



Establishing Essential Regulatory Requirements for Paramedicine in Canada

Wilker, C., Messer-Lepage, J., Ford, T., Kowalczyk, K., Glover Takahashi, S., and Clark, M.

Very few would contest that paramedicine’s scope of practice, the diversity of roles and practice contexts are growing rapidly in Canada and internationally (1, 2, 3). It is a challenging time and there is a keen interest from all stakeholders that the continued professionalization of paramedicine in Canada follows a process that facilitates growth and its continued evolution. Regulation of a profession is considered a key milestone in the continuum of professionalization (4). It, however, also creates an ongoing tension as regulated professions must maintain specific boundaries and values, i.e., regulatory requirements, and its members must reflect these, yet also evolve within the paradigm of the profession (3). With a profession changing as rapidly as paramedicine, having an accurate description of current entry level paramedic practice helps to define these regulatory requirements and describe what the public and patients can expect for safe, ethical, and effective care.

More specifically, establishing the essential regulatory requirements will (a) support consistency and uniformity in education and practice by paramedics, (b) advance paramedics as health professionals who respect the public’s right to safe, ethical, and effective care, and (c) increase government and other health professionals’ confidence in the profession’s ability to superintend the profession, i.e., protect its integrity and the public.

This article describes the development of Pan-Canadian Essential Regulatory Requirements (PERRs), i.e., the Canadian Paramedic Competence Framework (CPCF) and the Canadian Paramedic Regulatory Practice Standards (CPRPS), their value to the profession and regulation of paramedicine in Canada, and the anticipated implementation pathways. A national online consultation survey launches in November 2022 at which time all paramedics will be invited to

help verify and confirm that the content in these two documents reflects entry level practice¹ in these four paramedic designations regulated in Canada. These include:

- Emergency Medical Responder (EMR)
- Primary Care Paramedic (PCP)
- Advanced Care Paramedic (ACP)
- Critical Care Paramedic (CCP)

Current Use of Competencies and Standards by Regulatory Authorities

Registration, Addressing Concerns and Monitoring Competence

In Canada, provincial paramedic regulators, whether self-regulated or government regulated, depend on defined competencies and standards to fulfil their legislative mandate, and regulate the profession.

- Regulators have the legislated authority to grant registration to individuals to practice as paramedics. They ensure that individuals who obtain registration have the proof of entry level competence to practice, i.e., they have the essential competencies to maintain the specific boundaries and values of paramedics.
- Regulators must also address concerns from the public about a paramedic's practice, and this requires regulators to identify what competencies or regulatory practice standards are in question.
- Depending on the jurisdiction's legislative structure and requirements, regulatory authorities may also
 - monitor their registrants' continued competence and assess if they are meeting the essential competencies, and
 - describe the educational requirements to guide curriculum development and ensure students graduate with entry level competencies.

Although the 2011 National Occupational Competency Profile (NOCP) developed by the Paramedic Association of Canada (PAC) is used in varying degrees by regulatory authorities and COPR, many provincial regulators found it necessary to develop competencies and regulatory standards that are more current and reflect entry to practice and essential requirements for practice in their jurisdictions (5). As a result, the profession has a range of regulatory standards which can confuse stakeholder expectations and risk the public's confidence in the profession.

Karl Kowalczyk, Executive Director/Registrar of the College of Paramedics of Nova Scotia, provides an example:

“When the Paramedics Act came into force, the College of Paramedics of Nova Scotia established its Essential Competency Profiles utilizing resources it recognized would require updating at a significant cost for any regulator. It embraced COPR's announcement to develop Pan-Canadian Essential Regulatory Requirements because it

¹ Entry to practice' or 'entry level', refers to the point in a practitioner's career when they are initially registered/licenced, having successfully completed their professional education and training.

meant a collaborative, cost-effective and national approach to modernizing the documents.”

Facilitating Paramedics’ Mobility Internationally and Across Canada

Regulation of health professions is a provincial government responsibility, yet paramedics are geographically mobile. Both the Canada Free Trade Agreement and the 2009 Agreement on Internal Trade and ongoing implementation strategies call for reducing barriers to assessment and recognition of competence faced by internationally and Canadian trained paramedics as they move to Canada and within provinces and territories (6).

COPR serves as the main point of entry and body responsible for the preliminary assessment of credentials for internationally educated paramedics. It assists provincial regulators in assessing credentials of international applicants prior to those applicants completing provincial regulatory requirements. COPR also administers paramedic entry to practice examinations for seven regulatory jurisdictions in Canada. Both the content of the examinations and the assessment of credentials are dependent on up-to-date competencies and standards.

“This national project reflects COPR’s mission to create common unifying standards for regulation of paramedics in Canada and meet the requirements of the federal trade agreement,” explains COPR Executive Director Chelsea Wilker. “This has been an ongoing objective since COPR began and it’s a direct response to national and provincial governments’ demand for unified standards.”

COPR Executive Committee Chair Tim Ford and Executive Director Chelsea Wilker have met with various national and provincial committees responsible for labour mobility as well as the National Labour Mobility Consortia to increase their understanding of how the competencies and standards will facilitate registration of paramedics when moving from one province to another.

