



GUIDE TO CANADIAN UNDERGRADUATE MEDICAL EDUCATION

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About Healthy Pictou County



We are a grassroots, physician-led organization dedicated to the attraction and retention of medical staff and students to Pictou County.

The team at Healthy Pictou County acts as your community resource, answering questions about the area and helping to direct you as you explore opportunities to learn and work in the healthcare field.

We offer settlement assistance, preceptor and learner support, and ongoing healthcare social events to assist you in building a full and successful life in Pictou County.



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The importance of this guide

We developed this guide to support our local students and their support networks to better understand some of the processes and information for the journey of medical education. We also wanted to ensure that you knew that the community is here to support you, in a variety of ways, and we're thrilled that you're considering or currently pursuing this exciting and rewarding career path!



Let's dig in!

Pathways

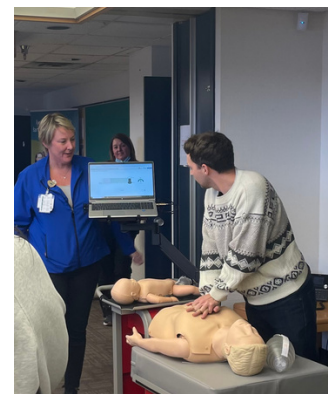
For Getting into Medical School

Numerous pathways can be taken to achieve the same end destination of a medical career. The seventeen accredited Canadian Medical Schools seek well-rounded applicants with diverse backgrounds.

Any undergraduate bachelor's degree may be taken before applying to medical schools in Canada. Some, but not all, schools require prerequisite courses in sciences and humanities, some require completion of the Casper situational judgment exam, and most (but not all) require completion of the Medical College Admissions Test (MCAT) with school-specific score minimums.

Applying to medical schools in Canada is highly competitive, placing pressure on applicants to succeed in all aspects of their lives, from academics to employment, volunteer and extracurricular activities, and demonstrating professionalism and leadership in their day-to-day lives and community involvement.

In creating this guide, Healthy Pictou County is here to provide a comprehensive support package to aid local aspiring doctors in achieving their dreams. We outline typical paths to medicine, application requirements, costs of applying, and a brief outline of what to expect in medical school and residency.



Considerations for Education



CONSIDERATIONS FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

There aren't necessarily any distinct requirements for completing your secondary school education to get into medical school. However, there are some things that you can consider doing that will help build your stamina and provide a foundational basis for your continued learning.

Medical school takes dedication, resilience, and self-disciplined learning to succeed. If you are in high school and thinking about a future career in medicine, beginning to challenge yourself early on will help you prepare.

THINGS YOU CAN DO:

- Take classes that challenge you: sometimes, when getting closer to the end of high school, students want to choose courses that will help them get easy "A's." Taking heavier course loads that require more effort will help you prepare for study habits needed in undergrad and medical school.
- Canadian Medical Schools do not have specific degree requirements; however, some require completion of prerequisite courses to be considered for application. Apply for a degree that interests you, but note that having more experience in sciences will help build a foundation for your learning in medical school.
- Take courses relevant to MCAT material: Physics, English (reading comprehension & analysis), Biology, Chemistry, Calculus (mental math calculations & algebra), psychology, and sociology.
- Watch for any courses that you might need as prerequisites for university programs.
- Engage in extracurricular activities: Engage in activities that fuel your passions, such as sports, music, theatre, student council, volunteering, etc. For the most part, medical schools will look at your activities within the last five years before applying, including what you did in your last year of high school, depending on when you apply.
- Take part in opportunities to build leadership skills: Physicians are seen as community leaders, so start developing these skills early.
- Don't stress! You still have so much time; leave yourself time to relax, hang out with friends and family, and have fun. We want to avoid burnout as much as possible.



CONSIDERATIONS FOR UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

There is no golden pathway to medical school; each student is unique. However, consider a few things if you plan to apply to medicine.

- Applying to medical school in Canada is highly competitive. Grade point averages (GPAs) are typically used as a cut-off (in combination with other factors) to determine who will receive an interview invitation. Keep on top of your studies and reference the guidelines for how each medical school calculates its GPA for the application process.
- Build relationships with your professors! Some schools require an academic reference letter to support students' applications to medical schools. It can be incredibly daunting to ask professors for a letter of reference, but building a relationship with them can make this task much more manageable. Go to office hours, ask questions, and make yourself known. Some university classes can have 300+ people, so the professor will only know who you are if you put in the effort.
- Get involved in research: This is optional and not required to apply to medicine. However, in pre-clerkship years, students must complete a research project, so getting involved in research will help you develop the skills and competencies you will need later on.
- Try to do extracurriculars that interest you instead of the ones that “check the boxes” for medical schools. Admissions committees are looking for unique candidates, on top of having stellar academics. Allow your passions and interests to shine through on your application.
- Put time and effort into building relationships with people who oversee your non-academic activities, such as employers, volunteer supervisors, coaches and teachers. Such people will be helpful later on, as you need verifiers for all the activities noted on your application.
- Volunteering can help you gain experience in healthcare settings. This is an excellent time to ensure you want to pursue a medical career.



CONSIDERATIONS FOR MATURE STUDENTS

- Age is but a number. You are never too old to commit to achieving your dreams! Applying to medicine is a long process, but the schooling is much longer. Ensure you are prepared to commit the next 6+ years to medical education, including long study nights, work hours, and minimal work pay compensation in residency.
- Double-check the admission requirements on each school's website before applying. Some are different for mature students than the typical admissions pathway. For example, McGill requires a letter of intent and NOSM only requires a 3-year bachelor's degree instead of 4 for applicants over 25.

ADVICE FROM LOCAL MED STUDENTS:

"I wish I knew that it wasn't the end of the world to take a gap year. During this time, I took a break from school, which helped with my burnout from undergrad, it allowed me to gain valuable research experience that will benefit me in the future and allowed me to focus all of my attention on my application."

"A piece of advice I was given the second time around was to simply be yourself, which sounded pretty obvious, but when I reflected on the differences between the two cycles, I thought I was way more relaxed and able to better present myself at all stages of the cycle when reminding myself to just show who I am. So there are very simple things that I overlooked because I thought medicine was this big scary field that only accepted the best of the best... and while it is insanely competitive, admissions are looking for people they can relate to and who they want to work with – which is not overworked robots with no hobbies."

"Don't pursue extracurriculars you don't care about just because it might look good on a med school app. You will be more likely to succeed with activities you're passionate about."

"Approach the application like a conversation between you and the school. They want to know you, not what you think you're supposed to be. Show your human side."

"Start earlier – although the majority of the application can be done in a few weeks (contacting references, answering questions, acquiring transcripts, etc.) it is important to start early when booking MCAT times and locations."



for parents & guardians:

Offering Support



to someone applying for med school

Medical School acceptance rates in Canada are typically less than 10%, with some school acceptance rates being as low as 1%. Admissions committees receive thousands of applications to fill, usually less than 200 seats. With the competitiveness of the application process, it is becoming increasingly frequent for students to pursue Master's degrees to boost their chances of being accepted into medicine. Over the last few years, approximately 30% of each Canadian Medical School's entering class obtained a graduate degree before being accepted into medicine.

