

Finding pharmacy work as an unlicensed IPG



Canadian pharmacy work experience is not required for an International Pharmacy Graduate (IPG) to be successful in the national pharmacy exams and provincial licensure assessments, but gaining experience in a Canadian pharmacy can be helpful.

If you are interested in working in a pharmacy setting while you progress toward licensure in Canada, this resource offers guidance to help you present your experience, approach employers and strengthen your applications.

What employers are looking for



The right mindset

Demonstrate your eagerness to learn, your adaptability and your openness to feedback.



Strong foundational knowledge

Build your knowledge of pharmacy in Canada before you apply.



Transferable soft skills

Showcase communication, problem-solving and teamwork skills that you acquired from previous roles.



Clarity and direction

Be clear about your goals, such as moving from assistant to intern to pharmacist.



Reliability and availability

Be reliable, responsive and able to commit to regular shifts.



Understanding of the role

Know what a pharmacy assistant or other entry level role involves and be ready to start there.



Professional communication

Communicate clearly and present yourself professionally in your resume and interviews.

Steps to increase your employability

Shift your focus from “experience” to “value”

Build your knowledge

Learn how pharmacy works in Canada and build knowledge relevant to pharmacy practice. For example, you could complete the NAPRA Diagnostic Tool and Learning Modules (DTLM), review your provincial drug formulary and explore learning resources from regulators and professional associations, such as CPhA’s practice tools and the CPS, to learn about common conditions, medications and patient care.

Understand pharmacy software systems

Be aware of common pharmacy systems used in Canada (e.g., Kroll, HealthWATCH) and how they support dispensing, billing and documentation. While opportunities to learn these systems outside of a pharmacy are limited, use available information to learn what you can and be comfortable using and adapting to new computer systems.

Identify an area of interest

Choose one area to learn more about, such as pharmacist prescribing, compounding or managing conditions like diabetes or hypertension, so you can speak about it clearly and demonstrate your interest and understanding.

Reframe your resume and interview approach

Lead with your skills

Start with what you can do, not what you lack. Use clear, direct statements that show initiative. (E.g., “I have taken steps to learn how pharmacy workflows operate in Canada and how prescriptions are processed.”)

Be honest and clear

Accurately describe your skills, knowledge and training. Authenticity builds trust and credibility with employers. (e.g., “I have 5 years of experience in the pharmaceutical industry and am currently preparing for the PEBC Qualifying Exam. Although my experience is not in direct patient care, I have strong medication knowledge, experience in regulated environments and I am actively building my skills for practice in Canadian.”)

Show your value

Highlight how you can support pharmacy operations, efficiency and the patient experience. (e.g., “In my previous role, I worked in a fast-paced environment where I coordinated tasks and supported team workflows to meet tight timelines. I bring strong organization, reliability and the ability to learn quickly, and I am ready to contribute to day-to-day operations and support the pharmacy team.”)



Apply strategically

- 1 Know which roles you qualify for – and articulate your path**

Not all pharmacy roles are open to you at every stage of licensure. Pharmacy assistant positions are available to anyone, but intern or equivalent roles require meeting provincial requirements – typically passing at least part of the PEBC Qualifying Exam. Knowing where you stand and being able to speak to your exam and registration timeline, shows employers you are organized and committed. Consult the specific requirements to register as an intern in your province.
- 2 Prioritize in-person outreach**

Visit pharmacies in person to ask about opportunities and leave your resume. This helps you make a direct impression and communicate your strengths, which is especially important if you do not yet have Canadian experience. Job boards can be part of your search, but applying online alone may not be enough to stand out.
- 3 Expand your search**

Look beyond major cities to suburbs, smaller towns or rural communities where there may be more opportunities and less competition.
- 4 Be persistent and professional**

Follow up after one to two weeks and ask for feedback. Stay respectful and appreciative, even if you are not selected.
- 5 Consider service-oriented stepping stones**

If you are struggling to secure pharmacy work without Canadian experience, consider roles in retail or customer service. These roles build transferable skills and demonstrate reliability – making you a stronger candidate when you re-apply to pharmacy positions.

Do you *need* Canadian pharmacy work experience for certification and licensure assessments?

No. You don't need Canadian pharmacy work experience to be successful in certification or licensure assessments. Success is based on your knowledge and exam performance, not your employment history.

However, Canadian experience can be helpful. Although not required, working in a Canadian pharmacy environment can offer advantages:

- **Confidence**

Exposure to daily pharmacy operations, patient interactions and team communication can help you feel more comfortable and prepared as you approach exams and licensure assessments.

- **Context**

Seeing how Canadian practice standards apply in everyday situations can reinforce what you study for exams.

- **Communication skills**

Real interactions with patients, colleagues and prescribers help strengthen your communication skills.

- **Faster integration**

Familiarity with the pharmacy environment can make your transition into internship and practice smoother.

These benefits are *supplementary*. They support your readiness but do not affect your eligibility or ability to succeed in assessments.



Keep going – the right opportunity can come at any time.

If you are interested in gaining Canadian work experience as you work toward licensure, shifting your focus to highlight your transferable skills and demonstrate a strong mindset can help you in your efforts. Be persistent, take initiative and recognize the unique value you bring to the Canadian health-care system.

Resource Links:

- [CPhA Practice Development Resources](#)
- [CPhA Learning](#)
- [CPS](#)
- [Kroll pharmacy management software resource and training library](#)
- [NAPRA Diagnostic Tool and Learning Modules \(DTLM\)](#)
- [PEBC References and Learning Resources](#)

IPG Mentorship and Integration Project Resources:

Recorded webinars

- [Getting hired as an Unlicensed IPG](#)
- [Pharmacy Practice Beyond the Big Cities: Life and Work in Rural and Small Urban Centres](#)
- [PART 1: Beyond the Dispensary: Diverse Careers in Canadian Pharmacy](#)
- [Rebuilding Career Confidence after Long Gaps and Immigration Hurdles](#)

Podcasts

- [Discovering Opportunities After Licensure](#)
- [Family, Exam and the Pharmacy Dream](#)