

Applying to Medical School

If you are thinking about a career as a medical doctor (MD), the information in this tipsheet can be a great place to learn more about the profession and the requirements for applying to medical school. While there are many different types of MDs, attending medical school is a requirement to become an MD in Canada. Applying to medical school involves many steps and some planning. Below you will find information about the basic requirements for applying to medical school.

In this tipsheet, you will learn:

- How to effectively prepare before applying to medical schools,
- The basics of the application requirements,
- What is involved in the application process and some strategies to use,
- Where to find additional resources.

Before Applying

Learn About the Profession: Consider learning more about becoming an MD by conducting information interviews with doctors, residents, and medical students. Learning about the day-to-day work, different specialties, and experience of being in medical school can be helpful when deciding if becoming an MD is the right career path for you. Be realistic and informed by also exploring other career options that interest you in addition to the role of a physician.

Gain experience: Experiences such as extracurricular activities or healthcare-related jobs can look good on an application, but any experience that informs your understanding of people while building your interpersonal and communication skills can help demonstrate your suitability for a career in medicine.*

Understand your skills and experience: Being able to connect your background and experiences to your understanding of the medical field and your career goals is part of the application process. Reflect on how your experiences have prepared you for the challenges of medical school and a career in medicine.

Get organized: Deadlines and application requirements vary from school to school. Use a method that helps you keep track of these details and manage the time it takes to complete the application while balancing your other priorities.

Understand the costs: Medical school is expensive. Research the overall cost of medical school programs and explore avenues of financial support. Also, remember that applying to medical school includes many expenses such as application fees, costs for MCAT preparation, travel for interviews, etc. Research these costs and budget accordingly.

**Note: Queen's School of Medicine new admissions process aims to remove systemic barriers (which include access to certain job and extracurricular experiences). The lottery system is based only on the GPA, MCAT, and CASPER requirements.*

Academic Requirements

Undergraduate Degree: A common misconception about applying to medical school is that you need to have completed an undergraduate degree in health sciences or life sciences. There is no specific undergraduate program required to be accepted into medical school. Instead, consider choosing an undergraduate program that interests you.

Prerequisites: Some medical schools require specific undergraduate courses, such as several credits in organic chemistry and/or statistics, as prerequisites for admission. Every medical school has slightly different prerequisites, so always check each school to ensure you will meet the most up-to-date admission requirements.

GPA Requirements: The reality of medical school admissions today is that your undergraduate grades, even if you have continued your education beyond your undergrad, are an extremely important part of the process. Most medical schools require very high GPAs for admission. In addition, different schools calculate GPAs in different ways. Be sure to check how each program calculates applicants' GPAs.

MCAT (Medical College Admissions Test): The MCAT is a standardized test that evaluates your knowledge of both the physical and biological sciences, your verbal reasoning and writing skills, as well as your understanding of psychological, social, and biological influences on behaviour. The test is computer-based and takes approximately 7.5 hours. Accommodations are available. Many applicants choose to study for and write the MCAT a year before applying to medical school. This approach can be helpful because it allows them time to retake the test (if necessary). Before choosing to rewrite the test, be sure to investigate how the schools you are applying to consider multiple attempts. Most schools also set an expiry date for MCAT results (often 3-5 years).

Medical schools that use the MCAT as part of their admissions process may have a minimum criterion for each section of the test as well as a minimum overall score. Reference each school's minimum requirements for the year that you are applying. You may also want to consider the average MCAT score of successful applicants for the year prior.

CASPer Test (Computer-Based Assessment for Sampling Characteristics): The [CASPer test](#) is a new addition to some medical school applications. Depending on the requirements for the medical school you are applying to, you may need to take the CASPer test. CASPer is an online test used to understand the applicant's behavioural tendencies based on their responses to different, difficult, everyday situations. The answers to these questions measure the following traits: ethics, empathy, equity, communication, collaboration, professionalism, and judgment. Because the test is online, you will want to make sure you have a strong internet connection, a functioning webcam, and a quiet place where you will not be disturbed. Accommodations are also available for this test. Be sure to check the requirements, especially the version of the CASPer test you will need to take as well as when your score is due.

Application Basics

Applications for medical schools in Ontario go through the [Ontario Medical School Application Service \(OMSAS\)](#). The OMSAS website details the application instructions and requirements shared by Ontario medical schools, but each university may have additional instructions; it is important to research each school for these details as you would for application information for schools outside of Ontario.

Deadlines: The application deadlines for medical schools differ. There may also be different due dates for submitting the application requirements. Be sure to verify all deadline details for the different schools you are applying to well in advance.

Transcripts: Whether you are applying through a central application service like OMSAS or directly to a program, you will likely need to arrange to have official transcripts sent to the different institutions you are applying to. There is usually a fee associated with this service. Request your transcripts well in advance of the deadline to avoid any last-minute delays.

