

In-Practice Certification Route (IPCR) for Non-Procedure Based Certificates of Added Competence (CACs)

CAC in Palliative Care (PC)

Application package

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Background

Certificates of Added Competence (CACs) provide a means of recognizing those family physicians who have achieved a defined level of competence and will commit to maintaining this competence. Members who hold CACs are valued resources to their communities, other family physicians, and their patients.

Family physicians with CACs in Palliative Care (PC), who are recognized with the CCFP (PC) Special Designation, are system leaders and champions in their communities. They work with other family physicians, colleagues from other specialties, and other care providers to increase the capacity for providing palliative care through direct patient care, consultations, peer support, program leadership, education, and research.

To this point, CACs in PC have been awarded through two time-limited routes, the Leadership and Added Competency Verification route, as well as the ongoing Canadian Residency Certification Route (CRCR).

The In-Practice Certification Route (IPCR) will allow members who have acquired competence and skill in palliative care to apply for a CAC while in practice. To be awarded a CAC, applicants will have to demonstrate that they practice in the scope defined in the [Residency Training Profile \(RTP\) for Palliative Care](#) and possess and maintain the competencies outlined through the [Priority Topics and Key Features for the Assessment of Competence in Palliative Care](#).

The IPCR targets a wide range of potential applicants:

- Family physicians who have completed residency training in palliative care without achieving a CAC and are currently working in the domain of care
- Family physicians who have not completed residency training, but have achieved competencies while in practice and are currently working in palliative care

Criteria and process for awarding CACs through the In-Practice Certification Route

All applications will be assessed according to the published [eligibility requirements](#), taking into account the specific and individual practice context of the applicant and the community in which they work.

Preliminary application

With the base eligibility expectations and an initial access fee of \$364, an applicant may apply for access to the portfolio management system. After the preliminary application review and approval at the administrative level, the applicant will be granted access and able to start building their CAC application portfolio.

Preliminary application - Eligibility requirements

Membership

The applicant must hold Certification in the College of Family Physicians of Canada (CCFP) and remain a member in good standing with the CFPC throughout the review of their application.

Licensure

The applicant must have a licence to practice family medicine independently in a province or territory of Canada.

Application portfolio

The eligibility requirements listed below are based on the [RTP for Palliative Care](#), which includes the Practice Narrative and the Core Professional Activities (CPAs), and they are further mapped to the [Priority Topics and Key Features for the Assessment of Competence in Palliative Care](#).

The application is built as a portfolio and applicants must provide concrete examples to prove that their scope of practice and contribution to palliative care justifies the awarding of the CAC.

To qualify for a CAC in PC, physicians must be regularly engaged in palliative care practice and demonstrate they have practised in the domain of care without restriction for the four-year period (approximately 400 hours per year) immediately prior to the application submission date. The most recent two years in practice must be in Canada.

The following CPAs are expected of family physicians with a CAC in PC:

PC CPA 1: Provide advanced-level palliative care for those with serious illnesses and their families using counselling and non-pharmacological and pharmacological modalities

To qualify for a CAC in PC:

1. Applicants must have experience in all of the following areas. They will be asked to describe how these activities are part of their current or past practice and give concrete details about the types of cases that they see related to each area of practice listed below.

- Assessment and management of pain
- Assessment and management of nausea, vomiting, and bowel obstruction
- Assessment and management of breathlessness

- Assessment and management of delirium
- Management of anorexia, cachexia, nutrition, and fatigue
- Management of despair and suffering
- Assessment and management of anxiety and depression
- Management of grief
- Goals of care conversations and advance care planning (e.g., discussing a Do Not Resuscitate order, appointing a Substitute Decision Maker, and setting up Power of Attorney)
- Management of imminent death
- Implementation of palliative sedation therapy
- Assessment and management of non-malignant terminal illness
- Assessment and management of emergencies in palliative care
- Addressing requests for medical assistance in dying (MAID)

Applicants should describe their approach to assessment and diagnosis, as well as treatment options they provide in various settings of their practice. They should mention the tools they use for assessment, medications they prescribe, symptoms and side effects they manage, procedures they perform, and non-pharmacological modalities they use to treat palliative patients. They should give examples of working with family members, caregivers, as well as community services and other health care providers.

