Obtaining a medical license

In order to practice medicine in the United States, physicians must obtain medical licensure. They may also seek an optional board certification. Board-certified physicians complete specialty examinations beyond the minimum state licensure requirements.

Basic education requirements

In order to become licensed and certified, physicians must demonstrate that they have met certain undergraduate and graduate education requirements.

Basic education requirements for licensure and board certification include:

- A medical doctorate from a U.S. or internationally accredited medical school.
- Certificate of completion of a medical residency training in an Accreditation for Graduate Medical Education (ACGME)-accredited program.
- The AMA provides additional information on undergraduate and graduate medical education requirements for licensing and board certification.

Medical licensure requirements

Physicians are required to obtain an unrestricted medical license for every state in which they intend to offer clinical medical services. The process requires an up-to-date understanding of licensure requirements including required examinations, training, education and fees.

The AMA offers introductory information on the medical licensure process as well as State Medical Licensure Requirements and Statistics, a detailed guide published annually. Together these resources offer a combination of data and articles to help lead physicians through the licensure process.

Board certification and maintenance of certification requirements
The board certification process begins with physicians demonstrating initial expertise in a medical specialty by earning board certification through 1 of 24 members of the American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS). In addition to the basic education requirements listed above, physicians must:

- Provide letters of attestation from a program director and/or faculty members.
- Obtain an unrestricted medical license to practice medicine in the U.S. or Canada.
- Pass a written and, in some cases, an oral examination created and administered by an ABMS member board.

Board-certified physicians can maintain medical specialty expertise by participating in a professional development program known as the ABMS Program for Maintenance of Certification (MOC). The MOC offers focused assessment and improvement activities that provide a structured approach for enhancing patient care and improving patient outcomes.

Find more information about initial certification and MOC process steps from the ABMS.

Physicians seeking initial certification or applying for a medical license in another state should anticipate delays due to the investigation of credentials and past practice as well as the need to comply with licensing standards.