. Be sure to use current contact information for the verifier so that medical schools can easily connect with them, if needed. Graduate student applicants are often required to submit additional materials such as a letter from their supervisor/program.

Personal Questions /Essay/Supplementary Materials – Some medical schools will ask applicants to submit answers or essays to general or specific questions about their goals, experiences and fit with the program. Students applying in a category such as a graduate student or aboriginal student may also be required

to submit additional materials, letters or essays. This part of the application can be an extremely time-consuming part of the application process so it is wise to start early and have others read your writing along the way. Flawless grammar and spelling are essential. Pondering the personal statements portion of the application sometimes highlights for students that they may be having difficulty articulating their specific reasons for choosing a career as a physician and defining what makes them different from other well-qualified candidates. Tell succinct but vivid stories that enable the reader to get to know you and to see your potential contributions to the occupation of physician and to their medical school.

Need help? Attend one of our [workshops](#). As mentioned, relevant topics include: Applying to Medical School, Thinking about Medical School, or Grad II: Personal and Research Statements.

Supplementary Resources

MCAT

<https://www.aamc.org/students/applying/mcat/>

Canadian Federation of Medical Students

www.cfms.org/

Medical Council of Canada

<http://www.mcc.ca/>

Ontario Medical Association

<https://www.oma.org/Pages/default.aspx>

College of Physicians and Surgeons (Ontario)

<http://www.royalcollege.ca/>

The Association of Faculties of Medicine of Canada

<https://www.afmc.ca/>

Ontario Medical School Application Service (OMSAS)

www.ouac.on.ca/omsas/

References – You may be asked to provide written recommendations. In Ontario, referees are asked to complete a Confidential Assessment Form (which you download from the OMSAS or university website) and write a letter, both of which are submitted to OMSAS. If you are given the option of who to choose, choose referees carefully. It is important to distinguish between “I am willing to write you a reference”, and “I am willing to write you a *positive recommendation*”. If the medical schools give you the choice to pick your referees, try to solicit references from people who know you in different contexts (as opposed to 3 teachers, for example) and who will write about specific and positive qualities you possess. Choose people who know you well. Set up an appointment to discuss your goals, your recent activities and to help them remember specific incidences in which your best qualities stood out. Thank them in writing afterwards and let them know your progress.

Interviews – After succeeding at the initial application stage, you may be invited to attend an interview at the medical school. Need help? Attend a [Medical School Interview Workshop](#) at Career Services. They are held regularly from January to April each year.

Applying Out-of-Country

Because of the extremely competitive nature of medical school entrance requirements in Canada, some applicants consider attending a medical school



in the U.S., Caribbean, or elsewhere internationally. There are many factors to consider when making this decision including increased tuition and living expenses, ability to secure necessary residency training and the challenges of living in another country.

If you want to return to Canada to practice medicine, be advised that as of this writing, that still tends to

be a—not impossible— but, extremely difficult process. You may want to read this 2010 report from the Canadian Residency Matching Service for the latest statistics and barriers facing Canadian students studying abroad:

(https://www.carms.ca/assets/upload/pdfs/2010_CSA_Report/CaRMS_2010_CSA_Report.pdf).

Funding

The process of applying to and paying for medical school can quickly become onerous with OMSAS fees (for those applying to Ontario schools) as well as fees for applying to any additional schools. There are also costs for transcripts requests from Queen’s and travel & clothing expenses for interviews.

Medical school tuition ranges but can be over \$20,000 per year. There is, however, some help available for both the application costs and tuition and expenses. Some of the sources mentioned here are Ontario-based but similar programs may be available in your home or medical school province or country.

Ontario Medical Student Bursary Fund: <http://www.omsbf.org/>

MCAT Fee Assistance: <http://www.aamc.org/students/applying/fap/start.htm>

Ontario Under-served Area Program:

<http://health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/northernhealth/>

Contact Student Awards at the university to which you are applying for other sources of funding.

Canadian Medical Schools

Check with each medical school to ensure that you have the most accurate and up-to-date admissions criteria. If you are applying to another province, ask about the number of spots available to out-of-province students, then build that knowledge into your application strategy.

Some past information may be in the Association of Faculties of Medicines in Canada (AFMC) Admissions guide.

University of Alberta
University of British Columbia
University of Calgary --
(Cumming School of Medicine)
Dalhousie University
Laval University (French only)
University of Manitoba
McGill University
McMaster University
Memorial University of
Newfoundland

University of Montreal (French only)
Northern Ontario School of Medicine
University of Ottawa
Queen’s University
University of Saskatchewan
Sherbrooke University (French only)
University of Toronto
Western University (Schulich)