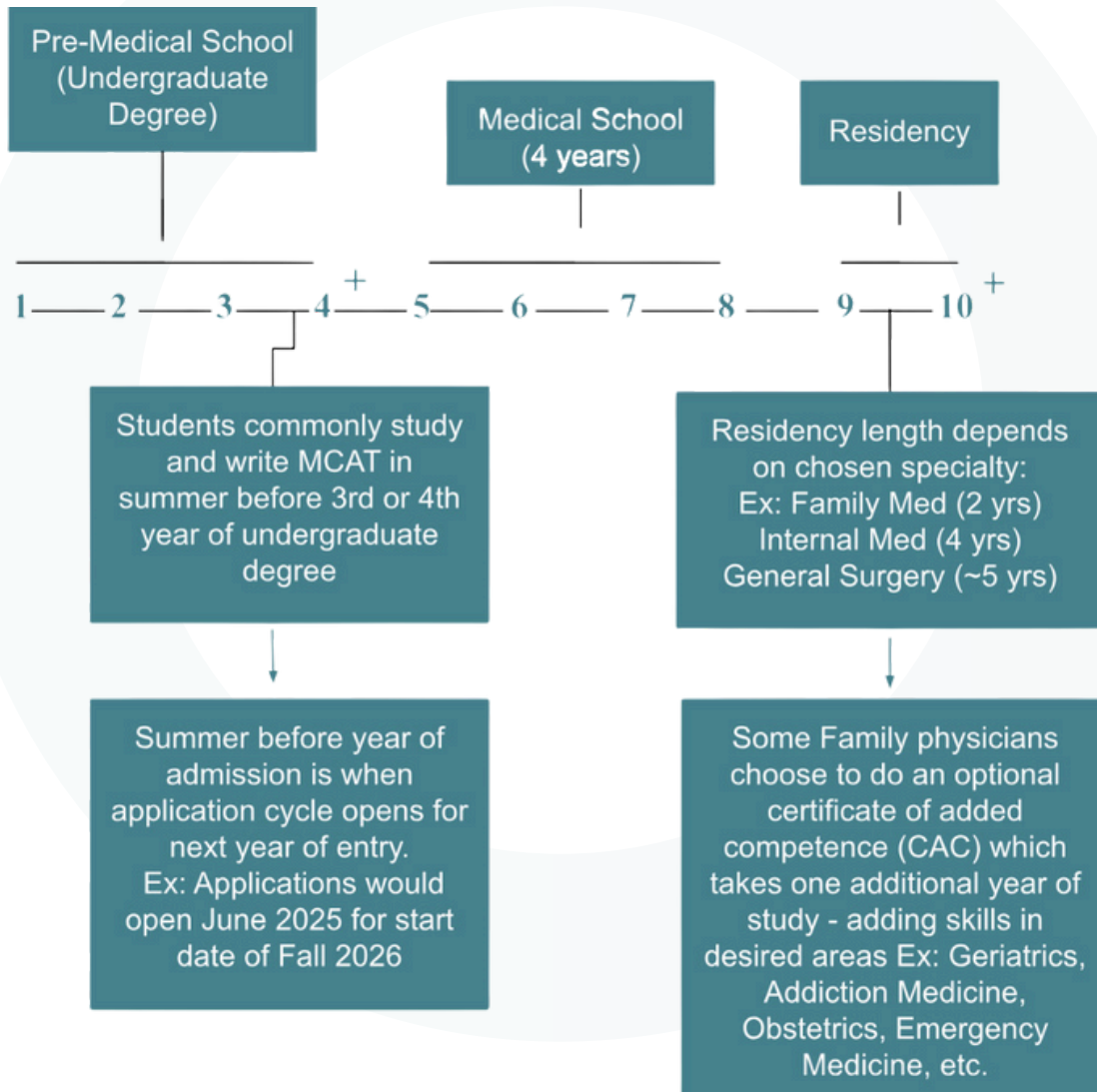
Putting immense effort into applying to medicine only to receive a rejection letter is incredibly discouraging. Make sure to be empathetic and provide support if a rejection letter arrives. The way each student accepts support is different, but reassure them that, sadly, rejection is a very common aspect of medical school application processes and that most applicants apply more than once before they receive an acceptance letter.

- Support and encourage without applying added pressure. Ensure your student applies to medical school to fulfill their passions, not parental or familial pressures/expectations.
- Do your best to understand what the student applying is going through: read up on the MCAT, interview process, application requirements, and what medical school curriculums look like.
- Most of your student's time is spent thinking about applying to medicine. To avoid burnout or frustration, promote discussion about different topics and avoid exhausting conversations about medical school unless the student brings it up.
- The application process is long, and waiting can create anxiety. To promote wellness, make sure they promote self-care and de-stress as much as possible throughout the process.

Med School Timeline



Remember, your journey to medicine is unique. While we provide an example timeline of what applying to medicine directly from your undergraduate degree might look like, it's essential to understand that this is just one path. Your journey can be tailored to your circumstances and goals, allowing you to maximize your opportunities and experiences.



Canadian Medical Schools

Applying to medical school is a lengthy process, with applications typically opening the year before the start date for that class. Applications open between June and August for a start date that is over a year away. For example, beginning the application process in summer 2026 would mean applying for a fall 2027 start date.

The application puts you through a “hurry up and wait” process. After submitting your initial application in late summer/early fall, emails will be sent to inform you of your acceptance to the next round of interviews, ranging from November to March depending on where you interview.

After interviews, the waiting begins again to see if you are offered a spot in the class. Invitations are typically sent in late March for Dalhousie Medical School and in May for Ontario-based schools. Application deadlines change from year to year, so it is crucial to ensure you are aware of and have a calendar for each application's due date.

Each school calculates GPAs, MCAT requirements, extracurriculars, and reference letters slightly differently. The link below provides a guide to the requirements for each medical school in Canada and details the cost of each application.

[Application Requirements for each Canadian Medical School](#)



With the opening of Cape Breton Medical Campus (CBMC), Dalhousie Medicine has created a Rural Applicant Pathway designated for rural Nova Scotia residents. Thirty students will be admitted to the CBMC each year and will attend classes in Sydney, Nova Scotia.

Applications opened for CBMC in summer of 2024, and can be found [HERE](#) (See page 17 for more details in this guide)

The MCAT



MCAT
Medical College
Admission Test

EXAM FORMAT

The MCAT is probably the most daunting aspect of the medical school application process. The MCAT, or Medical College Admissions Test, is a standardized, multiple-choice exam designed to test students' problem-solving, critical thinking, and knowledge of natural, behavioural, and social science concepts and principles necessary for the study of medicine.

