

Federation of Medical Regulatory Authorities of Canada

ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY

Part I – Preamble

Canada's 13 Medical Regulatory Authorities (MRAs) operate under 13 distinct legislative frameworks yet share common basic objectives and responsibilities including the protection of the public by ensuring medical practitioners in Canada provide competent, safe, and ethical care.

One way in which this is accomplished is through setting standards to ensure that physicians who apply for registration and licensure have demonstrated that they have the required competencies. This includes ensuring that they have the degree of language proficiency necessary to practise safely in the province or territory of licensure¹.

This document describes English Language Proficiency (ELP) requirements for medical registration in Canada.

Part II – Guiding Principles

In setting ELP requirements, FMRAC and its 13 members agree that:

1. The protection of the public is the primary statutory responsibility of the MRAs and the foundation for ELP standards.
2. ELP standards must be based on bona fide requirements to practise safely and competently.
3. ELP standards and assessment of an applicant's compliance with those standards should be evidence-based and fairly applied.
4. An assessment by one Canadian MRA that a physician has met the ELP requirement will be deemed valid evidence of ELP in any other Canadian jurisdiction for the purposes of issuing an equivalent category of license.

¹ In Quebec, the language of medical practice is French.

In New Brunswick and the Yukon, both French and English are used in medical practice.

In Nunavut, English, French, Inuinnaqtun and Inuktitut are used in medical practice.

In the Northwest Territories, English, French, Inuktitut, Inuinnaqtun, Inuvialuktun, Gwich'in, North Slavey, South Slavey, and Tłıchǫ are used in medical practice.

For all other Canadian provinces, English is considered the language of medical practice.

Part III – Basis for the Requirement

To practise safely and competently in an English-speaking province or territory, a physician must possess sufficient ELP to conduct the following activities²:

1. Create medical records that meet MRA standards.
2. Collaborate and coordinate effectively with other health care providers engaged in care of their patients. This requires the ability to exchange information about patients in writing or orally using technical vocabulary, including in situations that may be urgent.
3. Competently interpret reports and medical records created by other health care providers in English.
4. Communicate effectively with patients in English³. This includes the ability to understand medically relevant information provided by the patient, communicate a diagnosis and treatment advice, and secure an informed consent to treatment where appropriate.⁴

Inclusive Assessment for Physicians with Communication-related Disabilities

FMRAC recognizes that physicians with communication-related disabilities may demonstrate their ability to provide safe and competent care through alternative means or with supportive measures. These considerations apply to qualified physicians who experience disabilities affecting language processing or expression while maintaining the cognitive and professional capabilities to practise medicine safely.

In circumstances where examinations are required to demonstrate ELP, examination providers are responsible for the provision of inclusive assessment methods. In circumstances where the MRA waives examinations, the MRA has discretion to apply such methods.

Part IV – Demonstrating ELP

An applicant who has completed medical education, training, and certification in English in Canada is deemed to have met the ELP standard for registration.

For other applicants, MRAs may accept the following as evidence of an applicant's ELP.

1. **The applicant has undergone medical education and training in the official language.** In some countries, medical education and training are offered exclusively in English and a proof of program completion will be acceptable. In others, the MRA will need a specific confirmation of English as the language of the applicant's instruction and training. The relevance of education and training as evidence of ELP will wane as time since program completion increases. Such evidence may be used to demonstrate competence in all four professional activities listed in Part III.

² In assessing an applicant's ELP against requirements, MRAs will give due consideration to the nature of the applicant's medical specialty and practice setting, as these may influence the degree to which each of the bona fide requirements apply.

³ It is recognized that patients in Canada may speak a wide variety of languages in addition to one of the two official languages and this will often be their first language. It is also recognized that the ability of a physician to engage with a patient in their first language supports better health outcomes and this practice is encouraged by MRAs. However, this does not negate the requirement for ELP for other aspects of medical practice.

2. **The applicant has achieved a passing score on medical qualifying or certification examinations administered in English or successfully completed a Practice Readiness Assessment in English.** The relevance of examination or practice assessment results as evidence of ELP will wane as time since their completion increases. Such evidence may be used to demonstrate competence in the first three professional activities noted under the heading “Basis for the Requirement” above.
3. **The applicant has practised in English.** This requires the applicant to provide verification that they have been practising in a setting where the language of medical records and correspondence is English and a majority of patient and interprofessional encounters take place in English. This may be confirmed by the MRA through publicly available sources of information about languages spoken in the jurisdiction. Where additional verification is necessary, this may take the form of letters from Medical Directors or equivalent or the MRA may confirm directly with the facility. Such evidence may be used to demonstrate competence in all four professional activities noted under the heading “Basis for Requirement” above.
4. **The applicant has successfully completed a language test set by Immigration, Refugee and Citizenship Canada (IRCC) as part of their immigration process.** Such evidence may be used to demonstrate competence in the patient communication professional activity noted under the heading “Basis for Requirement” above.

Where ELP cannot be established to the satisfaction of the MRA through the means listed above, the applicant may demonstrate ELP through formal testing:

The preferred test due to its relevance to medical practice is the OET (Occupational English Test) Medicine examination, completed within the 24 months before applying for registration, achieving a minimum grade of B in each component.

All MRAs also accept the following tests:

1. The IELTS (International English Language Testing System) Academic, completed within the 24 months before applying for registration, achieving a minimum score of 7.0 in each of the four components.
2. The CELPIP (Canadian English Language Proficiency Index Program) General examination, completed within the 24 months before applying for registration, achieving a minimum score of 9 in each component.

Where the applicant has worked, trained and/or practised in English since successful completion of an IRCC-set, OET, IELTS or CELPIP test, MRAs may choose to waive the currency requirements noted above.