


Practicing Medicine

in Alberta, Canada



Alberta, Canada
Medical Practice in Alberta
Obtaining a licence

Dr. Peter Senior



Alberta, Canada is one of the most vibrant, dynamic and exciting locations in the world, which makes it the perfect setting for you and your family to fulfill your dreams.

ALBERTA, CANADA

The more you learn about Alberta, Canada, the more there is to like. Enjoy excellent public education, world-class universal health care and outdoor adventure all year long.

Alberta offers doctors and other health professionals a wealth of opportunities, both challenging and rewarding. Whether you want to further your career in a beautiful rural community or a vibrant cosmopolitan city, Alberta offers the right fit.

Salaries are on par with the U.K., but housing and living costs are considerably lower. Property costs in Alberta average around half of those in the U.K..

Plus, Alberta's education system is one of the best in North America and nearly free up to the university level.

With the sunniest climate in Canada and four distinct seasons, Albertans enjoy countless opportunities to experience a variety of sports, recreational and cultural activities all year round.

It is a place where you can find the perfect balance between a rewarding practice and a fulfilling quality of life. Welcome to Alberta — a whole new world of opportunity.



“Having financial freedom here, my family and I are able to afford the hobbies and leisure activities we enjoy... We eat out regularly, take holidays and I afford fine housing and new cars. If you are a UK doctor interested in spreading your work horizons, improving your remuneration and greatly improving your standard of living – give Alberta a try.”

- Dr. David Hanton, GP who now lives in Castor, Alberta, a farming community in the Prairies (picture above)

MEDICAL PRACTICE IN ALBERTA

How is health care delivered in Alberta?

Canada’s national health insurance program, often referred to as Medicare, is designed to ensure all residents have reasonable access to medically necessary hospital and physician services on a prepaid basis. In Alberta, Alberta Health Services (AHS), a province-wide hospital/primary care trust is tasked with coordinating the delivery of health supports and services.

Framed by the national Canada Health Act, the principles governing our health care system reflect Canadian values of equity and solidarity.

In Canada, each of our 10 provinces and three territories separately license general practitioners and specialists. For Alberta, the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta (CPSA) is the relevant body that regulates general practitioners/family physicians and specialists.

How large is Alberta’s health care system and what are the opportunities?

At any given time, there are more than 7,700 licensed and practicing doctors in Alberta serving its 3.7 million residents. Doctors in Alberta benefit from stable, collaborative relationships amongst the profession, the Alberta Medical Association (AMA), Alberta Health Services (AHS) and the provincial government.

Practice opportunities range from smaller cities (less than 10,000 population), towns (1,000-10,000 population) and villages (300-1,000 population) with a wide range of amenities and services, larger regional and teaching centres (30,000-90,000 population) in northern, central and southern Alberta, to the province’s two largest metropolitan cities of Edmonton, the provincial capital, and Calgary (each in excess of one million population).

“My family all enjoy the wonderful outdoor opportunities, the standard of living and the general quality of life. Overall, things are much cheaper here and are of better quality.”

- Dr. Joy McLean, GP who moved from the UK to work in Banff, Alberta, in the beautiful Rocky Mountains (picture right)



How do physicians in Alberta get paid?

Most doctors practicing in Alberta are independent contractors, typically members of medical practice groups. Mostly, doctors are paid on a **fee-for-service (FFS)** basis directly from Alberta Health and Wellness, the provincial department of health, according to a payment scheme negotiated by the profession. In addition, doctors are able to earn income from other public (e.g. worker compensation) and private (e.g. automobile insurance) payers.

Doctors in Alberta also enjoy **innovative payment arrangements** including Primary Care Networks (PCNs) and alternative payment plans (i.e. payment schemes other than FFS), a provincial locum service, office electronic medical record (EMR) support, and on-call payment schemes.

Alberta doctors working in rural, remote and northern Alberta cities, towns and villages also have access to a **Clinical Stabilization Initiative** which offers fixed payments and FFS top-ups as well as a yearly lump sum payment for every year of practice in the province.

Pensions in Canada are a mixture of government (Canada Pension Plan) and private (Registered Retirement Savings Plans), and in Canada, doctors can also incorporate, which effectively shields their income tax contributions.

What is the scope of practice for physicians in Alberta?

General practice in Alberta covers a broader scope than is usual in the U.K., it is more independent (i.e. there is no need to do telephone triage) is less guideline-driven, and offers the opportunity to manage hospital in-patients and be involved with intrapartum obstetrics.

Hospitals throughout the province, including most rural hospitals, are well equipped. Many offer surgical services, a full range of diagnostic and therapeutic services, and carry the latest CT scanners and ultrasound equipment.