2. Applicants are expected to spend a minimum of 30 per cent of their current practice in this domain of care. If the percentage is lower, they will be asked to provide an explanation.
3. Applicants are expected to see a minimum of 40 per cent of patients by referral. If the percentage is lower, they will be asked to provide an explanation.

PC CPA 2: Function as most responsible physician for patients admitted to palliative care units (PCUs)

PC CPA 3: Manage palliative care in the home (wherever patients deem home to be)

To qualify for a CAC, physicians are expected to presently work in or have experience in the following settings. They will be asked to describe their exposure to the following care settings and the role(s) they hold or have held and include examples of current and past experiences.

1. Home-based palliative care
Examples include doing home visits, providing home-based care as member of a team or as a consult
2. Hospital-based palliative care unit
Applicants should specify the number of beds in the unit, list the complex symptoms they manage, and describe their role in the interdisciplinary team (e.g., most responsible physician (MRP)).
3. Facilities with dedicated palliative care beds
Applicants should specify the number of beds in the unit, list the complex symptoms they manage, and describe their role in the interdisciplinary team (e.g., MRP).

PC CPA 4: Collaborate in all levels of care

PC CPA 5: Provide consultation and peer support

Family physicians with a CAC in PC are recognized for having acquired additional expertise and often receive formal referrals from colleagues. They also bridge a gap in care by providing appropriate referrals to allied health providers and other specialist physicians and surgeons. They help develop the health workforce by supporting and building the capacity of family physicians and others in this domain of care.

To qualify for a CAC in PC, physicians must provide evidence that they are a peer resource and source of referral to their colleagues. They are expected to provide team-based and collaborative care with a range of health professionals within institutions and in the community.

Applicants will be asked to describe how they incorporate the roles listed below in their practice and give concrete examples, including current and previous experiences:

- Resource to colleagues
Examples include providing informal consultations to colleagues within the same practice, mentoring, teaching interdisciplinary team members through rounds or courses, and taking palliative calls.
- Consultant and source of referral for colleagues
Applicants are expected to specify the number of referrals they receive in a month, and give a general description from whom they receive the referral, and how the referral is managed (e.g., taking over care as MRP, providing consultation).
- Member of an interprofessional team
Applicants should describe their collaboration with other providers and resources in planning and providing care for patients, maintaining services to the community, and improving the quality of palliative care.

PC CPA 6: Provide administrative, educational, and/or clinical leadership

As clinical leaders, family physicians with CACs in PC are responsible for meeting the needs of the communities they serve. CAC holders are involved in administrative roles, scholarship, and advocacy for their patients, the domain of practice, and system-level health. They provide a family medicine leadership presence and perspective on palliative care at local or regional levels in a wide range of CPAs, clinical and educational leadership roles for committees, organizations, and initiatives.

To qualify for a CAC in PC, physicians must provide evidence of clinical and educational leadership. Applicants will be asked to share what leadership roles they have in the domain of palliative care:

1. Act as a leader within an interprofessional team and/or a primary care [Patient's Medical Home](#)
Applicants should list other professionals on their team and describe the setting and their activities as the leader of the team.
2. Teach in the domain of care or acting in an educational leadership role
Applicants will be asked to give concrete details about the profile/level and number of learners and setting(s) in which they teach and the length of the course.
Examples include teaching palliative care to medical students, family medicine residents, and enhanced skills residents.
3. Be involved in administrative leadership in palliative care
We recognize that not all those who work in the domain of care are involved in administrative leadership. Applicants will be asked to share some examples of their involvement. Examples include membership in or chairing committees, task forces, advisory groups, or local, provincial, or national organizations; leadership positions, such as program director at palliative care enhanced skills programs, or medical director at hospitals or hospices.

