



# CONTINUING COMPETENCE PROGRAM

The College of Medical Laboratory Technologists of Alberta (CMLTA) Continuing Competence Program, approved as amended by Council, and in force effective September 15, 2016. This document replaces any previous versions.



The Continuing Competence Program was produced by the College of Medical Laboratory Technologists of Alberta in partnership with the Government of Alberta.

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# CONTINUING COMPETENCE PROGRAM

## INTRODUCTION

The *Health Professions Act* (HPA) governs all regulated health professions in Alberta and collectively brings these professions together under one statute. Pursuant to the HPA, all regulated health professionals must participate in a standardized continuing competence program. Accordingly, each College governing a regulated health profession must establish a Continuing Competence Program (CCP). A CCP is a systematic means for a College to monitor the ongoing knowledge, skills, judgments, and attitudes of professional practitioners to ensure their Regulated Members meet standards in the provision of professional services to the public. Although a mandatory component for registration and practice permit renewal, a CCP also provides many benefits to the individual Medical Laboratory Technologist (MLT). These benefits include professional integrity, personal growth, career advancement, and the application of newly acquired or enhanced knowledge, skills, judgments, and attitudes in a professional capacity. The CCP represents the minimum mandatory continuing education a health professional is required to complete on an annual basis—it is neither inclusive nor representative of all annual learning and professional development voluntarily undertaken by a professional practitioner.

The development of the CMLTA CCP was accomplished through a collaborative partnership with Alberta Health and the CMLTA in compliance with provincial legislation and leading practice standards. The CMLTA CCP was introduced in 2006 with mandatory participation implemented in 2007. Since that time, the CMLTA has published four versions of the CCP, each based on the original format, but with significant revisions and enhancements. The most recent CCP version adopts a new format incorporating the CMLTA *Standards of Practice* as a core element.

The *Medical Laboratory Technologists Profession Regulation* sets out the specific requirements of the CMLTA CCP that a Regulated Member must complete on an annual basis, which include:

(a) *A self-assessment based on the Competency Profile developed by the CMLTA indicating the areas where continuing competence activities are to be undertaken by a Regulated Member in the next registration year;*

(b) *A written Learning Plan that sets out the continuing competence goals of the Regulated Member for the next registration year and the continuing competence activities to be undertaken by the Regulated Member during that year to achieve the continuing competence goals; and*

(c) *A completed Learning Plan from the previous registration year documenting the competence activities that were completed.*

The CCP evolves from time to time in response to regulatory, legal, and ethical expectations. The CMLTA communicates any major revisions to the CCP to all Regulated Members. In addition, the most current version of the CCP may be viewed or downloaded from the CMLTA website, or a copy may be requested from the CMLTA.

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# THE CMLTA **STANDARDS OF PRACTICE** IS A FOUNDATIONAL AND FUNDAMENTAL DOCTRINE WHICH LENDS ITSELF TO BE ADAPTED AS AN ASSESSMENT TOOL FOR GAUGING CONTINUING COMPETENCE WITHIN THE NUMEROUS PRACTICE ENVIRONMENTS OF MLTS.

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The CMLTA *Standards of Practice* is a foundational and fundamental doctrine which lends itself to be adapted as an assessment tool for gauging continuing competence within the numerous practice environments of MLTs.

The *Standards of Practice* represent the minimum standards for knowledge, skills, judgements, and attitudes expected of all MLTs in Alberta. The *Standards of Practice* are mandatory and apply to Regulated Members at all times in all dimensions of professional practice. Together; the *Standards of Practice*, the CMLTA *Code of Ethics*, regulatory requirements, and

workplace policies establish the framework to direct the practice of medical laboratory science. The *Standards of Practice* define the minimum level of performance expected of Regulated Members. The *Standards of Practice* serves as a stand-alone document used in complaint resolution and professional discipline hearing proceedings, and most recently, serves as the primary resource and foundation of Version 4 of the CCP; namely the MLT Competency Profile. As the MLT Competency Profile is the basis of the annual Self-Assessment of Practice, a Regulated Member's Self-Assessment of Practice is directly linked to the *Standards of Practice*.