Rural family doctors also provide coverage to the Accident and Emergency (A&E) Department. Home visits are unusual, except for palliative care, as patients requiring medical attention when clinics are closed typically attend the A&E department of their local hospital. Many family doctors have had additional training in fields such as surgery, anaesthesia or obstetrics and provide these additional skills to their communities.

The range of practice for specialists is similar to the U.K., although Residents (Registrars/Senior House Officers) work mainly in the province's regional cities and the tertiary care centres in Edmonton and Calgary.



What support services are available?

Even in rural cities, towns and villages, expert advice is immediately available via the province's **Referral, Access, Advice, Placement, Information and Destination (RAAPID)** telephone support services. RAAPID is a single point of entry for doctors outside the tertiary centres in Edmonton and Calgary to facilitate critical and/or urgent transfers or consultations.

The provincial air ambulance service transports several thousand patients annually from one hospital to another for a higher level of care, or from an accident scene to hospital. Air ambulance care attendants include paramedics, nurses, respiratory technologists and physicians. Flight services which are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and every day of the year, are conducted by 14 dedicated aircrafts (12 airplanes and two helicopters).

Telehealth uses videoconferencing technology to connect Albertans with the best possible health care, no matter where they live. It connects patients and health care providers securely and confidentially by transmitting pictures, voices and information so effective decisions about health care can be made.

The Alberta Rural Physician Action Plan (RPAP) is an independent, not-for-profit company funded by Alberta Health and Wellness. RPAP provides recruitment and retention supports at no cost to doctors and their families who practice outside the metropolitan centres of Edmonton and Calgary. RPAP provides rural doctors with access to:

- The **Virtual Library** provides rural doctors with rapid access to reliable, up-to-date medical information in addition to online medical textbooks and journals, plus information about other clinical resources, continuing medical education, computer technology, office management and rural practice.
- The **Enrichment Program** assists doctors in rural or regional communities to upgrade existing skills or gain new skills to meet the medical needs of the community or surrounding areas.
- **General Emergency Medicine Skills (GEMS)** provides an online emergency skills training experience with a hands-on simulation component that enables rural doctors to upgrade accident and emergency skills at work or at home.

The **Alberta Medical Association (AMA)** provides doctors with access to a number of negotiated benefits to support them.

- An annual grant is available for **continuing medical education**.
- Reimbursement for **medical malpractice costs** subject to a \$1,000 deductible is provided through the Canadian Medical Protective Association (CMPA). For example, a doctor practicing obstetrics (labour and delivery) and some anaesthesia, surgery and shifts in the Accident and Emergency Department would pay an annual CMPA membership fee of \$4,020, of which all but \$1,000 would be rebated.
- A **Parental Leave Program** provides \$1,000 per week for up to 17 weeks to doctor-parents of a newborn or newly adopted child.

The AMA also provides a wide range of member benefits including insurance, practice management advice, counselling/treatment support, financial planning and funds management.



Is the concept of primary care supported?

Primary Care Networks (PCN) are very popular in Alberta; in fact, more than 70 per cent of all doctors in the province are part of PCNs. In a PCN, a group of doctors partner with other health care professionals and AHS to coordinate health services for patients in their geographic area. A PCN can be comprised of one clinic with many doctors, health professionals and support staff, or several doctors and health professionals in several clinics across a geographic area. Each network has the flexibility to develop programs and to provide services in a way that works locally to meet the specific needs of patients.

Are there physician locum services available?

As part of its goal to create and maintain environments that encourage retention of rural doctors by improving their personal lifestyle, Alberta Medical Association Physician Locum Services (PLS) provides locum relief to doctors practicing in eligible communities in rural Alberta. PLS has three programs for rural doctors: the **Regular Locum Program**, which provides weekend and weekday office and emergency room coverage; the **Weekend Locum Program** and the **Seniors Weekend Program** (both funded through RPAP), which provide weekend coverage of rural Accident and Emergency Departments. In addition, the **Specialist Locum Program** provides periodic relief for specialist doctors practicing in Alberta's regional centres.



Requirements for Family Medicine

To practice either full time or as a locum in Alberta, you must be eligible for a licence as determined by the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta (CPSA). To help you determine if you may be eligible for a licence, answer the following questions and refer to www.tinyurl.com/3qk6htt.

- Are you currently practicing medicine as a General Practitioner/Family Doctor?
- Do you have a Medical Degree from an institution listed International Medical Education Directory? <https://imed.faimer.org>
- Do you have 24 months of postgraduate residency training in family medicine (which includes the following)?
 - Three** of the following mandatory rotations:
 - Pediatrics (Eight weeks)
 - Obstetrics and Gynecology (Eight weeks)
 - Internal Medicine (Eight weeks)
 - Surgery (Eight weeks)
 - Four months of community-based primary care in a family medicine setting?
- Did you pass the Medical Council of Canada Evaluating Exam (MCCEE)? www.mcc.ca/en/exams/ee
- Do you hold one of the following?
 - Certificate of Completion of Training (CCT)
 - Joint Committee on Postgraduate Training for General Practice (JCPTGP)

Requirements for Specialty Practice

In order to practice either full-time or as a locum in Alberta you must be eligible for a licence as determined by the CPSA. To help you determine if you may be eligible for a licence, please answer the following questions.

