

Frequently Asked Questions: Accommodations in Postgraduate Medical Education

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Resident Affairs is committed to supporting residents who experience barriers to participating fully in postgraduate medical education (PGME) because of a characteristic protected under applicable human rights legislation.

The purpose of accommodation is to reduce or eliminate these barriers and provide equitable access to training. Accommodations do not alter the requirement to meet the essential competencies and standards of the residency program and must not compromise patient safety.

Accommodation is an individualized and collaborative process. Each request is considered on a case-by-case basis.

1. How do I request an accommodation?

You can contact Resident Affairs to discuss your circumstances and the accommodation process before submitting a formal request.

When you are ready to proceed, complete the **Request for Accommodation Form** and submit it to:

- the **Assistant Dean, Resident Affairs DMNS (ADRA)** for residents based in mainland Nova Scotia or Prince Edward Island
- the **Assistant Dean, Student and Resident Affairs, DMNB** for residents based in New Brunswick.
- the **Assistant Dean, Student and Residents Affairs, CBMC**, for residents based in Cape Breton

Accommodation requests range from straightforward to complex. Straightforward requests may be addressed collaboratively by Resident Affairs and your Program Director/Site Director. More complex requests may be referred to the **Accommodations Advisory Committee (AAC)** for review and recommendations.

The ADRA will assist you throughout this process.

2. What will Resident Affairs ask me about?

Resident Affairs will work with you to understand:

- the barrier(s) you are experiencing in residency training;
- whether the barrier is related to a characteristic protected under applicable human rights legislation;
- how the barrier affects your participation in educational or clinical activities;
- accommodations that may reduce or eliminate the barrier;
- whether you have previously received accommodations related to the current request; and
- whether additional documentation or information is needed to assess the request.

You are welcome to suggest accommodations that you believe may be helpful. However, the accommodation ultimately provided may differ from the accommodation initially requested if another reasonable option effectively addresses the identified barrier.

3. Will I need to provide medical or other supporting documentation?

Supporting documentation may be required when it is necessary to establish the nature and impact of a barrier or to help determine an appropriate accommodation. The documentation required will depend on the circumstances of the request. Resident Affairs will advise you if additional information is needed.

For example, accommodation requests for medical reasons require documentation from your health care provider.

4. Is my accommodation request confidential?

Yes. Your privacy and confidentiality are important throughout the accommodation process.

Resident Affairs retains the information you provide and shares only information necessary to assess or implement your accommodation. In more complex cases, and with your consent, relevant information may be shared with the AAC or other individuals whose expertise is required to assess the request.

Once an accommodation has been approved, limited information may need to be shared on a confidential, **need-to-know basis** with individuals responsible for implementing it.

You will be informed about the steps in the process and when information needs to be shared.

5. Will I have to attend meetings about my accommodation request?

You will normally meet initially with the ADRA to discuss your request.

For straightforward requests, the ADRA and Program Director/Site Director will generally work with you to determine a reasonable accommodation and how it can be implemented.

Complex requests may be referred to the AAC. You will only be asked to meet with the AAC if additional information or discussion is required. The ADRA can attend with you to provide support. Depending on the request, your Program Director or Site Director may also participate.

Meetings will be arranged as promptly as possible with the goal of minimizing disruption to your training.

6. What is a family status accommodation?

Family status is a protected ground under applicable provincial human rights legislation. However, not every childcare or caregiving difficulty will give rise to a duty to accommodate.

Family status accommodation may be considered when a resident experiences a barrier to participating in residency training because of a significant caregiving responsibility or obligation and reasonable accommodation is required to address that barrier.

Family status requests are assessed individually. Resident Affairs may ask about:

- the nature of the caregiving responsibility or obligation;
- how it creates a barrier to participation in residency;
- the impact of the clinical or educational requirement on that responsibility;
- reasonable alternative arrangements that have been considered or attempted; and
- what accommodation may reduce or eliminate the barrier.

Examples of circumstances in which family status accommodation may be considered include:

- breastfeeding or the need to express breast milk during the workday;
- caregiving responsibilities for a child or dependent with a disability, serious illness or complex medical needs;
- required attendance at significant medical appointments or treatments for a dependent;
- significant caregiving responsibilities arising from exceptional or unexpected family circumstances; or
- other circumstances in which a residency requirement creates a significant barrier related to a protected family status obligation.

Although they can create genuine scheduling challenges for residents, **routine childcare responsibilities do not necessarily create a legal duty to accommodate.** For example, routine daycare drop-off or pickup times, preference for a particular childcare provider or location, commuting considerations, or difficulty coordinating ordinary childcare arrangements would not generally be sufficient **on their own** to establish a family status accommodation.

However, individual circumstances vary. Residents who believe a clinical or educational requirement creates a significant barrier related to family status are encouraged to contact Resident Affairs to discuss their circumstances rather than determining for themselves whether they qualify for accommodation.

7. Does accommodation mean that my workload, clinical responsibilities or competency requirements will be reduced?

Not necessarily. The purpose of accommodation is to remove or reduce barriers to participation in training, not to lower educational or professional standards.