The exam is broken down into 4 sections:

- Biological and Biochemical Foundations of Living Systems (59 questions)
- Chemical and Physical Foundations of Biological Systems (59 questions)
- Psychological, Social and Biological Foundations of Behaviour (59 questions)
- Critical Analysis and Reasoning Skills (53 questions)

Each exam section is passage-based, meaning there is a reading component to understand the situation. Questions will be based on information pulled directly from the passage, information from memory, or questions that can be answered using combined knowledge from your memory of content and information from the passage.

Sometimes you have to combine your knowledge from different disciplines to answer questions. Each passage will be 1–6 short paragraphs long, with an accompanying set of 5–7 questions.

The natural and social science sections are based on foundational concepts, testing knowledge from disciplines in year-long courses in general chemistry, organic chemistry, biology, biochemistry, introductory physics, psychology and sociology.

The Critical Analysis and Reasoning Section (CARS) is based on the ability to comprehend and analyze information from various sources in the social sciences, arts, and humanities.



Need some help? In 2024 Healthy Pictou County launched a local study group with support from other local students offering testing questions and general support and advice. Reach out to hello@healthypictoucounty.ca to get connected with the next study session!

TESTING LIMITS

- You can only book one exam at a time.
- You can test a maximum of three times in a year and no more than four times over two consecutive years.
- You have a lifetime limit of taking the MCAT 7 times.



Exam Overview		
Section	Number of Questions	Time Allotted
Test Day Certification		4 minutes
Tutorial (optional)		10 minutes
Chemical and Physical Foundations of Biological Systems	59	95 minutes
Break (optional)		10 minutes
Critical Analysis and Reasoning	53	90 minutes
Break (optional)		30 minutes
Biological and Biochemical Foundations of Living Systems	59	95 minutes
Break (optional)		10 minutes
Psychological, Social, and Biological Foundations of Behaviour	59	95 minutes
Void Question		3 minutes
End of Day Survey		5 minutes
Total Content Time		6 hours and 15 minutes
Total Seated Time		7 hours and 30 minutes

PREPARING FOR THE EXAM

Recommendations suggest saving time to prepare 200–300 hours (3 – 6 months) to study for the MCAT.

Multiple companies have study book sets with the contents of the MCAT exam

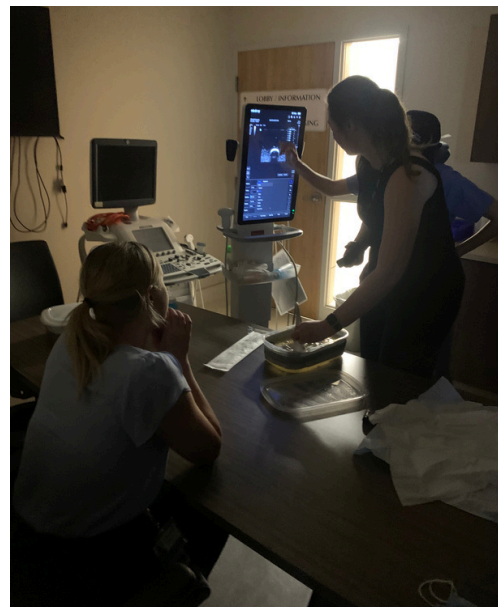
- Princeton Review
- Kaplan
- Blueprint
- Prep 101
- Exam Krackers

Choosing university courses that cover the same content as the exam is beneficial, making some sections much more approachable. Some recommended courses are first-year university biology, general chemistry, organic chemistry, biochemistry, first-year psychology & sociology, and physics.

Choosing a study schedule that works for you and sticking to it is very important. Create your own study plan or find one online that you like and stay disciplined to keep up with it.

A common mistake people make is sacrificing practice for content review. The MCAT tests your problem-solving abilities more-so than your knowledge. It tests your ability to apply basic knowledge to different, possibly new, situations and your ability to reason out and evaluate arguments. It is important to make time for practice exams & build stamina, which is a considerable aspect of test preparation.

- 7.5 hours is a long time! Your ability to stay focused and fuelled for the entire duration without burning out is essential.
- Most study plans suggest scheduling a full day each week to sit down and write a full practice test while modelling testing conditions, such as leaving your phone outside of the test room, timing your test, practicing with the same foods you'd eat on breaks at the testing centre, or even wearing the same clothes you plan to wear on testing day.





RESOURCES (FREE)

- ANKI: Anki is a free and open-source flashcard program that aids memorization using cognitive science techniques, such as active recall testing and spaced repetition.
- “Miledown” created a free-access ANKI deck covering MCAT content so you don’t have to make flashcards yourself. It has 2,900 cards and covers all the content that the AAMC expects you to know for the MCAT.
- [“MileDown” Review Sheets: 90 pages of content review](#)
- [Jack Westin Free Practice Passages](#)
- [Blueprint free resources: Practice questions, diagnostic tests, live sessions](#)
- [AAMC](#)
- [Guide to Building Your Study Plan](#)
- Full-length practice exam (graded)
- Sample test (un-graded)
- 230 question bank
- [Kahn Academy MCAT Prep](#)

RESOURCES (FOR PURCHASE)

- [U World Question Bank](#)
- [AAMC Full-Length Exams](#)
- [JackWestin Practice Passages](#)
- [Blueprint Practice Exams](#)
- [Blueprint Prep Course \(\\$\\$\\$\)](#)
- [Princeton Review Prep Course \(\\$\\$\\$\)](#)
- [Prep 101 Course \(\\$\\$\\$\)](#)
- [Kaplan Review Prep Course \(\\$\\$\\$\)](#)



Through our MCATstudy group, we can potentially provide support for some of these resources. Email hello@healthypictoucounty.ca for details

The CASPer

The CASPer is an open-response situational judgement test that measures aspects of social intelligence and professionalism, such as ethics, empathy, problem-solving, and collaboration. Some, but not all, medical schools use the CASPer exam to help determine who will be invited to interview. See the spreadsheet with [Canadian Medical School Application guidelines](#) to see if the schools you are applying to require the CASPer.

- 90–110 minutes to complete
- Video and typed responses to 14 scenarios
- Scored by highly trained human raters
- Scores are sent to programs within 2–3 weeks



TYPED RESPONSES

You will read three word-based scenarios and watch five video-based scenarios. For each scenario, you will type answers to 3 open-ended questions, which will all be presented on the same page. You will have 5 minutes total to respond to all three questions.

HOW IS THE CASPER SCORED?

A CASPer response is scored relative to other students' responses to the same scenario. This means your score signifies the strength of your response compared to other test takers' responses. Raters are trained to use a Likert scale of 1 to 9 (1 being poor and 9 being excellent) to evaluate responses. This grading scale will compute entire scores into percentiles to show how you rank against other test takers.

VIDEO RESPONSES

You will read two word-based scenarios and watch four video-based scenarios. For each scenario, you will record videos to answer two open-ended questions, presented one at a time. You will have one minute to record each response.

HOW TO PREPARE FOR THE CASPER?