PC CPA 7: Participate in the scholarly aspects of palliative care

Family physicians with CACs in PC engage in scholarly activities, such as providing continuing professional development (CPD) or education, conducting research or quality improvement initiatives. Applicants will be asked to describe their involvement in scholarly activity related to palliative care.

1. Involvement in education (e.g., providing CPD) and/or teaching, which may include undergraduate and/or postgraduate students and interprofessional groups
Applicants will be asked to give concrete details about sessions/content they have created and/or delivered. Examples include conducting hospital rounds, teaching interdisciplinary staff, giving presentations and talks at conferences, facilitating workshops, authoring textbooks, developing teaching modules, hosting videos, participating in journal clubs.
2. Involvement in research

Examples include helping develop guidelines pertaining to palliative care, participating in research on tools used in assessment, and evaluating interventions, authoring and reviewing papers, supervising residents' palliative care projects.

3. Involvement in quality improvement initiatives

Applicants will be asked to describe their engagement in PC-related quality improvement initiatives on one or multiple levels:

- a) In their practice
- b) In their institution
- c) In their region

Examples include initiatives at hospitals, participation on committees tasked with quality improvement, own practice audits, implementation of new models of care.

PC CPA 8: Act as a resource to a community

Family physicians with CACs in PC see themselves as resources to their patients and communities. They assess and respond to patients' needs by advocating with them as active partners for system-level change in a socially accountable manner. They identify and engage in community prevention initiatives.

Applicants will be asked to describe and give concrete examples of their engagement in advocacy:

1. At their own patients' level

Examples include advocating for patients with other health providers, for their access to palliative care services or medications (especially for low-income patients), or developing processes to enhance early identification of those patients who require a palliative approach.

2. At the community level

Examples include assessing needs and advocating for changes to sustain provision of palliative care, participating in policy projects related to palliative care, participating in community health fairs, providing long-term care palliative outreach in times of need, or creating a palliative care program.

3. At the system level

Examples include engaging in committees and working groups, such as the Canadian Society of Palliative Care Physicians or the Canadian Hospice Palliative Care Association; advocating for medical leadership that helps to train and support physicians in palliative care; lobbying for funding for improved care and treatment of palliative patients.

PC CPA 9: Perform procedures as appropriate (where available)

To qualify for a CAC in PC, physicians must show how they integrate the following procedures in palliative care, either by personally performing or ordering as appropriate, and by providing post-procedure monitoring and follow up:

1. Ultrasound-guided paracentesis
2. Point-of-care ultrasound
3. Continuous subcutaneous infusions
4. Advanced wound management

PC CPA 10: Manage personal professional activities

Continuing Professional Development (CPD)

To qualify for a CAC in PC, physicians must provide evidence of engaging in palliative care-related CPD. They are required to complete a minimum of 75 credits in the five-year cycle.

Applicants will be asked to provide details about the CPD/CME activities they have **undertaken in palliative care** in the past five years.

Please note that Mainpro+® credits are tracked on a separate platform, and it is not possible to link that information directly to the CAC application portfolio.

CAC narrative

Family physicians with CACs in PC are committed to the values expressed in the [Family Medicine Professional Profile](#). They are committed to delivering accessible, high-quality, comprehensive, and continuous front-line health care. They embody a characteristic approach that strengthens the compassion, responsiveness, integrity, and quality of the health care system. They provide care that supports continuity and is relationship- and patient-centred, community adaptive, and collaborative.

Applicants will be asked to provide a narrative on how they feel their practice in family medicine and palliative care adheres to this expectation of practice as outlined in the RTP.

Examples include empowering family physician colleagues to improve their care for palliative patients, incorporating palliative care in comprehensive family medicine, and demonstrating passion for palliative care.