“Strengthening relationships with our government stakeholders, particularly the Labour Mobility Consortia, has always been a priority within our organization,” said Tim Ford. “We are committed to facilitating a strong understanding of the PERRs Project and how the competencies and regulatory practice standards can have a positive effect on Labour Mobility.”

Benefits to a National Regulatory Approach

Having common paramedic competencies and regulatory practice standards across Canada will:

1. Increase consistency in the competencies and standards used by provincial regulatory authorities to assess an individual’s eligibility for registration.
2. Decrease barriers to job markets as paramedic credentials will be held to the same standards across Canada.
3. Facilitate more timely transition to a new paramedic position in another province.
4. Facilitate deployment of paramedics from other areas of Canada when an emergency calls for a massive, urgent-care response.

- Increase confidence that assessment of internationally educated paramedic credentials is based on current paramedic practice in the four designations.

Development Milestones

The PERRs project began in February 2021 when COPR agreed to move forward with the development of Pan-Canadian Essential Regulatory Requirements (PERRs) (competencies and regulatory practice standards). These requirements would integrate the four distinct designations of paramedic professionals and reflect and specifically focus on the needs of the public and patients for safe, effective care.

Five phases were outlined in the Project Charter (7) with Phase Four: Validation Consultation about to start.

Timelines and Key Milestones

Phase One: Governance Established	Phase Two: Framework Approved	Phase Three: PERRs Drafted	Phase Four: Validation Consultation	Phase Five: Final PERRs Approved
August – September 2021	October – December 2021	January – October 2022	November – February 2022	March – April 2023
Governance structure established with management and Project Steering Committee in place Appointments to other committees completed COMPLETED	Background paper prepared to inform preferred framework to guide development Essential Requirements Committee reviews and recommends proposed conceptual framework Project Steering Committee discusses and confirms final framework COMPLETED	PERRs drafted and reviewed by Subject Matter Expert Committee Consultation with Stakeholder Advisory Committee Project Steering Committee approves draft for validation survey. ON TIME	Pan-Canadian Validation consultation and analysis Results of validation consultation reviewed and adjustments to PERRs made	Final PERRs approved by COPR Board COPR member boards' approval PERRs translated to French, and both versions released

Dr. Susan Glover Takahashi is leading the development of the PERRs project and brings over 20 years of expertise in developing regulatory competencies as well as designing entry-to-practice and ongoing competence assessment programs. Additionally, over 35 experts in paramedicine

are working with Dr. Glover Takahashi on committees and additional ad hoc groups to inform the framework, content and provide feedback at key strategic points.

Connecting with the PAC's Project

At the agreement of PAC and COPR, Dr. Glover Takahashi and Dr. Alan Batt, who is the lead consultant in the development of PAC's National Occupational Standard for Paramedics in Canada, meet regularly to ensure understanding of each group's approach, share resources, and align projects as appropriate. Common definitions for terms are being used and both projects are following systematic processes for development and using experts in the field.

“Collaboration across projects is important while each organization ensures they have the resources to inform and guide their distinct and important roles in paramedicine. COPR's PERRs project will reflect the essential regulatory requirements, and I call that the “ground floor” of what paramedics must currently do in their day-to-day work from coast to coast to coast. The professional associations' project outcomes can look to the future – I call that the ceiling of where paramedicine aspires to go,” explains Dr. Susan Glover Takahashi.

Anticipated Implementation

COPR members have a legislated mandate of public protection and hold the responsibility of clearly describing the competence requirements for all four practitioner designations that are currently regulated. The approach chosen by each province will depend on which competencies and standards they have in place currently, and where the CPCF and/or CPRPS may fill gaps or update their existing regulatory requirements.

Jacquie Messer-Lepage who Chairs the PERRs Project Steering Committee and is the Registrar of the Saskatchewan College of Paramedics describes the process:

“The increase in labour mobility throughout Canada emphasizes the importance of adopting a harmonized approach to regulation of paramedic professionals. The development of the PERRs takes us one step closer to meeting our collective commitment to making labour mobility more streamlined while ensuring patients receive consistent high-quality care.”

Blueprinting Examinations and Assessment Tools

COPR will use the CPCF and CPRPS to blueprint the examinations for three of the designations (i.e., EMR, PCP, and ACP) which will impact education.

Entry level educators will want to ensure that their curriculums meet the needs of students who intend to take any of these exams as part of becoming registered to practice. Accreditors may also be interested to see if educators are considering these standards in their curriculum. This does not, by any means, limit educators from teaching beyond entry level requirements and essential competencies that address specific population needs or emerging practice. Continuing professional education providers also play a role in enhancing competencies beyond entry level.

However, as in regulation, accreditors of paramedic education programs are concerned about entry level practice. They will be evaluating an education program to see if it is preparing students to graduate with the competencies for entry level practice. The entry to practice examinations will also assess this.

With this information, regulators can be confident that the individual has the essential competencies to deliver safe, ethical, and effective services according to the paramedic's designation. These checks of competence signal to many outside stakeholders that paramedicine regulators are diligent in protecting the public's interest as well as the profession's integrity.