## **ENABLING COMPETENCIES**

Each of the three main standards (e.g. professional accountability, knowledge based practice, and professional roles) within the *Standards of Practice* contain a list of statements which qualify the main standard and further expand on the practical application of the standard in the workplace. These qualifying statements in the *Standards of Practice* are referred to in the context of the Self-Assessment of Practice as Enabling Competencies.

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# THE **SELF-ASSESSMENT OF PRACTICE** IS DESIGNED TO ASSIST REGULATED MEMBERS IN THE REFLECTION OF THEIR PRACTICE STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES AND ESTABLISH AN ANNUAL LEARNING PLAN TO GUIDE THE MAINTENANCE AND/OR DEVELOPMENT OF COMPETENCE IN THE WORKPLACE.

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To provide safe, competent, and ethical medical laboratory services; MLTs must be able to demonstrate the necessary knowledge, skills, judgments, and attitudes in their professional practice. The Self-Assessment of Practice is designed to assist Regulated Members in the reflection of their practice strengths and weaknesses and establish an annual Learning Plan to guide the maintenance and/or development of competence in the workplace.

## **COMPLETING THE SELF-ASSESSMENT OF PRACTICE**

The online Self-Assessment of Practice provides a systematic and organized method to assist Regulated Members in the self-reflection of their practice, to recognize potential areas for continued or new learning, and to create a Learning Plan. Regulated Members self-assess by selecting the Self-Assessment of Practice Statement which most accurately describes their abilities and circumstances for each Enabling Competency as derived from the *Standards of Practice*.

## **SELF-ASSESSMENT OF PRACTICE STATEMENTS**

There are two Self-Assessment of Practice statements:

1. **Competent (COM)** I have self-assessed this Enabling Competency as competent because I have the necessary knowledge, skills, judgments, and attitudes to adequately meet all the requirements for this Enabling Competency.
2. **Developmental/Advancing/Expanding (DEV)** I have self-assessed this Enabling Competency as developmental/advancing/expanding because I have identified weaknesses/gaps in my knowledge, skills, judgments, and attitudes in this Enabling Competency, and/or I would like to supplement my knowledge, skills, judgments, and attitudes in this Enabling Competency.

The Self-Assessment of Practice Statements do not imply unskilled or incompetent professional practice. If uncertain how to rate a particular area or Enabling Competency, individuals are encouraged to consult a peer or the CMLTA for assistance.

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# A **LEARNING PLAN** IS A SELF-DIRECTED LEARNING PATH TO MAINTAIN CURRENCY AND ENHANCE PERFORMANCE WITHIN THE PROFESSION AND TO ENHANCE INTERPROFESSIONAL PRACTICE THROUGHOUT THE HEALTH CARE ENVIRONMENT.

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A Learning Plan is a self-directed learning path to maintain currency and enhance performance within the profession and to enhance interprofessional practice throughout the health care environment. Learning Plans are based on the Regulated Member's current or anticipated area of practice and are derived from the Enabling Competencies identified in the Self-Assessment of Practice as Developmental/Advancing/Expanding (DEV).

Individuals assume personal responsibility for learning and evaluating progress in attaining specific competency goals.

As a component of the online MLT Practice Permit renewal, Regulated Members create a new Learning Plan containing a minimum of three (and up to a maximum of six) Learning Objectives for the registration year. Over the course of the registration year, Regulated Members document Learning Activities undertaken to complete their Learning Objectives.

**Members must complete a minimum three Learning Objective(s) as stated on a Learning Plan prior to the renewal or reinstatement of subsequent registrations.**

## **NEW LEARNING PLAN**

A New Learning Plan consists of the following components:

1. **Learning Objectives** are the Enabling Competencies identified through the Self-Assessment of Practice as Developmental/Advancing/Expanding (DEV) which have been chosen by the Regulated Member to be included in a Learning Plan. Based on individual priority, Regulated Members select three to six Enabling Competencies identified through the Self-Assessment of Practice as Developmental/Advancing/Expanding (DEV) to be used as their Learning Objectives. The CMLTA allows individuals to select the same Enabling Competencies for consecutive renewal years provided the learning obtained has a different focus and demonstrates a different element of learning from the previous year.

