



APPLYING TO MEDICAL SCHOOL

Learn where to start, what is involved, and find resources that can help

The medical school application process might be the first significant challenge of your prospective medical career. In this tipsheet we will discuss how to effectively set yourself up for applications and what is involved in them while providing some resources and strategies to assist you throughout. We're here to help you prepare for what is to come.

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 alignment 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. The [Career Information Area](#) at Career Services includes MCAT preparation guides for current students such as *MCAT 528: Advanced Prep for Advanced Students* by Deeangelee Pooran-Kublall. Accommodations for disabilities are also possible. Make sure to read up on the test day rules before going in for the exam!



Application Basics

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. 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 don’t need to re-write the exam, if you took it in the past. The [Career Information Area](#) at Career Services includes MCAT preparation guides for current students such as *MCAT 528: Advanced Prep for Advanced Students* by Deeangelee Pooran-Kublall.

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. An effective approach to these documents is to consider how your career intentions fit within the [CanMEDS framework](#). A competent physician is able to seamlessly integrate each of the 7 roles, making this the ultimate goal while attending medical school. Reflect on how the experiences listed in this document can most effectively demonstrate your ability regarding some of the key concepts within each of the roles.

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. Students may want to refer to the [CanMEDS framework](#) for guidance with what medical schools are focused on. Check out Career Service’s Research and Personal Statements [tipsheet](#) or one of the several books available in the [Career Information Area](#) to assist you in writing this document.

Need help? Attend one of our Graduate School [workshops](#) for help with program identification and applications.



Supplementary Resources

MCAT

<https://students-residents.aamc.org/applying-medical-school/taking-mcat-exam/>

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>

REFERENCES – 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. The best references are able to speak to both the quality of your work and character. Consider the unique value each reference can provide to avoid redundancies based on the experiences you have had with them and the skills and qualities they are able to speak to. You may want to connect with them to discuss your goals, your recent activities and to offer support with this document by sharing more information or assisting with targeted content ideas.

INTERVIEWS – After succeeding at the initial application stage, you may be invited to attend an interview at the medical school. Need help? Attend an [Interview I: Winning Interviews](#) or [Interview II: Communicating Your Skills and Experience](#) workshop at Career Services. They are held regularly from January to April each year. If you would like to do a mock interview book a career consultation appointment on [MyCareer](#) with a career counselor and notify them of your intentions in the notes.

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 an 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.

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.ontariomedicalfoundation.ca/about-us/>
MCAT Fee Assistance: <https://students-residents.aamc.org/applying-medical-school/applying-medical-school-process/fee-assistance-program/>
Ontario Under-Serviced Area Program: <http://health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/northernhealth/>

Review the Student Awards website at the university to which you are applying for medicine-specific awards, scholarships, bursaries, and 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)

What if I don't get in?

Receiving letters of rejection from Medical Schools can be a difficult emotional experience. After years of planning and continuous efforts to remain competitive you may have fallen just short of your goal. This degree of disappointment has the potential to impact your self-worth, identity, and overall mental health. [Student Wellness Services](#) has mental health supports available through their appointments, wellness groups and workshops. Despite this rejection, there are still lots of other opportunities to explore.

OTHER OPTIONS – If you are unable to gain admittance into Medical School this year, reflect on why you may have been unsuccessful and how this relates to your career goals. It may not be realistic to continue applying to Medical School programs in the future but there are other career options worth considering that relate to your aspirations and experiences. Career Services offers [career counseling appointments](#) to support your [career exploration](#) and to assist you in establishing some next steps if you are feeling lost.



Alternate Careers to Medicine

Consider the following related careers that may connect with your motivations and goals for wanting to be in medicine. Remember, this list is not prescriptive or comprehensive but it is a starting point.

Acupuncture
Administration (Health Care Policy, Hospitals, Community Health Clinics)
Advocacy - Patient
Clinical Chemistry
Community Health & Epidemiology
Dentistry
Diagnostic Medical Technology
Diagnostic Medical Sonography
Disaster Management & Relief Education
Health Promotion
Homeopathy
International Development
Microbiology
Naturopathic Medicine
Neuroscience
Nurse Practitioner
Nutrition
Optometry
Pharmacology
Physician's Assistant
Podiatry
Public Policy
Politics
Medical Research
Strategic Planning

Want to learn more?

Career Services offers [Drop-in Career Advising](#) to answer quick questions related to all aspects of your career planning and job search - Monday to Thursday from 1:30pm to 3:30pm.

For more in-depth explanations, check the following resources in our [Career Information Area](#):

- *Just What the Doctor Ordered: The Insider's Guide to Getting into Medical School in Canada* by Christine Fader
- *So You Want to be a Doctor, eh?* by Anne Berndt
- *Essays That Will Get You Into Medical School* by Dan Kaufman
- *Ace Your Medical School Interview* by Dr. Peter Griffiths
- *101 Medical School Personal Statements that Made a Difference* by Dr. Nancy Nolan
- *The New Medical School Preparation & Admissions Guide 2015* by Dr. Andrew Goliszek
- *MCAT 528: Advanced Prep for Advanced Students* by Deeangelee Pooran-Kublall