

Considering Medical School?

Are you considering Medical School and a career in the medical field?

The following information is an initial guide for undergraduate students who are interested in a possible career as a medical doctor. Basic information about what to expect as you prepare to apply to medical schools is provided, along with advice and guidance as you explore this career path. There is no “one” formula for getting into medical school, so consider exploring and developing your interests instead of trying to fit a “pre-med” mold.

What do I need to do if I am considering medical school?

First, it is important to be clear about your intentions. Why do you want to pursue medical school? Do you have a sense of your strengths and interests related to this field?

- **Reflecting** on yourself is an important first step. Try not to feel pressured by friends, family or what peers are doing or saying. Set realistic and attainable goals for yourself, as applying to medical school is a very important decision which requires time and dedication. The Student Success Centre has career counselling supports for all undergraduate students from all faculties.
- **Exploring** the medical profession can help you get a real sense of the career field and the education path. Using reliable career information databases and talking to people in the field can help you understand how you might bring your strengths to the field and what is required to enter and succeed in the field. To help you learn about the profession, the [Go Beyond Google and Career Conversations section of our website](#) has resources to support you with this.
- **Gather detailed information** about each program and school. There is no shortcut for this, it requires time to review each program and school's guidelines, descriptions, and application procedures. Take careful notes for yourself to stay organized and refer to throughout the application process.

- When ready - Apply! The time it takes to apply varies for each person. Give yourself enough time to complete your application(s) based on what works best for your time and schedule.

Where do I find information about medical schools?

- In Ontario, the application process is centralized through [OMSAS](#) and for other Canadian universities you would apply to each school separately.
- Try not to get overwhelmed by all the specifics of the application process prematurely, however if you have decided to aim for medical school it is important to know what is needed. Attend Medical School information sessions to get direct information about the programs and selection criteria; understand the [competencies required](#) for the profession.

What do I need to know about medical schools in general?

- Admissions requirements vary for each school, including prerequisite undergraduate courses, if any, so be sure to [investigate each school](#) directly before making undergraduate decisions. Don't assume.
- If schools have prerequisite courses, they generally request a combination of life sciences, humanities and social sciences. If you are considering medical school abroad, you might find more academic requirements than what is typical for Canadian medical schools.
- Academic standing is a very important factor in this highly competitive application process. To remain competitive, aim for consistently high grades; A-range grades (10's, 11's and 12's on McMaster's 12-point scale). But each Ontario medical school has a different formula for calculating their admissions GPA.
- As you work on building strong academic skills, also ensure you are developing skills and competencies outside of classes. Consider volunteering, extra-curriculars, and employment opportunities to start to build competencies for the profession. Review the

CanMed Roles as a guide, it outlines the roles that physicians take on, such as: Medical Expert, Communicator, Collaborator, Leader, Health Advocate, Scholar and Professional.

- References are an important consideration in the application process. Build relationships with people who have observed you regularly such as work and volunteer supervisors, course instructors, and research supervisors.
- Most schools will require the MCAT standardized test as part of their admissions selection process. Learn about the MCAT and get familiar with registration dates and test offering dates to plan when the best time is for you to prepare for and take the MCAT.
- The costs for MCAT, applications, travel for interviews, tuition fees, etc. add up, so be sure to factor in costs as part of your consideration.
- There are access streams for some schools which provide equity deserving opportunity for under-represented groups. This might also include support for costs/fees.

What do I need to do to apply?

Review the OMSAS website on how to apply to Ontario Medical Schools

- Make a list of schools that you are interested in and make note of deadlines and requirements.
 - Use the Further Ed Program Organizer (Excel) to outline your program options
- Write down important dates and deadlines and give yourself enough time to prepare all components of your application.
- Complete undergraduate studies
 - The requirement is 3 years of undergraduate education or Honours degree, depending on the school.
 - Some schools might require certain prerequisite courses. Ensure that you are checking the OMSAS website, as well as each program's requirements individually.
- Supplemental questions and CASPer test
 - These may involve short answers, short essays, or the CASPer test which are meant to determine your suitability for the medical program. Writing short

essays or responding to supplemental questions are often the most time-consuming part of the application process. It is important to make the time to be thoughtful and articulate with your responses.