Autobiographical Sketch: Most medical schools require that you complete an autobiographical sketch comprised of an itemized list (with descriptions) of different activities you have been involved in. These activities can include employment and volunteer roles, any research experience, awards, extra-curricular activities, and any other relevant activities. You may also be asked to include the name and contact information of a person who can verify your participation. Make sure you seek the permission of the verifier and use their current contact information. Graduate student applicants are often required to submit additional materials such as a letter from their supervisor and/or program. An effective approach to writing an autobiographical sketch is to consider how these activities relate to the seven roles described in the [CanMEDS framework](#).

Resume or Curriculum Vitae (CV): Some medical schools will require you to submit a resume or CV as part of your application. Much like the autobiographical sketch, you should consider how each of your experiences relates to the roles outlined in the CanMEDS framework. You may find it helpful to look at the CV tipsheet for students applying to graduate school or our resources for resumes on our [website](#).

Personal Statements/Essays and Other Supplementary Questions: Some medical schools ask applicants to submit personal essays or answer a series of supplemental questions. These materials often pertain to your goals and experience and how you imagine you will succeed in the program. Check out our [tipsheets](#) on Personal Statements to assist you in writing your answers.

Additional Admissions Requirements: Students applying in specialized application streams such as graduate students or Indigenous students may also be required to submit additional materials, letters, or statements. In addition, some schools allow students who have faced exceptional circumstances to submit supplemental documents to support their request for special consideration. Refer to each medical school's requirements for more information.

References/Letters of Recommendations: For admission into Ontario medical schools and most other medical schools, you are required to have three references complete a Confidential Assessment Form (available on the OMSAS or the school's website) and write a reference letter. Both documents are submitted to OMSAS. When considering potential references, choose people who can speak to the quality of your work, skills, and character. Consider the unique value each reference can provide to avoid redundancies in their comments. It can be helpful to connect with each of your references to discuss what you would like them to highlight in their form and letter. Be sure to check the program website for the deadlines and give your referees lots of notice.

Indigenous Applicants

To help increase representation, medical schools in Canada provide pathways and support for Indigenous applicants. Medical schools may have dedicated quotas for Indigenous applicants, flexible minimum scores for GPA and the MCAT, as well as additional resources such as mentorship programs, preparatory courses, and financial aid. The application process typically includes proof of Indigenous heritage and may involve additional essays or interviews on Indigenous health issues. Each medical school has slightly different requirements and supports, so it is important to research what is required and offered by each institution.

Location

Medical Schools within Canada: Check in with each medical school you plan to apply to so that you have the most accurate and up-to-date admissions criteria. If you are applying to a medical school outside of the province or territory you consider your permanent residence, investigate how many out-of-province students the program accepts to build your application strategy.

Medical Schools Outside of Canada: Because of the very competitive nature of Canadian medical school entrance requirements, some people consider attending medical school in places like Australia, the Caribbean, or Ireland. There are many factors to consider when making this decision including increased tuition and living expenses, the ability to secure the necessary residency training upon returning to Canada, and the challenges of living in another country. If you want to return to Canada to practice medicine, note that this can be a difficult process and you are advised to research the requirements for this in advance. Look into the requirements for this process by visiting the Canadian Resident Matching Service ([CaRMS](#)), including the National Assessment Collaboration exam ([NAC](#)) offered by the Medical Council of Canada.

Final Tips

Medical school applications require a lot of time and preparation and you are encouraged to:

- Plan ahead to make sure you have all requirements before the deadlines.
- Verify all deadline details for the different schools you are applying to well in advance.
- Maintain a high GPA and aim for a competitive MCAT score.
- Ensure you have completed all required prerequisite courses for the medical schools to which you are applying.
- Research each school's program, mission, and acceptance criteria.
- Always reach out for support from family, friends, mentors, career services throughout the application process.

Career Services offers drop-in advising to answer quick questions related to all aspects of your career planning and job search. You can also book an appointment to speak with a Career Educator and Coach about your application. Visit [MyCareer](#) for the drop-in schedule and appointment bookings.

Expanding Career Possibilities

Getting into medical school is very competitive. The acceptance rate for Ontario schools is below 10%. It can also be a costly and time-consuming endeavor. The results can be very rewarding. However, pursuing medical school is not an option for everyone.

If you find that it is no longer a viable option, remember that there are many fulfilling career paths that allow you to make a significant impact. Explore other health-related fields such as nursing, physician assistant, genetics counsellor, physical therapy, or public health, which allow you to work directly with patients and contribute to their well-being.

Consider what sparked the interest in becoming a doctor; how can that interest be translated into other professions? Careers in health policy, social work, and community health education provide opportunities to support and advocate for individuals and communities, while professions in teaching, nonprofit work, or international development are other avenues where you can make a meaningful difference.

Assess your interests, strengths, and long-term goals to find a path that aligns with your desire to help others and contribute to the greater good. Career Coaches offer 1-1 appointments to help with this process and can provide additional resources for career exploration. Visit [MyCareer](#) for the drop-in schedule and appointment bookings.

Additional Resources:

Canadian Federation of Medical Students www.cfms.org/ Medical Council of Canada <http://www.mcc.ca/>

Ontario Medical Association <https://www.oma.org/>

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/

CanMEDS Framework <http://www.royalcollege.ca/rcsite/canmeds/canmeds-framework-e>