Residents receiving accommodations must continue to meet the competencies required by their residency program.

Depending on the accommodation, changes to scheduling, hours, location, assessment conditions or other aspects of training may be appropriate. In some circumstances, an accommodation may affect the length or structure of training.

8. Who pays costs associated with accommodation or assistive technology?

Residents are generally responsible for costs associated with making an accommodation request, such as obtaining supporting documentation or professional assessments.

Once an accommodation has been approved, Dalhousie University and/or the employer may be responsible for reasonable costs associated with implementing the accommodation, up to the point of undue hardship. Examples may include equipment, modifications to the learning environment or certain assistive technologies.

Responsibility for costs will depend on the nature of the accommodation.

9. Who is responsible for requesting an accommodation?

It is the resident's responsibility to bring forward a request for accommodation.

A request may be made before beginning residency, at the beginning of training, or at any point during residency. Residents are encouraged to make requests as early as reasonably possible, particularly when implementation may require advance planning.

10. Do accommodations from undergraduate medical education automatically continue into residency?

No.

Accommodations provided during undergraduate medical education do not automatically transfer to postgraduate medical education at Dalhousie, whether you attended Dalhousie or another institution.

If you anticipate requiring accommodation during residency, you are encouraged to contact Resident Affairs as early as possible to discuss your needs.

11. Do Dalhousie accommodations automatically apply to certification or licensing examinations?

No.

The Medical Council of Canada (MCC), College of Family Physicians of Canada (CFPC), and Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada (RCPSC) have their own processes for requesting examination accommodations.

Documentation related to your PGME accommodation may be helpful in supporting an application, but approval by Dalhousie does not guarantee approval by another organization.

Residents are encouraged to review application requirements and timelines well in advance of an examination.

12. Do I need to tell my preceptors or clinical team about my accommodation?

Your program is responsible for ensuring that individuals who need information to implement an approved accommodation receive the necessary information, with appropriate consent and attention to confidentiality.

There may also be circumstances in which you need to discuss the practical implementation of an accommodation with a preceptor or clinical team—for example, when an accommodation affects call hours, breaks, scheduling or patient-care responsibilities.

You are not expected to disclose your diagnosis or the reason for your accommodation to supervisors, preceptors or other residents.

Resident Affairs and your program can help determine how information should be communicated so that the accommodation can be implemented effectively while protecting your privacy.

13. How long does an accommodation remain in place?

The duration of an accommodation depends on the circumstances.

Some accommodations are required for a defined period, while others may be required throughout residency training. Accommodations may be reviewed periodically to ensure they continue to address the identified barrier and remain appropriate within the training environment.

If your circumstances or accommodation needs change, contact the ADRA. Updated documentation may be required depending on the nature of the change.

14. What if I experience resistance or mistreatment related to my accommodation?

If you are having trouble with the implementation of an approved accommodation, resistance to the accommodation, or mistreatment related to it, contact the ADRA.

You may also contact your Program Director/Site Director and/or the Office of Professional Affairs, as appropriate.

Residents should not be subjected to discrimination or mistreatment because they have requested or received an approved accommodation.

15. How long does the accommodation process take, and what happens while my request is being reviewed?

Timelines vary depending on the complexity of the request and whether additional documentation or consultation is required.

Straightforward requests may be resolved within a week, while complex requests may take several weeks.

Residents are encouraged to submit requests and supporting documentation as early as possible. Where appropriate and feasible, temporary accommodations may be considered while a request is being assessed.

16. What if my accommodation needs change or I no longer require accommodation?

Contact the ADRA if your circumstances change, your current accommodation is no longer effective, or you no longer require accommodation.

The accommodation may be modified or discontinued following discussion with you and the relevant Program/Site Director. Updated supporting documentation may be requested when necessary.

Changes will be documented and communicated to those responsible for implementing the accommodation.

17. What if the accommodation I request cannot be provided?

Accommodation is an individualized and collaborative process. A resident is entitled to **reasonable accommodation**, but this does not necessarily mean that the specific accommodation requested will be provided.

In determining what accommodation is reasonable, relevant considerations may include patient safety, the competency requirements of the residency program, the nature and size of the program, effects on other learners and members of the healthcare team, other protected rights, available alternatives, costs, and whether the accommodation would result in undue hardship.

Where the specific accommodation requested cannot reasonably be provided, other options that address the identified barrier may be explored.

18. What if I disagree with an accommodation decision?

If you disagree with an accommodation decision, the first step is to discuss your concerns with the ADRA and your Program/Site Director to determine whether the matter can be resolved informally.

If the matter cannot be resolved, the PGME Accommodation Policy outlines the process for appealing an accommodation decision.

Have questions or aren't sure whether you need an accommodation?

You do not need to determine on your own whether your circumstances meet the criteria for accommodation.

Residents are welcome to contact **Resident Affairs** Raffairs@dal.ca confidentially to discuss a barrier, learn more about the accommodation process, and determine appropriate next steps.