

BECOMING A LICENSED PHARMACIST IN CANADA

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The pharmacist profession in Canada has changed a lot over the past decade. With a widely expanded scope of practice that now goes far beyond a traditional dispensing role, pharmacists are doing more for their patients than ever before and are playing a larger role in health care system.

Pharmacy is changing. Pharmacists are taking on expanded roles and are increasingly being recognized as the medication management experts of the health care team. Given the increasing numbers of medications, aging population and the growing cost of pharmaceuticals, pharmacists are key to ensuring safe, cost-effective drug therapy for Canadians.

The Canadian Pharmacists Association (CPhA) stays on the cutting edge of breaking news in health care and ensures that pharmacists are included in discussions on the changing health care landscape. They work hard to create real opportunities for pharmacists to improve their working lives, expand their scopes of their practice and enrich the contributions they make to the health of Canadians.

Canada has approximately 42.500 licensed pharmacists working in more than 10.000 pharmacies. Of those, about 70% work in community pharmacies, 15% work in hospitals, and 15% work in other settings such as the pharmaceutical industry, governments, associations, colleges and universities.

Today's pharmacists are highly respected as the medication management experts of the health care team. They collaborate with patients, their families and other health care providers to benefit the health of Canadians. The pharmacist's traditional role is expanding, and pharmacists across Canada deliver a range of innovative services, including medication reviews, chronic disease management, immunization services and wellness programs. Most provincial governments have approved pharmacist prescribing with varying scopes of authority, a service that complements the care provided by a doctor and can result in more convenient refills, less time spent dealing with prescription changes and collaborative medication management.

Becoming a pharmacist requires a significant amount of formal education. Pharmacists educate patients about the use of drugs and illness prevention while providing them medication and conferring with physicians about medication issues. Aspiring pharmacists must complete at least two years of undergraduate study (not in any specific discipline) before attaining their Doctor of Pharmacy (Pharm.D.) degree from a pharmacy school. Pharmacists are also required to obtain licensure by passing the North American Pharmacist Licensure Exam.

Pre-pharmacy students must complete at least two years of college to be eligible for pharmacy school, though most complete 3-4 years of a bachelor's degree program. Aspiring pharmacists aren't required to pursue specific majors; however, undergraduate coursework in physics, chemistry, biology, and calculus can provide a foundation for advanced pharmacy classes.

While bachelor's degrees in pharmacy were once the requirement for entry-level positions, pharmacists are now required to hold Doctor of Pharmacy (Pharm.D.) professional degrees. Pharm.D. programs take four years to complete and prepare students for the technical, scientific and patient-care aspects of the profession. Courses may include: Pathophysiology, Toxicology, Disease treatments, Biopharmaceuticals, Pharmacy ethics and law, Drug absorption rates, Patient care, Medicinal chemistry.

Pharm.D. programs also incorporate clinical training into their curricula. Through clerkships, students gain practical experience in pharmacy settings under the supervision of licensed pharmacists. The goal of clinical practice is to familiarize students with patient interaction while allowing them to develop professional skills by applying knowledge acquired in the classroom.

Graduates of Pharm.D. programs must pass the North American Pharmacist Licensure Examination administered by the National Association of Boards of Pharmacy (NABP) in order to demonstrate the skills necessary to safely distribute medicine. Most states also require the NABP's Multistate Pharmacy Jurisprudence Examination on federal and state laws. Other licensing requirements might include a criminal background screening and a certain amount of clinical experience.

So, in order to become a licensed pharmacist in Canada, you need:

A bachelor's or doctor of pharmacy degree from one of 10 Canadian universities: Dalhousie University (College of Pharmacy), Memorial University of Newfoundland (School of Pharmacy), Université de Montréal (Faculté de pharmacie), Université Laval (Faculté de pharmacie), University of Alberta (Faculty of Pharmacy & Pharmaceutical Sciences), University of British Columbia (Faculty of Pharmaceutical Sciences), University of Manitoba (Faculty of Pharmacy), University of Saskatchewan (College of Pharmacy and Nutrition), University of Toronto (Leslie Dan Faculty of Pharmacy), University of Waterloo (School of Pharmacy);

To complete a national board examination through the Pharmacy Examining Board of Canada (PEBC) (except Québec);

Practical experience through an apprenticeship/internship program;

Fluency in English or French.

The profession of pharmacy is regulated on a provincial and territorial level. The regulatory authorities are directly responsible for granting pharmacist licenses, assessing the competency of pharmacists and ensuring public safety.

Enrolment in NAPRA's Pharmacists' Gateway Canada is a mandatory first step towards licensure in Canada for international pharmacy graduates (IPGs) in all provinces except Québec. There are 3 steps to achieving PEBC pharmacist certification for International Pharmacy Graduates: Step 1- document evaluation; Step 2: the pharmacist evaluating examination; Step 3: the pharmacist qualifying examination- Part I (MCQ) and Part II (OSCE). When you have passed both Parts of the examination you will be certified and registered with PEBC.

Pharmacists Gateway Canada (Gateway) provides a number of tools for IPGs, including a public website where IPGs can find everything required to better understand and navigate the Canadian licensure process. The Gateway provides access to clear and up-to-date information on the licensure requirements in every province and territory across Canada and is a confidential national document repository accessible to the candidate, the PEBC and the pharmacy regulatory authority.

Pharmacists are valued members of the Canadian health care team, providing high quality primary care services that lead to better health outcomes for patients. Through medication and chronic disease management, immunization services and wellness programs, pharmacists contribute to a healthier population, resulting in savings to overall health care spending. Provincial governments also recognize the value of investing in pharmacy services and many provinces now cover these services as part of their provincial drug plans.