COLLEGE OF PHYSICIANS AND SURGEONS OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

T 604-733-7758
TF 1-800-461-3008
F 604-733-3503

300–669 Howe Street
Vancouver BC V6C 0B4
Canada

cpsbc.ca

**LICENSING POLICY**

# English Language Proficiency Exemption - Considerations of Exceptional Circumstances

## Purpose

The purpose of this policy is to provide guidance on the circumstances that may be considered by the registrar as exceptional in relation to an exemptions from the College of Physicians and Surgeons of BC (CPSBC) *English Language Proficiency Requirements* licensing policy as part of an applicant's licensure requirements for all classes except the visitor and emergency classes.

## Background

CPSBC's mandate obliges the registrar to place patient safety above all other considerations, and this includes ensuring that physicians meet expected for English language proficiency.

The Bylaws require that all applicants provide information confirming the applicant's English language proficiency, satisfactory to the registrar. In certain situations, the registrar is afforded discretion to exempt an applicant from the English language proficiency requirements in exceptional circumstances.

Section 6-4(1)(j) of the CPSBC Bylaws (the Bylaws) under the *Health Professions and Occupations Act* states:

### General eligibility standards

6-4 (1) An applicant for each class of licence, except for an emergency licence, must provide to the registrar:

[…]

(j) information confirming the applicant's English language proficiency, satisfactory to the registrar,

[…]

### Current English language proficiency requirements

An applicant for any class of licence, except for emergency licence, must have the ability to speak, read and write English to the satisfaction of the registrar, pursuant to section 6-4(1)(j) of the Bylaws.

The registrar may determine that an applicant has demonstrated English language proficiency if either:

1. The primary language of medical education was English, and the primary language of patient care was English, or
2. The applicant currently holds a valid medical licence in a majority native English-speaking country*, and the applicant demonstrates that they practise independently primarily in English.

*Please see the *English Language Proficiency Requirements* policy for a complete list of countries.

## Policy

An applicant who is unable to meet the requirements set out in section 6-4(1)(j) of the Bylaws and who believes that there are exceptional circumstances that may exempt the applicant from the requirements, may make a request to the registrar for consideration of those circumstances.

In considering a request of this nature, exceptional circumstances are deemed to be those that demonstrate that there is not a risk to patient safety.

### Examples of valid exceptional circumstances

The following is a non-exhaustive list of factors which may, at the discretion of the registrar, be regarded as exceptional circumstances falling within the definition described above.

- independent practice in Canada primarily in English
- independent practice in an international jurisdiction in English
- postgraduate training in Canada in English
- postgraduate training in an international jurisdiction in English
- completion of a practice ready assessment outside of BC in English
- completed examinations in English (e.g. certification in the College of Family Physicians, Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada, Medical Council of Canada Qualifying Examination, United States Medical Licensing Examination, American Board of Medical Specialties)

The above circumstances may not, in and of themselves, be considered exceptional in nature. The registrar will consider each case on its merits and the specific factors surrounding the situation.

Valid as used in the term “valid evidence” above requires objectively verifiable documentary evidence or information from a generally accepted authority.

### Evidence required for exceptional circumstances

Applications for exceptional circumstances to be considered must be accompanied by valid evidence of those circumstances. Such evidence should normally be independent third-party evidence, verifiable (i.e. confirmed by an official person and/or organization), and relevant.

Examples of such evidence:

- letters from employers confirming practice in English
- confirmation of exams passed in English
- documentation regarding medical education or postgraduate training and patient care in English (e.g., transcripts, letters from programs)

**Circumstances that are unlikely to be valid exceptional circumstances**

Generally, those circumstances that did not involve patient care during medical practice in English. Examples of such include the following:

- academic publications, including peer reviewed journals and abstracts, in English
- conference presentations and other public speaking engagements in English
- practice in another regulated profession in English (e.g. pharmacist, naturopath, nurse)
- experiences prior to medical school
- delay in licensure will have adverse impact on patient care

**Effective April 21, 2026**
**Revised July 30, 2026**