- Practice your typing skills: You can improve your 'words per minute' by using typespeed practice websites or creating timed typing exercises.
- Be professional - use appropriate language and be dressed appropriately for the video portion.
- Troubleshoot technology and any potential glitches beforehand
- Evaluate multiple perspectives when coming to a decision
- Develop your technique for answering questions
- Think before you write or speak. Don't rush yourself more than the test rushes you - keep calm!
- Get a feel for the questions you will be asked: <https://www.casptest.com/casper-sample-questions/>
- Invest in optional practice tests: <https://astroffconsultants.com/services/casper-tests/>

Dalhousie Medical School

Application Streams

In addition to the general applicant admissions pathway, Dalhousie has created different application streams for diverse populations to increase accessibility and equity in medical education training to include more underrepresented populations who face significant barriers in their pipeline to medical education. This consists of a Black Learners admissions pathway, Indigenous admissions pathway, Military Medical Training Program, Kuwaiti & Saudi Sponsored positions, and a new rural applicant pathway for Cape Breton's Medical Campus. Such application streams include waiving the minimum requirements for the MCAT exam, reducing the minimum GPA, and adding pathway-specific personal statements.

See the Dalhousie Medical Schools Applicant Pathway tab on their website for more details:

<https://medicine.dal.ca/departments/core-units/admissions/education-equity/rural-applicant-pathway.html>



Cape Breton Medical Campus



Dalhousie Medical School is introducing a new medical campus at Cape Breton University, set to be open in the fall of 2025. The campus has a focus on the health priorities of Cape Breton, creating opportunities for education and research. The campus will train 30 students yearly to be physicians in rural practice. Applicants for this campus must be Canadian citizens or permanent residents, limited to Nova Scotia applicants with lived experience in rural Nova Scotian communities. The longitudinal integrated clerkships (LIC) will be offered to third-year medical students, with newly created placement spots in Cape Breton and across rural communities in Nova Scotia. After completing residency, the school includes a 5-year return of service (ROS) in family or general medicine in rural Nova Scotia.

Multiple Mini Interviews (MMIs)

MMIs were designed at McMaster University to assess verbal and non-verbal communication skills, which cannot be evaluated on standardized exams. This interview format consists of 6-10 interview stations, each focused on a different question or scenario. The MMI is designed to measure competencies like oral communication, nonverbal skills, and teamwork, which are critical competencies for future physicians to possess. Interviewers consist of community members, professors, and physicians of the local area surrounding the medical school. This interview format gives multiple opportunities to showcase skills, unlike traditional 1-on-1 interviews. Each mini-interview has a 2-minute preparation period to build a response to the presented question/scenario, followed by 5-8 minutes to discuss their answer. Interviewers can ask follow-up questions if the entire response time still needs to be filled. Some Canadian Medical Schools require MMIs in the application process, including Dalhousie.

HOW TO PREPARE FOR THE MULTIPLE MINI INTERVIEWS

- Be familiar with the specific school you are interviewing for, such as its curriculum, policies, mission statements, etc.
- Be familiar with the community surrounding the medical school: stay current on news and events.
- Practice answering questions on ethical scenarios.
- Practice seeing a question and preparing to answer for 5-8 minutes. It's helpful to do this with a friend so you can practice speaking in front of someone.

ADVICE FROM LOCAL MED STUDENTS:

“

“In my opinion, the most important parts of interview prep are doing some research on the hot topics in medicine in Nova Scotia (ex, Indigenous healthcare, housing crisis, food insecurity, etc.), creating a structure to follow in your responses, and receiving feedback from others on how to improve. I also recommend recording yourself practicing so you can identify any weak spots. It's also super important to leave enough time for interview prep.

I gave myself about 6 weeks to prep. This might seem too long for some people, but I struggled at first and needed that time to become more comfortable and confident in my interview skills. The interview is the most important part of your application, so interview prep is essential!”

“Dal Student Success Center offers one-hour practice sessions with a tutor.”

“For interview preparation, practicing answering questions is essential. Applicants should also be familiar with their moral compass as many questions are ambiguous and your ability to give reason to your answer is just as important.”



You're In!

Now What?



MED 1 (PRE-CLERKSHIP)

Students typically learn in lectures, labs and small groups. They learn physical exam skills and professional competencies. Med 1 includes a mandatory family medicine rotation and the beginning of a research project. The year ends with a week in rural medicine, where students spend one week observing a rural physician in practice.

The curriculum is divided into four units-

1. Foundations I
2. Host Defense
3. Metabolism and Homeostasis I
4. Human Development

A typical week in your first year at Dalhousie School of Medicine

- Tutorial group meetings for 2-3 hours twice a week
- 3-5 hours of lectures
- A patient contact experience for 3-4 hours, emphasizing patient-doctor relationships
- ½ day for research in medicine
- ½ day for electives in second year
- A 3-hour laboratory related to cases under study

MED 2 (PRE-CLERKSHIP)

In second year of medical school, students continue their foundational learning, physical exam skills and professional competencies. In this year, students also take one or two elective courses of their choosing.

The curriculum is divided into four units:

1. Neurosciences
2. Metabolism and Homeostasis 2
3. Musculoskeletal and Dermatology
4. Palliative Care, Oncology and Geriatrics

MED 2 (PRE-CLERKSHIP)

A typical week in your second year at Dalhousie School of Medicine includes:

- Tutorial group meetings for 2-3 hours twice a week
- 3-5 hours of lectures
- A patient contact experience for 3-4 hours, emphasizing patient-doctor relationships
- ½ day for research in medicine
- ½ day for electives in second year. Pictou County offers clinical electives in Family Medicine.
- A 3 hour laboratory related to cases under study
- 2 hour concentration on critical appraisal or population health

Dalhousie Pre-Clerkship Attendance and Absence Policy

- Leaves of Absence can be granted for up to one year following approval of the school's Associate Dean.
- Students must be able to finish their medical education within seven years of the program's commencement with given leaves of absence.

MED 3 (CLERKSHIP)



In the third year, students see patients more routinely, completing two units in simulated settings. Students also begin their “clerkship,” working alongside established physicians called “preceptors.” Such an opportunity gives them the experience to develop the generalist skills they need to enter any profession and helps students decide what type of doctor they want to be. Here, students spend three weeks in PIER 1 at the beginning of year 3- refreshing clinical and procedural skills learned in Med 1 & 2 and are introduced to clerkship behaviours. PIER 2 happens in December of Med 3, which takes place over two weeks to support and enhance your ability to navigate clerkship successfully.

Med 3 students are given their rotation/LIC info based on a lottery system, which gives them little control over where they go.