*NOTE: Effective with Version 4 of the CMLTA CCP, Regulated Members are no longer required to create specific statements to act as Learning Objectives. Enabling Competencies identified as Developmental/Advancing/Expanding (DEV) through completion of the*

*Self-Assessment of Practice are automatically converted into Learning Objectives after being prioritized by a Regulated Member to be included on a new Learning Plan.*

2. **Projected Learning Activities** are the tools an individual plans to utilize to develop the selected Learning Objective. The CMLTA recognizes that learning is achieved through many avenues dependent upon the preferred learning style of the individual. Learning Activities may include people, literature, courses, policies, procedures, etc. The CMLTA acknowledges a Learning Activity may have several applications if the focus is broad, but Regulated Members must identify discrete Learning Activities for each Learning Objective submitted. For example, a one-day professional event, may not be identified as the Learning Activity for more than one Learning Objective, unless the event can be succinctly structured into more than one Learning Activity. At the time individuals identify their learning needs to develop a Learning Objective, potential learning opportunities are often unknown. For that reason, individuals are only

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required to select Projected Learning Activities, from the dropdown menu. The CMLTA acknowledges Projected Learning Activities may vary from those ultimately utilized to complete a Learning Objective.

For a listing of Learning Activities and documentation requirements, please refer to *Documentation Guidelines for Learning Activities*.

- 3. Projected Professional Development** is the predicted outcome or benefit to an individual's professional practice through completion of the Learning Objective.
- 4. Target Date** is a realistic time frame for achievement of the Learning Objective and will vary depending upon the complexity and urgency of the learning. The CMLTA suggests all Learning Activities be undertaken during the year for which registration and an MLT Practice Permit are issued; however, Learning Activities from September 1 prior to the registration year through December 31 of the registration year

will be accepted. A minimum of one Learning Objective must be completed in the year for which the MLT Practice Permit has been issued. For example, on a 2017 Learning Plan, the CMLTA will recognize Learning Activities from September 1, 2016 through December 31, 2017 provided at least one Learning Objective is completed in 2017.

### COMPLETED LEARNING PLAN

Regulated Members are bound by legislation to complete a minimum of three of their stated Learning Objectives. During the online MLT Practice Permit renewal, Regulated Members must declare whether or not Learning Objectives have been achieved on their annual Learning Plan. Regulated Members are instructed to annually record details of Learning Activities utilized to complete their Learning Plans on a CCP Activity Log.

Individuals may use any Learning Activity listed in the *Documentation Guidelines for Learning Activities* to complete their Learning Objectives.

An uncompleted Learning Objective may be applied to a subsequent year's Learning Plan provided it is still supported by the Self-Assessment of Practice.

When a Learning Objective can no longer be completed due to a change in employer, area of practice, or an extenuating circumstance, the individual must submit a written request to make changes to their current Learning Plan to the Manager of Professional Practice and Competence/Deputy Registrar no later than August 1.

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# A FUNDAMENTAL COMPONENT OF THE CCP IS THE RECORDING OF LEARNING ACTIVITIES ON THE ONLINE **CCP ACTIVITY LOG**.

A fundamental component of the CCP is the recording of Learning Activities on the online CCP Activity Log. Annual completion of the CCP Activity Log is required to validate Learning Activities and is requested by the CMLTA in the event of a CCP Compliance Audit. While it is sufficient for Regulated Members to simply record and track the progress of Learning Objectives on their completed Learning Plans, the CCP Activity Log requests additional information to validate Learning Activities that were completed and the resultant impact on a Regulated Member's professional practice. The online CCP Activity Log guides Regulated Members to input and save the required data and allows for the uploading of required supporting documentation, if applicable. The online CCP Activity Log requests the same data as listed on the *Documentation Guidelines for Learning Activities*.

The *Documentation Guidelines for Learning Activities* was developed to serve as a quick reference to the data elements requested during the completion of the online CCP Activity Log to validate Learning Activities.

It is an annual requirement to complete a CCP Activity Log, but only those individuals selected for a CCP Compliance Audit are required to submit their completed CCP Activity Log to the CMLTA.