- Are you currently practicing medicine in your specialty?
- Do you have a Medical Degree from an institution listed in the International Medical Education Directory? <https://imed.faimer.org>
- Did you pass the Medical Council of Canada Evaluating Exam (MCCEE)? www.mcc.ca/en/exams/ee
- Do you have specialty certification and recognition in the discipline of training by another medical regulatory authority?
- Do you hold one of the following?
 - Certificate of Completion of Training (CCT)
 - Certificate of Completion of Specialist Training (CCST)

If you have answered **yes** to all of the above questions, you **may** be eligible for a licence in Alberta.



Registration Process to Obtain a Licence (Medical Practice Permit) in Alberta

All doctors who wish to practice in Alberta must be licensed by the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta (CPSA). For more information, visit www.tinyurl.com/3qk6htt.

There are three steps in the registration process for physicians who have not previously practiced in Alberta: 1. Eligibility Review, 2. Application for Registration, and 3. Registration e-Appointment including payment of fees as appropriate.

Step 1

- Complete the online Eligibility Review form (The eligibility review is NOT an application - it is a pre-screening process to determine eligibility to apply for an Alberta licence).
- Completed form is reviewed by CPSA. An application form for licensure is sent to eligible candidates.

Step 2

- Eligible candidates complete the Application form, and send all required documentation to the CPSA. International medical graduate (IMG) applicants must provide credential verification through the Physician Credential Registry of Canada (PCRC). www.pcrc.org
- Completed file is reviewed by CPSA. Candidates eligible for a licence will receive an Application Approved letter.
- Eligible candidates who are offered a position complete Part A and Part B of the Physician Readiness Assessment (PRA). Part A is a preliminary 90 day maximum clinical assessment by an independent assessor, and Part B is a supervised 90 day practice assessment in the recruitment location. Assessments determine whether the applicant is ready for independent practice in Alberta and failure of any part means denial of licensure. All applicants who require an assessment must have a sponsor. The sponsor is the practice or organization recruiting the candidate. www.tinyurl.com/6dau4pz

Step 3

- Once the assessments have been arranged, candidates receive instructions to complete the Electronic Appointment (eAppointment).
- Registration details are updated, and a licence (practice permit) is issued. Candidates must receive their licence before they start the assessment.

Allow a minimum of six months prior to the date a licence is desired, to complete the three step registration process. After that, approximately three months may be required to obtain valid Canadian immigration status and this is issued by the Canadian High Commission in London. www.tinyurl.com/3lu75tk

Important Licence Application Timelines

The application process to obtain a licence must be completed in a timely fashion. Inactive files result in the candidates having to submit a new Eligibility Review form and pay the applicable fee. A file is deemed inactive when there is no correspondence or activity:

- Within any six month period after the CPSA issues an Eligibility Review reply.
- Within any 12 month period after the CPSA receives your Application form.



Examinations Required for Licensure

Medical Council of Canada Evaluating Examination

(MCCEE): To practice medicine as a General Practitioner/ Family Doctor or Specialist in Alberta, you must pass the Medical Council of Canada Evaluating Exam (MCCEE). This exam can be written at 13 testing sites in the U.K. at different times throughout the year. Information about the MCCEE can be found at the Medical Council of Canada website at www.mcc.ca.

There are no other exams required for licensure.

English Language Proficiency: If English is not your first language, you may be required to submit valid IELTS or TOEFL confirming achievement of the required scores. Please consult the CPSA website for details. www.tinyurl.com/3abkn6z

Practice Readiness Assessment: U.K. family physician applicants with their CCT and MRCGP will only require a Part A assessment of up to two weeks duration. The Part B assessment is 90 days in duration and is in the practice location the candidate has been recruited to.

Steps for Relocating to Alberta

12 months to go

Researching Opportunities & Starting the Process

1. Research location and practice style preferences with the Alberta Physician Link website. View the current vacancies and sign-up for free job alerts emails. www.AlbertaPhysicianLink.ab.ca
2. All International Medical Graduates (IMG) must write the Medical Council of Canada Evaluating Exam (MCCEE) prior to licensure. The College of Physicians & Surgeons of Alberta (CPSA) requires the MCCEE results prior to you applying. If you are at all considering working in Canada then write the MCCEE www.mcc.ca.
3. As an IMG, you must complete the online (pre-screening) eligibility review form on the CPSA website to determine if you are eligible for a licence in Alberta. www.tinyurl.com/3abkn6z

4. Once you receive a response from the CPSA indicating that you may be eligible for a licence, they will send you an eligibility letter indicating the steps that need to be completed to obtain a licence. Go to the Alberta Physician Link website, register (the registration form is an online CV) and upload the eligibility letter so you can apply for positions.
5. Apply to the Physician Credential Registry of Canada (PCRC) for verification of your medical credentials. www.pcrc.org
6. You must complete the CPSA application package and submit all documents as listed in the CPSA eligibility letter.