- ❑ Check each school's GPA requirements
 - Review how [OMSAS calculates your GPA](#) to avoid confusion.
 - Be sure to check how each school evaluates your marks, they can differ.
- ❑ You will need to write and [release scores](#) of the MCAT to OMSAS
 - More information on the MCAT is provided later in this tip sheet
- ❑ Programs will require letters of reference
 - For Ontario programs, you will need up to 3 references. The requirement listed on the [OMSAS website](#) is one academic or employment-related referee, one non-academic referee and one referee of your choosing.
 - Review the [How to Ask for Grad School References \(PDF\)](#) tip sheet to learn more about asking for references.
- ❑ Sketch/Verifier Requirements
 - The [Autobiographical Sketch \(ABS\)](#) is a detailed and comprehensive list of your activities since age 16, within the following categories: employment, volunteer activities, extracurricular activities, awards and accomplishments, research and other.
 - For each of these activities you must have a [verifier](#), which is a record of names, addresses, telephone numbers and email addresses of contacts that can verify your involvement in that activity.
 - Consider volunteering or gaining experience through clubs, community groups, organizations or working with professors. Supports to help you can be found through [Student Success Centre's Experiential team](#).
- ❑ Review the [transcript requirements](#) stated by OMSAS and each school individually.

Where can I get information about the Medical College Admissions Test and how can I prepare?

- Many medical schools require applicants to write the MCAT, a standardized exam covering four sections:
 - Biological and Biochemical Foundations of Living Systems
 - Chemical and Physical Foundations of Biological Systems
 - Psychological, Social, and Biological Foundations of Behavior; and
 - Critical Analysis and Reasoning Skills.
- You can find an overview of each of the sections on the AAMC website
- Almost all U.S. medical schools and many Canadian schools require you to submit MCAT exam scores. Many schools do not accept MCAT exam scores that are more than three years old.
- Plan accordingly to write it at least 3 weeks before the admissions deadline so you can meet the OMSAS deadline for MCAT scores to be released.
- Some students prefer self-studying from textbooks while others have more success taking a preparatory course (Ex. Oxford Seminars, Kaplan, Princeton). The AAMC provides some free planning and study resources. Khan Academy also provides a free online self-study guide.

What are some tips for when I am ready to apply to Ontario Medical schools?

- While information surrounding the success of preparing for the CASPer test is varied, it is recommended that you start practicing early and get familiar with the structure of the test.
- Knowledge in the variety of topics and issues affecting the Canadian health care system will not only help you in interviews, but also make you a more knowledgeable applicant; get to know Public Health in Canada and follow health-related news.
- Consider the timing that is best for you. Many students will apply after they have completed their undergraduate degree so they can apply with a stronger application, or wait until they are personally ready (financially, or otherwise).

- Be strategic with which schools/programs you are a stronger candidate. Understanding how each program varies with their application requirements can help you be effective in your applications.
- Be sure to research access streams and understand the support each program offers for student accommodation.

What are my options for studying abroad?

- Some students choose to apply to International medical schools in the United States, the Caribbean and beyond, to increase their chances of being accepted.
- A principal concern for students studying abroad with plans of returning to Canada should be securing a residency placement in Canada upon graduation from medical school. These residency spots are competitive for International students, so it is very important to [conduct extensive research](#) if you are considering studying medicine abroad.
- You can refer to the Tip Sheet about Medical School Abroad to provide more details.

What are other career options in this field?

- Medical school acceptances are very competitive, and it's a good idea to consider alternate options. There are many career possibilities for everyone, and fulfilling careers tend to evolve through being open to new opportunities, exploring interests, taking risks, and being flexible. The Student Success Centre can help you explore career paths, healthcare-related or otherwise through [career counselling, e-career planning essential program, or Alternatives to Medical School presentation](#).
- Research other education pathways such as Public Health or Health Care Administration, which will allow you to contribute to the health care field. Or you can explore alternative healthcare professions through the range of [regulated healthcare roles](#).

Where can I find help from McMaster during this process?

- We are here for you. For assistance with all-things further education, feel free to contact to the [Student Success Centre](#) for support. We offer workshops, one-on-one appointments, research and application support, interview preparation and many more services.

What resources can help me academically?

- As a McMaster student, you have access to academic coaching and writing advising to help you be successful in your studies and build academic skills for further studies. Please contact the [Student Success Centre's Writing and Academic Skills Services](#) for support.

Additional resources

- [Guide to Grad School \(PDF\)](#)
- [Volunteer: Places of Interest \(PDF\)](#)
- [Why Volunteer? \(PDF\)](#)
- [More Student Success resources](#)
- Attend the [Grad and Professional School Fair](#) offered at McMaster in the beginning of the fall term.