CLERKSHIP MED 3 ROTATIONS

- **Emergency Medicine (3 weeks):** Gain experience in history tracking, completing physical examinations, developing care plans, and delivering discharge instructions.
- **Family Medicine (6 weeks):** You will complete six weeks of family medicine rotations in the Maritimes. Students can select to work with family doctors who are particularly interested in emergency medicine, obstetrics, or geriatric care.
- **Internal Medicine:** Students will complete four weeks of general medicine, four weeks of a clinic-based subspecialty, and two weeks of geriatric medicine.
- **Obstetrics and Gynecology:** In this six-week rotation, students will gain a broad view of women's reproductive health from childbirth to menopause.
- **Pediatrics:** This six-week clerkship (in Halifax) is divided into three weeks in the pediatric medical unit and three weeks of mixed ambulatory/emergency care. Students placed outside of Halifax typically have an integrated 6-week rotation.
- **Psychiatry:** This six-week rotation will expose students to various inpatient and outpatient clinical experiences and psychiatric disorders. Placements are offered in HRM, Saint John, Fredericton, Moncton, Miramichi, Windsor, Charlottetown, and Sydney.
- **Surgery:** This 9-week rotation provides students with broad principles of surgical care through exposure to surgical specialties. Here, students complete 3-weeks of general surgery and two 3-week selective rotations where you can choose from 9 surgical specialties (cardiac, neurosurgery, otolaryngology (ENT), pediatric general surgery, plastics, orthopedics, thoracics, vascular surgery and urology. This rotation includes on-call duty.
- **Electives:** allow students to gain experience in disciplines not offered in the regular curriculum, such as studying particular curriculum areas in depth and exploring career opportunities. The elective period consists of 18 weeks in Med 4

Specific to Cape Breton Medical Campus:

Med 3 students will do LIC (Longitudinal Integrated Clerkships) instead of block rotations, meaning they will go to a community for an entire year instead of short rotations in different locations. (Please note: There are other LIC seats throughout the province).



MED 4 (CLERKSHIP)

Med 4 runs for 32 weeks with scheduled time for you to participate in 18 weeks of electives. These 18 weeks are divided into 12 weeks of general electives, three weeks of community-based electives, and three consecutive weeks of interdisciplinary electives. Med 4 students have complete control over where they want to go and do their rotations.

At the end of Med 4, three weeks are scheduled for the Critical Review and Mastery Unit. This unit prepares students for your Medical Council of Canada exam and first year of residency. In this, students complete the Advanced Cardiac Life Support (ACLS) course, which is required for admission to any residency program.

Upon finishing the 4th year of medical school, students must pass the Medical Council of Canada Evaluating Examination (MCCEE), which is a mandatory licensing exam to be able to continue into your residency program.

Med 4 Graduation occurs in June. Be sure to celebrate with friends, family, and your peers for reaching this huge milestone!

CLERKSHIP LEAVE OF ABSENCE POLICIES (DALHOUSIE)

Short Term Absences

Short-term leave may be granted by the site-specific Associate Dean for mandatory components of the curriculum as per the following:

1. Unanticipated Short-Term Leave

- a. Illness or injury – see UGME policy document
- b. Care of an immediate family member or bereavement

2. Anticipated Short-Term Leave

- a. Research work accepted at an educational conference or scientific meeting.
- b. Selected as a representative for Dalhousie University, province or Canada for an extracurricular activity, such as a sporting event.
- c. Selected as a representative by a Faculty of Medicine department or affiliated organization for an education conference or scientific meeting.
- d. To attend an event, such as a wedding or family reunion.
- e. Other activities deemed appropriate by the Associate Dean and faculty member(s) involved.



PROCEDURE FOR REQUESTING SHORT-TERM LEAVE

1. Students apply for short-term leave off by completing a time-off request form six weeks in advance (except in emergencies) and submitting it to ugme@dal.ca (Halifax-based) or dmnb.leave@dal.ca (DMNB-based students). UGME/DMNB will confirm receipt of the application within 72 hours. After approval by UGME/DMNB, the request will be forwarded to the relevant clinical department for approval. NOTE: Approval by both UGME and the Clinical Department is required; approval by one does not imply approval by the other.
2. Students who take short-term leave MUST ensure that all relevant faculty members, including tutors, attending physicians and preceptors, are notified of their absence as far in advance as possible.
3. Short-term leave during an exam will only be granted under exceptional circumstances, such as personal/health reasons or presenting research at a conference. Exam deferral for personal/health reasons must first be supported by the Assistant Dean of Student Affairs and approved by the site-specific Associate Dean. Exam deferral to present at a conference will be approved by the site-specific Associate Dean, who will first request approval from the Clerkship Director. Deferred exams are to be written on the designated deferral date. If short-term leave during an exam has been approved, students must also submit an exam deferral request form to ugme@dal.ca. In some circumstances, it may be possible for an exam to be written off-site during the leave, but it must be written at the same time as the other students are writing it.

LEAVE OF ABSENCE (LOA)

A leave of absence (LOA) is a prolonged absence from the curriculum during which a student cannot reasonably participate in practical learning and is not considered to be working toward the MD degree.

This implies that the student will not obtain the MD degree within the anticipated 4-year time frame.

[Dalhousie Clerkship: Short & Long-Term Leave of Absence Protocol](#)

- Doctors Nova Scotia annually celebrates deserving medical students with \$5000 bursaries to help fund their medical education. Applications open in September.
- Johnson Scholarship Foundation Support Bursary: Dalhousie's Indigenous and African Nova Scotia Entrance Requirements bursary program is designed as an initiative for Indigenous students (First Nation, Inuit, and Métis) and African Nova Scotians applying to programs requiring entrance exams (e.g. medical school, dental school). The program aims to reduce or eliminate the financial burden associated with application requirements. Bursaries will be awarded as a reimbursement for the cost.
- Medical Student Leadership Award: Medical Students in their second to last year of study are eligible. Must have demonstrated interest in or commitment to a career in family medicine.
- Indigenous Student Leadership Award: Must be an Indigenous medical student in Canada in their second last year of study. The student must be in good academic standing.
- INDSPIRE (Indigenous education, Canada's Future): INDSPIRE is an Indigenous-led registered charity that invests in the education of Indigenous people for the long-term benefit of these individuals, their families and communities, and Canada. With the support of its funding partners, Indspire disburses financial awards, delivers programs, and shares resources intending to close the gap in Indigenous education.
- Indspire's Building Brighter Futures Bursaries, Scholarships, and Awards: this program helps alleviate some of the financial stress students may experience. Through this program, Indspire has provided nearly \$79 million through almost 25,000 financial awards to Canadian Indigenous students. Indigenous students enrolled full-time at a post-secondary institution are eligible to apply.
- QEII Foundation Diversity in Health Care Bursary: The QEII Foundation Diversity in Health Care Bursary supports students who identify as African Nova Scotian/Black, Indigenous, racialized, immigrant, 2SLGBTQIA+, experiencing physical, cognitive or learning limitations that impact activities of daily living – or have intersectionality of these identities.
- Sutherland Harris Memorial Hospital Foundation Post-Secondary Scholarships: Intended to be awarded to former Northumberland Regional High School and Pictou Academy students who have completed their first year of study in a specified health field at a recognized post-secondary school. Students must complete the application form, enclose official transcripts, enclose proof of enrollment for the upcoming academic year, enclose an essay for up to 500 words on any topic related to the applicant's chosen field of study, citing personal reasons for their career choice, enclose demonstrated volunteer contribution and or work in the health field. Applications are due the last Friday of May. Up to six scholarships valued at \$1000 will be awarded each calendar year.

