

# Quick Guides to the Health Professions

## Physicians

### *What is a physician?*

A physician is a health professional licensed to practise medicine, the "art and science of the diagnosis and treatment of disease and the maintenance of health." Physicians often practise medicine within a patient care team that includes other healthcare professionals.

In addition to a medical degree, physicians may take specific training to specialize in a particular discipline (e.g., pediatrics). Surgeons are physicians who are specially trained to perform medical operations. Osteopathy is a non-invasive practice focusing on treating and strengthening the joints, muscles, and spine to improve overall health.

### *What do physicians do?*

Physicians assess patients by taking their medical history and performing physical examinations. A physician may order diagnostic tests to further investigate a patient's medical condition. Once a diagnosis is reached, the physician may prescribe medication or suggest other treatments or interventions. Physicians often counsel patients on preventative medicine, providing advice on proper nutrition, exercise and other aspects of a healthy lifestyle.

### *Where do physicians work?*

Physicians work in a variety of settings including family health teams, walk-in clinics, private practices, hospitals, primary care networks, universities, and long-term care facilities.

### *Education and preparation*

Medicine is offered as a graduate

program in Canada. Completion of a Baccalaureate degree is required before entrance to the 3-4 year accredited medical program. After graduation, 2-7 years of postgraduate training is required, depending on the type of practice.

### *Licensure*

The College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta licenses Alberta physicians. Before issuing a practice permit, the College obtains Certificates of Professional Conduct and checks references and discipline history. Practice permits are renewed annually.

### *Professional organizations*

College of Family Physicians of Canada  
<http://cfpc.ca>

College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta  
<http://cpsa.ca>

Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada  
<http://royalcollege.ca>

Alberta Medical Association  
<http://albertadoctors.org>

Canadian Medical Association  
<http://cma.ca>

Medical Council of Canada  
<http://www.mcc.ca>

### *Contributors to this guide*

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Office of Interprofessional Education and Practice, Western University Canada  
<https://www.uwo.ca/fhs/education/ipe/index.html>



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