The CPCF and CPRPS will assist individuals from other countries to compare the regulatory requirements with their own country's practice standards. This is of particular interest to individuals planning to move to Canada and work as paramedics. For example, the paramedic equivalency self-assessment tool will be based on the regulatory requirements outlined in PERRs and can help international applicants to assess their readiness for registration in Canada. If these individuals go on to write a COPR examination, they will find that the documents inform the exam blueprint, i.e., the content that may be tested.

We're Almost There!

Both the CPCF and CPRPS are scheduled to launch May 2023 and COPR is developing a roll-out plan to ensure a smooth transition from the current standards in use. COPR's Project Charter provided the roadmap for systematic and transparent development (7). Over the past two years, after numerous meetings with each committee, as well as informal meetings and presentations with regulatory boards, accreditors, and labour mobility groups, we're almost there.

For more information on the project, visit [COPR's website](#) to review the updates that were published at each phase, committee membership, the project charter and background paper.

Help Confirm Current Entry Level Practice

Very soon paramedics will be asked to validate the draft essential regulatory requirements through an online survey. Below are the two documents that have evolved during the development of the essential regulatory requirements. Survey participants will have access to the competencies relevant to their designation, i.e., EMR, PCP, ACP or CCP and outcome statements for the regulatory practice standards.

Development of PERRs Led to Two Draft Documents

Canadian Paramedic Competence Framework (CPCF)

Eight Roles

1. **Expert in Out of Hospital Care:** Provides safe and effective care across practice settings, within the paramedic's scope, and within standards of practice.
2. **Paramedic as Person:** Manages personal, professional, and contextual dimensions of competence.
3. **Patient-Centred Communicator:** Communicates with patients, their families, and those involved in patients' circle of care.
4. **Advocate for Health, Equity, and Justice:** Demonstrates patient and systems advocacy for health, equity, and justice throughout the health care system.
5. **Team Collaborator:** Demonstrates effective interprofessional practice with paramedic colleagues, public safety personnel, and other health care team members.
6. **Leader:** Provides situational leadership and manages systems for paramedic practice.
7. **Scholarly Practitioner:** Engages in professional development, scholarship, and use of evidence-based practice with peers, colleagues, and students.
8. **Professional:** Demonstrates ethical practice, high standards of professional behaviour, and accountability to patients, the public, the profession, and regulations.

Canadian Paramedic Regulatory Practice Standards (CPRPS)

Topics

1. Scope of Practice
2. Competence
3. Cultural Safety and Humility
4. Privacy and Confidentiality
5. Prevention of Sexual Abuse
6. Duty to Report
7. Patient Assessment, Diagnosis, Interventions
8. Communications
9. Collaboration and Professional Relationships
10. Documentation and Record Keeping

Completing the survey is an important step in verifying and confirming that the documents' content reflects current and essential, entry level practice. Watch for further information about how to access the online consultation survey on the [COPR's website](#). Questions can be directed to: info@copr.ca

References

1. Batt A, Poirier P, Bank, J, Bolster, J, Bowles, R, Cameron, C, Donelon B, Dunn N, Essington T, Johnston W, Lapierre R, Lysko M, Mason P, Steary D, Tavares W. Developing the National Occupational Standard for Paramedics in Canada. Canadian Paramedicine. 2022; March. <https://canadianparamedicine.ca/developing-the-national-occupational-standard-for-paramedics-in-canada/>
2. Newton A, Hunt B, Williams J. Disruptive innovation: Barriers, opportunities and differences internationally. International Paramedic Practice 2020; September. <https://www.internationaljpp.com/features/article/disruptive-innovation-barriers-opportunities-and-differences-internationally>

3. Reed B, Cowin L, O'Meara P, Wilson I. Professionalism and professionalization in the discipline of paramedicine. *Australasian Journal of Paramedicine*. 2019;16(0):1-10
<https://doi.org.10.33151/ajp.16.715>
4. Adams TI. The Changing Nature of Professional Regulation in Canada, 1867-1961. *Social Science History*. 2009 Summer; 33(2):217-243. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/40267999>
5. Parker-Taillon D, Burnett D, Glover Takahashi S, Clark M on behalf of Canadian Organization of Paramedic Regulators. Background Paper on Determining the Pan-Canadian Essential Regulatory Requirements Model. 2022; January 28.
https://copr.ca/wp-content/uploads/2022/01/COPR-PERRs_Background-Paper_28Jan2022.pdf
6. Employment and Social Development Canada – Strategic Policy and Research Branch Joint Summative Evaluation of Foreign Credential Recognition Program/ Inter-provincial Labour Mobility Initiative: Final Report. 2016
https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2016/edsc-esdc/Em20-34-2015-eng.pdf
7. SGT & Associates on behalf of the Canadian Organization of Paramedic Regulators. Project Charter for the Development of COPR Essential Regulatory Requirements Documents (PERRs) – Updated. 2022; July. https://copr.ca/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/COPR-Project-Charter_PERRS_21july28_Distribution.pdf