Residency



Matching to a residency program is one of the most essential steps in your medical education—setting the course for your professional career. In Canada, we use CaRMS, the Canadian Resident Matching Service. This is an independent, not-for-profit organization to which you submit your application, and they oversee the matching process from beginning to end.

After confirming your eligibility, you enter background information into the matching service, including personal statements and your resume. After researching different programs, students select which programs they would most like to apply to. If the programs are also interested in you, they will reach out for an interview. After interviewing, students will rank which programs they would like to go to the most, and each program will do the same in ranking which students they would most like to admit to their residency program.

From here, the CaRMS matching algorithm matches students and programs. On “Match Day,” students log in to their CaRMS portals to view their results. Matching happens in two iterations, so if you aren’t matched in the first round, you can match in the second round with any remaining positions. You are legally bound to attend once you are matched with a residency program. This makes the matching process extremely important to ensure you are ranking programs that will best suit you on your list. However, after beginning a residency program, you can transfer programs if you wish.

Did you know?

Pictou County is one of the sites for the Dalhousie North Nova Family Medicine Residency Program. Launched in 2019, North Nova is the third site in the Dalhousie program to offer integrated competency-based program centered on family medicine. We offer a passionate group of preceptors and incredible community and hospital-based clinical experiences.

For more information on the North Nova site, you can visit <https://www.maritimefamilymedicine.ca/northnova>

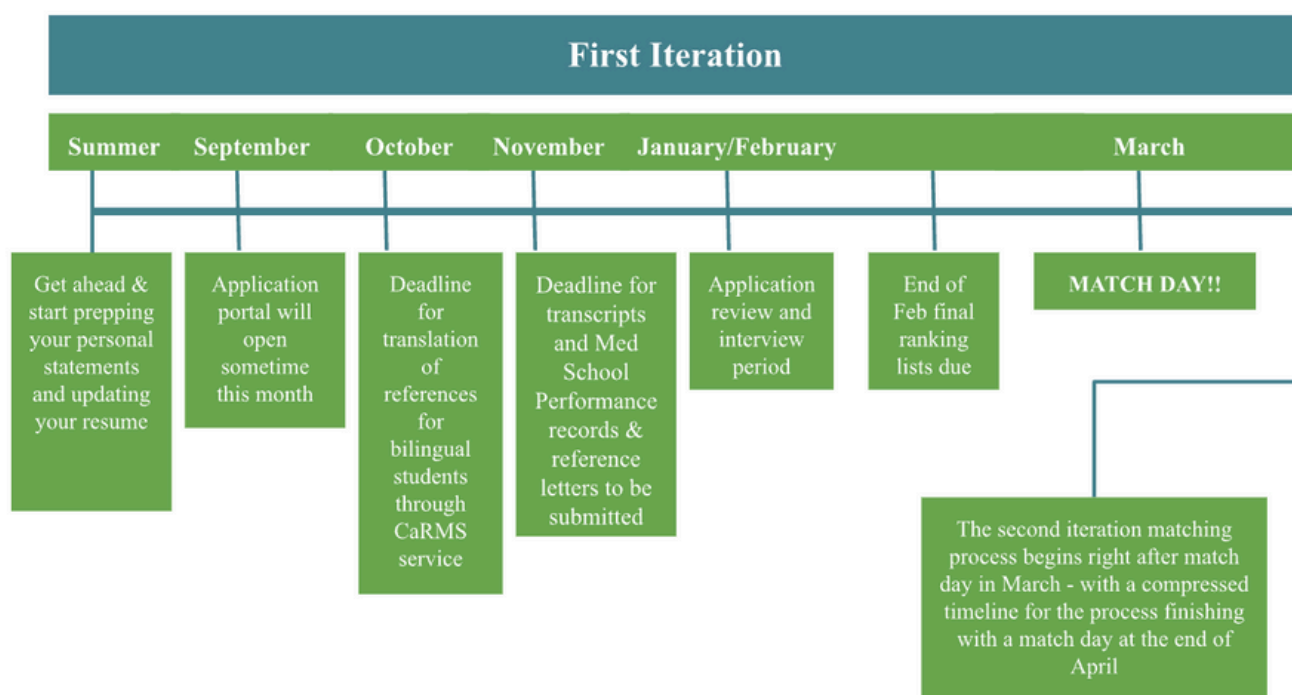


DO YOU WANT TO APPLY TO THE SAME PROGRAM AS YOUR PARTNER?

Ranking lists have tools that allow you and your spouse or partner to submit your ranked residency programs as a pair. Only one ranking list is submitted, but this can create drawbacks, slightly reducing the chances of a successful match.

ASSOCIATED COSTS

Even after all this time, applying to residency programs still costs money. You will need to budget for registration and test fees, which total over \$1000, and travel costs for interviews.



July 1st is the Medical New Year! This is when you will begin as a resident physician.

WHAT IF I DON'T MATCH TO A RESIDENCY PROGRAM?

Suppose you do not match in the second iteration process. In that case, you can participate in the post-match process (PMP), which allows unmatched applicants to apply to programs that are still considering applicants. Programs are not obligated to participate in this application process. Available residency positions will be listed in the post-match process program description and can be added or removed anytime. This matching process has no cost, nor does it involve any ranking.

Residency	Length (years)
Anesthesiology	5
Cardiac Surgery	6
Community Medicine/Public Health and Preventative Medicine	5
Dermatology	5
Diagnostic Radiology	5
Emergency Medicine	3-5
Family Medicine	2-3
General Surgery	5-6
Internal Medicine	4-6
Pathology/Laboratory Medicine	4-5
Medical Genetics	5
Neurosurgery	6+
OB/GYN	5
Ophthalmology	5
Otolaryngology	5
Pediatrics	4
Physical Medicine and Rehab	5
Plastic Surgery	5
Psychiatry	4-5
Rural Family Med	2-3
Urology	5

LENGTH OF RESIDENCY

Residency lengths and structures depend on your chosen specialty. However, the first year after graduating from medical school—post-graduate year 1 (PGY1), is usually dedicated to general clinical acclimation in more broad fields like general surgery and internal medicine. After PGY1, programs begin to specialize more; some may refer to this as the internship year.

CAN I TRANSFER RESIDENCY PROGRAMS?

In short, yes. Principles of transfer from Dalhousie Postgraduate Medical Education:

1. Residents must meet with the Associate Dean of Postgraduate Medicine before requesting a transfer.
2. The resident must have a valid and substantive reason for switching programs. This process usually occurs after appropriate exposure to the discipline.
3. Allocations for the training programs are determined by physician resource needs. No program should train residents beyond these needs, and physician resource needs will be considered before allowing any transfer.
4. Confidentiality should be maintained for as long as possible.
5. No program will be required to accept a postgraduate trainee who does not meet the program's admission criteria or for whom adequate training resources are unavailable.
6. Funds for postgraduate training will follow the resident.
7. Negative impacts on programs resulting from transfers should be minimized. This may require compensatory transfers of entry positions in subsequent years.
8. The donor program should be given three months' notice of a trainee leaving the program.