## COMPLETING THE CCP ACTIVITY LOG

To highlight awareness and to emphasize the importance of maintaining a CCP Activity Log, the CMLTA developed an interactive online format for Regulated Members to record the information necessary to validate Learning Activities. Regulated Members can access the CCP Activity Log through their Member Login on the CMLTA website.

After selecting the chosen Learning Objective from the corresponding Learning Plan year, Regulated Members select a suitable Learning Activity from the dropdown menu; whereupon, the programming will display the data required to validate the learning.

Documentation requirements include:

1. **Nature of Resource** Record the most appropriate type/category of resource that best relates to the activity. For example, textbook, procedure, workshop, conference.
2. **Date** Record the date(s) on which the learning occurred.
3. **Title** Record the title of the applicable resource. For example, the title of the textbook, journal, course, procedure, policy, in-service, or professional event.
4. **Topic** Record the topic of the Learning Activity and briefly describe the subject matter.

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5. **Name** Record the name of the applicable provider/equipment/procedure. Depending on Learning Activity selected, Regulated Members are requested to provide the name of author, website, presenter, organization, committee, group, instrument, or procedure.

6. **Dedicated Hours** Record the time (in hours) of instruction, participation, review, learning, etc. Do not include the hours the new learning has been applied in professional practice. All learning is individualized and the number of hours to complete a Learning Activity for a specific Learning Objective will vary between individuals.

7. **Other** Please feel to include any additional information regarding the Learning Activity.

8. **Supporting Documents** If required, the online CCP Activity Log will indicate the required supporting documents. For example, certificate of attendance or transcript.

9. **Impact on Professional Practice** Record the outcome/benefit of the completed learning and the relevancy/applicability on MLT professional practice.

*NOTE: Based on the Learning Activity selected, documentation requirements may vary.*

Regulated Members are able to consecutively enter data for multiple Learning Activities per Learning Objective when necessary.

The online CCP Activity Log is available beginning the 2013 registration year and all subsequent years. Although the online submission of the CCP Activity Log is only activated once a Regulated Member is selected for a CCP Compliance Audit, Regulated Members are encouraged to frequently update their online CCP Activity Log with details of completed Learning Activities.

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# THE **CCP COMPLIANCE AUDIT** IS ONE MEASURE TO ASSESS AND VALIDATE THE INTEGRITY OF THE CCP.

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The CCP Compliance Audit is one measure to assess and validate the integrity of the CCP.

Legislation stipulates that regulatory colleges must have an established process for the review and evaluation of previous and current Regulated Members' compliance with the CCP. To fulfill this mandate, at the beginning of each year, the CMLTA randomly selects up to 20% of Regulated Members from the previous year's registration roster to participate in the CCP Compliance Audit. The Compliance Audit is a tool used by the CMLTA that serves a two-fold purpose: to systematically assess the integrity of the CCP as mandated by Alberta Health; and to monitor the conformance of Regulated Members. Individuals randomly selected for the Compliance Audit must participate and submit evidence of continuing education and professional development activities. When selected for a CCP Compliance Audit, individuals are required to provide documentation and/or evidence of learning for one to five previous years of professional practice. The CMLTA instructs individuals to retain copies of all CCP documentation, including their recorded learning activities, for a minimum

of five years for this purpose. Participation in the CCP Compliance Audit is a mandatory component of CMLTA registration and annual MLT Practice Permit renewal. As it is an audit of the previous registration year(s), current Regulated Members, and even those not currently registered in Alberta, are eligible.

Individuals selected for the CCP Compliance Audit will be sent the initial CCP Compliance Audit notice detailing all relevant documentation required by the CMLTA.

Individuals are instructed to submit the required documentation through the Member Login on the CMLTA website. Those documents may include:

- Completed CCP Activity Log(s).
- Employer Verification of MLT Employment and MLT Practice Hours.
- Compliance Audit Declaration.

Prior to the specified deadline, individuals must submit Compliance Audit documentation to the CMLTA for review and assessment. The CMLTA follows a detailed schedule with specified deadlines to ensure timely processing and correspondence with the audited individual. The CMLTA institutes a cumulative late fee for individuals who disregard the stipulated deadlines.