Years in practice

To qualify for a CAC in PC, physicians must be regularly engaged in palliative care practice and demonstrate they have practised in the domain of care without restriction for the four-year period (approximately 400 hours per year) immediately prior to the application submission date. The most recent two years in practice must be in Canada.

Licensure

The applicant must hold a full unrestricted licence to practise family medicine independently in a province or territory of Canada at the time of application and for the four years preceding the application.

Applicants must provide verification of registration or licensure for each medical regulatory authority in which they hold a certificate of registration or licence authorizing independent practice. These certificates are considered part of the application, which will not be reviewed or adjudicated until the CFPC receives all required documents.

CFPC staff are not responsible for following up with applicants or medical regulatory authorities regarding the Certificates of Standing. Applicants are responsible for ensuring the delivery and receipt of certificates within 30 days of the application submission date.

Applicants who have moved to a different territory or province or abroad in the 12 months prior to the application date are required to provide the Certificate of Standing from the last territory or province in which they practised.

Referee letters

Letters from four referees are required to provide evidence that the applicant is considered a special resource in palliative care, beyond being a valued member of the physician team in their community.

Referee eligibility requirements

Potential referees should be well-qualified clinicians with a background in practice, training, education, and/or scholarship and be able to provide a fair and objective opinion of the applicant's practice and CPD contributions in the domain of care for which the CAC application is based. The following expectations must be satisfied within the chosen four referees:

- At least two referees must be family physicians who are members in good standing with the CFPC
- At least two referees must be actively practising and/or teaching in the domain of care for which the CAC application is based
- At least one referee must be an active CAC holder in the domain of care for which the CAC application is based
- One referee must be a colleague with a comprehensive practice to whom the applicant acts as a resource/consultant
- One referee must be an interprofessional team member with whom the applicant works
- All referees must have known the applicant for at least two years in a professional capacity
- Referees cannot be relatives of the applicant or have any conflicting interests with those of the applicant

Note: If, as a whole, the selected referees do not meet all of the eligibility requirements, and the applicant would still like to use them as referees, the applicant will be asked to provide an explanation that satisfactorily justifies an exception to the referee eligibility requirements. The CFPC reserves the right, in its sole discretion, to refuse the explanation and require the applicant to provide alternate referee(s) that meet the eligibility criteria.

Referee letter form

Referees must use the standard online template to submit their letters. **The link to the online form will be provided and automatically sent to the referees after the applicant's application has been submitted.** Letters that are not submitted using the online link provided (e.g., any letters sent via email, mail, fax) will be ineligible and not accepted for review. Applicants and their referees are responsible for ensuring the delivery and receipt of referee letters within 30 calendar days of the application submission date. Submitted letters will only be accessible to authorized CFPC staff and the relevant CAC Peer Review Committee and members of the Board of Examinations and Certification (BEC), if applicable, and will not be shared with the applicant. Referee letters will only be used for the purpose of the CAC application review and will be retained by the CFPC for two years after the decision about awarding a CAC has been finalized.

Referee letter sections are based directly on the expectations as outlined in the [RTP for Palliative Care](#).

Referees will be asked to provide a fair and objective opinion of the applicant's practice and CPD contributions in the domain of care on which the CAC application is based. They will be asked to verify the applicant's scope of practice and their contribution to the discipline and the community, providing concrete examples about the applicant's role as a:

- a) Provider of advanced-level palliative care for those with serious illnesses and their families, using counselling and non-pharmacological and pharmacological modalities
- b) Resource to family medicine colleagues and a member of an interprofessional team
- c) Clinical, educational, and/or administrative leader
- d) Leader and participant in scholarly activities, including continuous quality improvement, research, and provider of CPD
- e) Resource to their community, engaged in advocacy on one or multiple levels:
 - For own patients
 - For patients in the community
 - For system-level health
- f) Continuous learner who is engaged in PC-related CPD

Application submission fee

The application fee of \$364 will be charged to access the application portfolio, and the 2024-25 IPCR assessment fee of \$3,973 will be charged at the time of submission.