PROCEDURE FOR TRANSFER (DALHOUSIE)

1. At orientation, all residents will be notified of this policy's availability and the proper procedures for carrying it out.
2. Residents must first confidentially apply to the Postgraduate Office with a request to switch to a specific program within this university.
3. The appropriate Program Director is then notified regarding any requests of a resident to transfer into that program.
4. A formal application process will then be undertaken. The potential recipient Residency Program Committee(s) shall proceed with an appropriate process to determine the resident's acceptability, generally completed within 30 days of the program director(s) being notified of the resident's transfer request.
5. Evaluations from the program in which the resident currently has a position should be made available to the program to which the resident is applying. Consideration should be given to the possibility of references being supplied. All possible mechanisms should be entertained to maintain confidentiality. However, this must be balanced against the need of the accepting program to have good recent information on the candidate.
6. Through this procedure, applicants must meet all of the criteria the program typically sets out. There is no obligation to accept the resident.
7. Suppose the resident is entirely acceptable and meets all of the criteria laid out by the accepting program. In that case, it is then up to the program directors of each discipline to decide whether a position will be offered. Suppose no vacancy exists in the program to which the resident is transferring. In that case, adequate funding from the donating program to cover the rest of the residents' training must be transferred to the receiving program.
8. Suppose additional negotiations are required between the program directors of the donating and recipient programs regarding possible compensation or exchange of entry positions. In that case, these must be completed and agreed to before the transfer is completed. The program directors may utilize the Associate Dean, PGME, to facilitate such discussion and resolution.
9. The Postgraduate Office will then be notified of the program decision. Sufficient time should be allocated to allow for future planning of CaRMS positions and will not interfere with the CaRMS interview process.
10. The donor program should be given three months' notice of a resident's departure to join a new program.

REQUIRED DOCUMENTATION FOR A RESIDENT TRANSFER (DALHOUSIE)

1. A resident seeking a transfer must provide their current program with a letter requesting release from the program and the date of release.
2. In addition, the resident will need to provide their current program a copy of the letter of offer to their new training program, with the official start date noted.
3. The current program must provide a written letter of release for their trainee with the finalized end date agreed upon by all parties.
4. The Dalhousie Postgraduate Medical Education office requires three weeks to process a transfer from the final date that copies of all the necessary documentation regarding the transfer have been received.

STARTING A FAMILY DURING YOUR RESIDENCY?

Each province and Residency Program will have unique policies and supports that you should look into. However, starting or continuing to build your family during medical residency is not uncommon. If you are pregnant, or your partner is, and you are planning on taking parental leave, it is recommended that you notify your residency program director early on. Birth mothers are advised to alert residency directors before the end of their first trimester of pregnancy to plan rotations, maternity leave, and coverage of calls during the second and third trimesters. Most programs allow up to one year of parental leave, though leave policies differ slightly between programs.

Physicians who wish to spend time with their newborn babies or newly adopted children can apply for parental leave through the Doctors Nova Scotia (DNS) Parental Leave Program.

This program includes \$2000/week for 26 consecutive weeks or a lengthened leave of up to 52 weeks, with the benefit spread over the timespan. Members will be eligible for this benefit as long as they reside in Nova Scotia and have billed at least \$50,000 in the 12 months preceding the baby's date of birth or the date of taking over care of an adopted child. In two-physician families, both parents are eligible for parental leave.



PART-TIME RESIDENCY TRAINING

For the most part, residency programs are full-time training; however, part-time residency programs may be desirable or necessary to accommodate personal responsibilities, family accommodations, disabilities, illness, or job sharing with a spouse for childcare.

Logistical considerations that may be encountered in establishing part-time residency programs include:

- Scheduling problems for rotations
- Incomplete or inconsistent educational experiences
- Lack of peer group support
- Devolved responsibility to others in the training program
- Service needs not met
- Financial implications
- Lack of commitment of trainee
- Loss of appreciation for the continuity of the disease process

Applications for part-time residency training may be considered under exceptional circumstances.

RESIDENT WELLNESS

The Office of Resident Affairs at Dalhousie offers support and assistance to postgraduate medical students (residents) in family med and specialty training programs across the Maritimes. This includes counselling, coaching, facilitation of referrals to other healthcare providers, and education about resident wellness.



Healthy Pictou County, and many other communities across residency sites and the province want our resident to succeed and often participate and support various ways to ensure our resident are happy, healthy and supported.

MARITIME RESIDENT DOCTORS

Established in 1969, Maritime Resident Doctors represents the interests of over 600 resident physicians training at Dalhousie University. In addition to negotiating the Collective Agreement and improving working conditions, Maritime Resident Doctors works constantly to improve the well-being of its members. Some of our larger well-being initiatives include our regular membership emails, monthly social, recreational and family functions, information seminars, an annual bursary program, and lots more.

Learn more at: www.maritimeresidentdoctors.ca



Pathways for

Internationally Trained Doctors

Multiple programs work to aid internationally educated physicians in transitioning their practice to Nova Scotia:

- The [Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia \(ISANS\)](#) is a community organization with a bridging program to help IMGs, offering employment counselling and coaching, pathways to licensure, and study groups. It has created an [Orientation for International Medical Graduates](#)
- Discuss [return of service agreements \(ROS\)](#) with Doctors Nova Scotia
- [Dalhousie Medical School Postgraduate Medical Education](#) lists residency positions in Canada
- [Dalhousie University Global Health Office](#) explores studying at [Dalhousie Medical School](#) and training abroad
- The provincial government's [International Medical Graduates recruitment resources](#) help assess qualifications
- [Nova Scotia Health \(NSH\)](#) lists job opportunities and resources for International Medical Graduates
- The [Canadian Resident Matching Service \(CaRMS\)](#) provides information about the residency matching process in each province
- The [College of Physicians and Surgeons of Nova Scotia](#) provides information about licensing in Nova Scotia and practice readiness assessments.

COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS AND SURGEONS DEFINED LICENSURE

If you have studied medicine outside of Canada, you are considered an International Medical Graduate (IMG). This includes Canadians who studied medicine abroad. The Medical Act requires physicians to be trained outside of Canada to practice with a "defined licence" and be under supervision. To get a defined license, specific requirements must be met.

TO OBTAIN A DEFINED LICENSE:

1. Applicants need to hold a recognized medical degree from a school listed in the World Directory of Medical Schools

2. Canadian certification exam eligibility: applicants must have certification or eligibility to challenge the Canadian certification examinations through one of the following paths:

Specialties (other than Family Medicine)

- a) Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada approved the jurisdiction route to certification.
- b) Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada Practice Eligibility Route (PER) to certification
- c) A successful Practice Ready Assessment in a specialty (other than Family Medicine)
- d) Collège des médecins du Québec

Subspecialties with a primary specialty in Internal Medicine

- e) SEAP Affiliate Status with the Royal College granted through the successful completion of a Subspecialist Examination Affiliate Program (SEAP) together with a successful Practice Ready Assessment in Internal Medicine

Family Medicine

- f) College of Family Physicians of Canada
- g) A Successful Practice Ready Assessment in Family Medicine
- h) Collège des médecins du Québec

Currently, the College will accept applicants registered and currently licensed in specific jurisdictions listed below instead of Canadian certification exam eligibility.