Finding a Practice Opportunity

7. When you apply for a position, information is provided to Physician Recruiters who review your eligibility letter and Alberta Physician Link registration information.
8. Maintain regular contact with RPAP Community Physician Recruitment Consultants to help you find a position that matches your skills and preferences. consultants@rpap.ab.ca
9. Check the CPSA online tracking system to ensure the required documents and references are being received as licensure is not possible without all the paperwork in place.
10. You must request Certificates of Standing from all medical jurisdictions where you have been registered to practice or train. The CPSA requires these to be current and dated within 90 days from the date you require licensure.
11. You will be contacted directly by the Physician Recruiters for an interview if they are considering you for the post(s).
12. It is common to travel to Alberta to visit one or more communities of interest. You should inform the Physician Recruiter of the community(ies) you would like to practice in. Check that your passports are current.
13. Maintain regular contact with the Physician Recruiters and community attraction and retention committee contact (if appropriate) to facilitate/organize the site visits.



14. Once all required forms and documentation are received the completed file is reviewed by the CPSA to determine whether you qualify for a licence. Candidates eligible for a licence will receive an Application Approved letter.

Six months to go

Planning to Relocate

15. Upon securing a position, the Physician Recruiter will initiate the Practice Readiness Assessment (PRA) with the CPSA.
16. A Return in Service (RIS) contract between you and Alberta Health Services or other relevant sponsor is prepared. This contract specifies that you will provide medical services in the specified community/clinic in return for their sponsorship of the PRA and any available recruitment/relocation assistance.
17. The Physician Recruiter then applies for a Labour Market Opinion (LMO) from the Canadian government which is forwarded back to you once it is received to accompany your work permit application when it is submitted to the appropriate Canadian High Commission/Embassy. An LMO is required for the PRA and the position you secured.
18. The CPSA will inform you of the next steps for completion of your PRA. Once details of the PRA are confirmed, you will be notified by the CPSA and receive instructions to complete the eAppointment process.
19. Apply for medical malpractice insurance through Canadian Medical Protective Association (CMPA). It is important to send the application and payment before arriving in Alberta. CMPA coverage confirmation with the CPSA can be done over the phone. The Part A of the PRA cannot begin until this coverage is in place. www.cmpa.org
20. Registration details are updated, and a temporary licence for the assessment is issued.
21. Once you receive your work permit, inform the Physician Recruiter who will notify the CPSA. Part A of the PRA can now begin.
22. Consider putting your house on the market and research relocation, temporary/permanent accommodation, and supports available from your Sponsor and the community you are relocating to.
23. At this point you are sent a Medical Staff Application package. When Alberta Health Services receives the completed application, it is forwarded through the process specified in the Medical Staff Bylaws and Rules.
24. You will be sent a Consent for the Release of Information Form so additional reference checks can be completed as part of your Medical Staff Application. Separate reference checks are also done by the CPSA prior to licensing.
25. The Physician Recruiter and the practice will help you obtain the necessary forms and billing numbers, with accommodation and settlement in the community, and orientation to the practice and local health care facilities.
26. Upon passing Part A of the PRA, the CPSA will complete the steps to grant a permanent licence (Provisional Register – Conditional Practice). Once you have received confirmation from the CPSA of your permanent licence, you can begin practising in the position/community you were recruited to and complete Part B of the PRA.



“There are many advantages here – career progression, scenery, lifestyle, people, climate, general atmosphere, ambience and the education system.”

- Dr. Peter Senior, Assistant Professor at the University of Alberta in Edmonton (pictured on cover)

USEFUL WEBSITES

Alberta Physician Link (APL)
www.albertaphysicianlink.ab.ca

College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta (CPSA)
www.cpsa.ab.ca

Alberta Rural Physician Action Plan (RPAP)
www.rpap.ab.ca

Medical Council of Canada
www.mcc.ca

College of Family Physicians of Canada
www.cfpc.ca

Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada
www.rcpsc.medical.org

Alberta Health and Wellness
www.health.alberta.gov.ab.ca

Alberta Medical Association (AMA)
www.albertadoctors.org

Alberta Health Services (AHS)
www.albertahealthservices.ca

Canadian Medical Protective Association (CMPA)
www.cmpa-acpm.ca

Multiple Listing Service Online - Canadian Real Estate
www.realtor.ca

Alberta Ministry of Education
www.education.alberta.ca/parents.aspx



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