The fees are non-refundable, regardless of the Peer Review Committee decision.

Please note, that CACs are a revenue-neutral program and, like all CFPC fees, are calculated annually to cover costs. The access fee covers the cost of the administrative review, while the assessment fee covers the cost of the administrative and committee review; the use and maintenance of the application platform; and the creation and distribution of certificates.

Application review

Administrative review

1. Preliminary application

The preliminary application requires verification of the applicant's status to allow access to the CAC application portfolio. Applicants will have to show that they are family physicians who are members of the College in good standing, hold the CCFP designation, and possess a valid and unrestricted licence to practise in Canada. After the administrative review and approval, applicants will be granted access to start building their portfolio.

2. CAC application portfolio

Applicants will build their portfolio by entering the required information about their training, practice, and CPD in the domain of care. This portfolio can be populated over an extended period of time. The portfolio is built around the RTP that includes the Practice Narrative and CPAs. The assessment expectations for the domain have been identified in the Priority Topics and Key Features for the Assessment of Competence. When the applicants determine that they meet the domain-specific eligibility requirements and that they have completed the application portfolio, they will submit it for assessment and pay the applicable fee. This does not have to be in the same year as the application is started.

Committee review

Each CAC domain of care has an established Peer Review Committee, appointed by the CFPC's BEC, to review all applications and make recommendations to the BEC on the awarding, or not, of CACs to individual applicants.

The standing Peer Review Committee will be comprised of five members with a CAC in the relevant domain of care. Peer Review Committee members serve for staggered three-year terms to ensure consistency over time. The panel is supported in its work by the Director, Certificates of Added Competence and the CAC team.

1. Individual review

As a first step, all applications will be reviewed individually, by each member of the Peer Review Committee. Peer Review Committee members will consider the information provided in the application, including the reference letters, and will arrive at a provisional recommendation: **Recommend** (award a CAC), **Do not recommend** (not award a CAC) or **Uncertain** (additional information and/or discussion with the Peer Review Committee members is required).

Every application will receive five provisional recommendations, which will be compiled, and an individual summary will be produced for each applicant.

2. Peer Review Committee - group review

Compiled summaries from the Peer Review Committee members' individual reviews and all the contents of the applications under review will be read and reviewed together as a group. Unanimous recommendations will be confirmed, and mixed recommendations will be further discussed, with final recommendations reached by consensus. This Peer Review Committee group application review will occur once a year.

If the Peer Review Committee cannot reach consensus in the group review and the members agree that additional information is beneficial to deciding, a decision on the application will be deferred and the applicant and/or their referee(s) may be contacted regarding any additional required information. If the requested additional information is not provided or is provided but is insufficient, the Peer Review Committee may proceed to make a recommendation not to award the applicant a CAC.

The Peer Review Committee's recommendations will be presented to the BEC for their final approval.

Recommendation decisions

In considering each CAC application, the Peer Review Committee shall arrive at one of the following recommendations:

- Applicants meeting requirements = Recommended for a CAC
- Applicants where additional information is required = Deferred
- Applicants not meeting requirements = Not Recommended for a CAC

Recommendations will be made based on the information provided in the application and reference letters, which shall demonstrate, to the satisfaction of the CFPC, that the applicant has acquired competence and is practising to the defined CAC role and scope, as outlined in the RTP.

All recommendations will be reviewed and confirmed by the BEC, after which the decision will be communicated to the applicant.

Reconsideration requests

Applicants who are not recommended for a CAC will receive a letter stating the CFPC's decision and reasons for not awarding a CAC. The letter will offer the applicant the opportunity to request a reconsideration of the decision, provided such request is made within 30 calendar days from the date of the decision. Requests made after this period will not be considered, and the BEC's decision on the application will be considered final.

When asking for reconsideration, the applicant must provide reasons, completely and in detail, for the reconsideration and include any additional materials or information that may support the request.

Reconsiderations will not be granted solely on the basis that an applicant disagrees with the decision.