Jurisdictions:

- General Medical Council in the United Kingdom
- Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency
- Medical Council of New Zealand

3. Need a Letter of Offer - Physicians who meet the above requirements must provide the college with a letter of offer from Nova Scotia Health or the IWK Health Centre before their defined license will be issued.

See the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Nova Scotia website for conditions of the defined license.

New Licensing Pathway	What's Changed
<p>Provides a comprehensive orientation program for physicians.</p> <p>Physicians trained outside of Canada have identified the need for more robust orientation programming to support their integration into medical practice in the Canadian context.</p>	<p>This is a new comprehensive and collaborative orientation program to help physicians practicing in Canada for the first time succeed.</p>
<p>Reduces the required time physicians on a defined license must practice under supervision by 60%.</p> <p>Research shows the majority of practice areas of concern are identified and addressed in the first nine months of supervision.</p>	<p>The minimum supervision period is 6 months. The maximum supervision period has been reduced from 60 months to 20 months.</p>
<p>Enables faster decisions regarding long-term licensure based on demonstrated competency.</p> <p>After 6 months:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - A physician may be eligible for a long-term restricted licence - A full licence can be obtained upon receiving a pass-standing on certification exams 	<p>A focus on demonstrated competency instead of certification, with more concentrated supervision, robust assessment, and faster licensure decisions.</p> <p>Licensing decisions as soon as 6 months:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Long-term independent licensure by way of a Restricted License without certification - A full license can be obtained anytime during or following the 6 months by receiving a pass-standing on certification exams

IMG CLERKSHIP PROGRAM (DALHOUSIE)

The IMG Clerkship Program admits two qualified candidates for clerkship at Dalhousie Medical School's Halifax campus (third and fourth year medical students). Upon completing this program, students will be eligible for entry into the first round of the CaRMS matching system as Dalhousie graduates. Requirements for this include proof of physical living in Nova Scotia for at least 12 consecutive months (1 year) before the application deadline; must have graduated from an international school or college listed in the international education directory; English language proficiency; Completed the Medical Council of Canada Examination (MCCEQ) Part 1; Complete the National Collaboration Assessment (NAC) and maintain a passing grade; and completion of the online application form.

IMG NOVA SCOTIA RESIDENCY

International Medical Graduates (IMGs) stream residency applicants will require a 3-year Return of Service (ROS) commitment when applying for Dalhousie residency positions. Individuals who match in a ROS stream must sign a return-of-service contract before starting their residency with the agency sponsoring the position.

- IMG applicants with a proven connection to Nova Scotia will be considered in the third stream of the first iteration of the CaRMS matching process
- IMG applicants with a proven connection to New Brunswick will be considered in the fourth stream of the first iteration of the CaRMS matching process
- IMG positions that go unmatched in the first iteration are not eligible for Canadian Medical Graduates to apply in the second iteration
- Unfilled CMG positions in the first iteration do not require a ROS
- In 2023, Nova Scotia added ten more of the available residency spots to be designated to international medical graduates with a Nova Scotia connection

FINANCIAL AID FOR IMGs

The McCarthy/Stewart International Medical Graduate Grant provides \$10,000 in financial support to up to 10 successful applicants each year.

Physicians who relocate to Nova Scotia from other regions of the world face significant financial barriers. Thus, the McCarthy/Stewart grant has been made available to assist incoming international medical graduates financially.

This grant was made in a memorandum by Dr. Graham Stewart's late wife, Julia McCarthy. Dr. Stewart was an IMG who joined the Nova Scotia Healthcare system after completing medical school in Scotland. However, during his journey, he faced many financial barriers during the transition to practice. With this grant, Julia hoped to reduce the stress of the monetary obstacles for international medical graduates coming to practice in Nova Scotia.

Eligibility:

- Be considered an IMG.
- Have signed a contract to practise in Nova Scotia and have successfully completed the Nova Scotia Practice Ready Assessment Program (applicants must be within the first two years of practice)
- Wish to continue practicing in Nova Scotia long-term



A selection committee will evaluate applications based on factors including:

- Identified financial need
- Intention to practice in Nova Scotia
- Perceived ability of applicants to reach full licensure based on where they are in the process

The grant recipients must provide banking information and participate in the program evaluation to help inform future grant application processes.

BARRIERS TO SUCCESS IDENTIFIED BY MEDICAL STUDENTS

- Lacking connections with people who have been through the application process/who are in the medical field
- Being uninformed: the application process has so many nuances, making navigating difficult when lacking connections
- Cost of the application cycle \$\$\$
- Scheduling studying for MCAT & working full/part-time is hard
- Mature student: Having to re-learn how you learn to become efficient with study techniques

MED STUDENTS ADVICE FOR SUPPORTING MENTAL WELLNESS

“The medical school application process can be very stressful, so it’s important to prioritize your mental health to avoid burnout. What helped me, especially during my MCAT studying, was scheduling time off. I would make sure to take at least one day a week off where I could relax, spend time with friends/family, etc. It is a long process, and giving yourself a break is important. I also found it helpful to take proper study breaks on long study days. It’s easy to just scroll on your phone, but I liked to get outside if possible and do something to feel refreshed when I returned to study. Another hard time during the application cycle is post-interview while you are waiting to hear if you got in. This can be months, and it can be stressful. To keep my mind off things, I tried to fill my free time doing hobbies and seeing friends and family so that I wouldn’t just sit there and stress.”



“

“My advice is to find someone going through the exact same thing, it doesn't have to be medicine any application process will stress applicants out equally, but the more similar you have in common, the more you can share, complain, and help each other out. Also, remain open-minded, the line between acceptance, waitlist, and rejection is microscopic, and one result over another does not define you as an applicant.”

“Don't make medicine and being pre-med your whole identity to the point where everything you do revolves around this goal. Maintain hobbies and activities that have nothing to do with medicine. Volunteer with non-medical-related organizations, if that's what you feel passionate about. Explore other career options. There are many ways to lead a fulfilling life and positively impact the world outside of being a physician.”

“SLEEP. For some reason, people think it's okay to pull all-nighters and cram for the MCAT, or to finish their applications, etc. Sleep, exercise, and taking time for yourself is so important.”



SOCIAL MEDIA RESOURCES TO FOLLOW

Instagram:

- @dalmedwell
- @northnovafm
- @dalglobalhealth
- @novascotiahealthyauthority
- @morethanmedicinens
- @dalhousieu
- @dalmedstudentsociety
- @dalmed_globalhealthinitiative
- @maritime_resident_doctors

Facebook:

- Aberdeen Health Foundation
- Nova Scotia Health
- Sutherland Harris Memorial Hospital Foundation
- Doctors Nova Scotia
- Maritime Resident Doctors



NOTICED SOMETHING WE SHOULD ADD?

Drop a note to hello@healthypictoucounty.ca - we'd love your feedback to continually improve this resource.