All reconsideration requests and any additional information that is submitted will be returned to the Peer Review Committee, to be reviewed individually by each member. The Peer Review Committee members will reconsider the application in light of the request and any new material provided and will again arrive at a provisional recommendation. The Peer Review Committee will reconvene as a group to discuss and

determine whether to change its initial recommendation. The Peer Review Committee's recommendation will be presented to the BEC for approval, after which the decision will be communicated to the applicant. Decisions made following a reconsideration request are final and cannot be appealed.

If new circumstances or information supporting an application becomes available after a final decision to not recommend a CAC or the 30-day reconsideration period has lapsed, as applicable, an applicant may submit a new application and begin the review process again.

Confidentiality and conflict of interest

Confidentiality

The information that applicants provide through their application for a CAC will be handled in accordance with the [CFPC's Privacy Policy](#). Only members of the Peer Review Committee and the staff charged with helping administer the CAC program have access to the applicants' personal information for reviewing and administration purposes.

For privacy reasons, and in order to facilitate a thorough and candid assessment and evaluation process, the names or other personal information of the Peer Review Committee members are not disclosed to applicants or third parties. Meeting minutes and documents created by Peer Review Committee members or the BEC during application reviews—including review deliberations, conclusions, notes, compiled summaries, and individual recommendations—are considered confidential and are not disclosed at any point, including in the event of a reconsideration request, unless required by law.

Names of successful applicants and the awarded CAC designations will be made publicly available on the CFPC's public website and, with an applicant's consent, may be shared with the medical regulatory authorities with whom the applicant is licensed. The identities of unsuccessful or ineligible applicants are not disclosed to any third parties, unless the applicant provides consent for such disclosure.

The information collected through CAC applications and the resulting decisions may be shared, in anonymized or aggregated form, to third parties for research purposes where the information is likely to advance the interests of family physicians or family medicine in Canada.

Conflict of interest

The CFPC seeks to avoid any conflicts of interest in the CAC application review process. In these circumstances, a conflict of interest is a conflict between a person's duties and responsibilities regarding the review process, and that person's private, professional, business or public interests.

There may be a real, perceived or potential conflict of interest when any member of a Peer Review Committee:

- Would receive professional or personal benefit resulting from the application being reviewed
- Has a direct or indirect financial interest in an application being reviewed

A conflict of interest may be deemed to exist or perceived as such when a Peer Review Committee member:

- Is a relative or close friend, or has a personal relationship with an applicant
- Is in a position to gain or lose financially/materially
- Has long-standing scientific or personal differences with an applicant
- Feels for any reason unable to provide an impartial review of the application

All committee members are subject to the CFPC's conflict of interest guidelines, and each Peer Review Committee member is committed to abide by the CFPC's conflict of interest policies and procedures prior to viewing any application information. CFPC staff are responsible for resolving areas of uncertainty.

Any Peer Review Committee member who identifies a conflict of interest that would prevent them from reviewing an application is directed to promptly disclose the conflict to CFPC staff. The CFPC's Director, Certificates of Added Competence will consider the circumstances of the reported conflict and determine if it constitutes a conflict of interest and what measures, such as recusal, are required. No Peer Review Committee member may participate in the review of an application if there is any real, perceived or potential conflict of interest. If that is the case, a substitute assessor will be used. Any conflict disclosures and avoidance measures will be appropriately documented within the Peer Review Committee's meeting minutes.

Useful links

[CAC web page](#)

[IPCR Eligibility requirements – Palliative Care](#)

[IPCR Application instructions package – Palliative Care](#)

[Residency Training Profile \(RTP\) for Family Medicine and Enhanced Skills Programs Leading to Certificates of Added Competence](#)

[Priority Topics and Key Features for the Assessment of Competence in Palliative Care](#)

[Mainpro+®](#)

[Family Medicine Professional Profile](#)

[Patient's Medical Home](#)

For more information about CACs please email cac@cfpc.ca or visit the [CAC web page](#).