The CMLTA reviews this documentation to determine that an individual adhered to their stated Learning Plan, completed the necessary learning activities, and has in essence fulfilled their contractual Learning Plan obligations. The audit process tests the conformance of Regulated Members to defined standards via the review of objective evidence of learning. The CMLTA examines submitted audit documentation in conjunction with applicable online renewal documents and determines if the individual has complied with the requirements of the CCP. If the individual has submitted satisfactory documentation, a pass letter is issued via email. If the CMLTA determines a Compliance Audit is incomplete, the individual will be notified by email of the deficiencies and/or remedial work required to successfully complete the Compliance Audit.

The Compliance Audit is also a means for the CMLTA to evaluate the CCP structure, format, content, and requirements as part of a good governance model. The CMLTA utilizes the Compliance Audit as a hands-on tool to monitor levels of CCP compliance. As the pass rate is a reflection of the effectiveness of this

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element of the CCP, when pass rates fall below targeted levels, the CMLTA will examine the program with the intent to revise or provide the necessary clarification to Regulated Members.

### KEY CONSIDERATIONS

A CCP Compliance Audit will remain outstanding on an individual's file until the individual has successfully complied with the request. If there are extenuating circumstances preventing an individual from complying within the specified deadlines, the CMLTA must be notified immediately to avoid escalating fines and a potential complaint of professional misconduct against the individual.

Pursuant to the HPA, all outstanding late fees must be paid before a subsequent registration and MLT Practice Permit will be issued.

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# SUMMARY

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All regulated health professionals are required to participate in a standardized Continuing Competence Program pursuant to the HPA. A mandatory structured professional development program is only one measure to ensure patient safety and public protection. All MLTs must assume personal accountability in professional practice to remain skilled, knowledgeable, and competent practitioners.

This document outlines the fundamental elements of the CMLTA CCP. The CMLTA reviews this document annually and communicates revisions and new requirements to Regulated Members via the website and in an annual registration/MLT Practice Permit renewal memorandum emailed to all Regulated Members. The most current version of the CCP may be viewed or downloaded from the CMLTA website, or a copy may be requested from the CMLTA. Comments or questions are welcome and can be directed to [info@cmlta.org](mailto:info@cmlta.org).

The data collected from the CCP is confidential and will not be shared with employers. This data may only be used in an aggregate format wherein the confidentiality of the individual is maintained, except where allowed or required pursuant to the HPA. Furthermore, it cannot be used for conduct or disciplinary purposes, except as provided for in Sections 51.1 and 52 of the HPA.

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# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

**The CCP is inflexible and does not allow Regulated Members to apply learning opportunities unknown at the time of renewal. Why is the program structured in this manner?**

In order to comply with legislation, Regulated Members must be proactive in their approach to learning and develop a Learning Plan prior to the upcoming registration year. The *Medical Laboratory Technologists Profession Regulation* stipulates:

**Continuing competence program 12.2**

*As part of the continuing competence program, a regulated member must complete the following, on an annual basis, in a form satisfactory to the Registrar:*

- (a) a self-assessment based on the competency profile developed by the College indicating the areas where continuing competence activities are to be undertaken by a regulated member in the next registration year;*
- (b) a written learning plan that sets out the continuing competence goals of the regulated member for the next registration year and the continuing competence activities to be undertaken*

*by the regulated member during that year to achieve the continuing competence goals;*

- (c) a completed learning plan from the previous registration year documenting the competence activities that were completed.*

There are many formats of CCPs among the regulated health professions. There is a movement towards the CMLTA's current format of Self-Assessment of Practice, whereby individuals identify competencies which may require growth or strengthening, and thereby apply a proactive approach to the development of Learning Plans.

**I attend many continuing education activities which are not applicable to my Learning Plan. Does the CMLTA recognize these additional activities?**

The CMLTA encourages individuals to attend all learning events which enhance one's professional development and portfolio, even if an activity does not apply directly to a Learning Plan. The CMLTA appreciates that a Learning Plan is neither inclusive nor representative of all continuing education activities an MLT participates in throughout the year. The CMLTA emphasizes the CCP

captures only the minimum mandatory education required to ensure compliance with the HPA.

**Why did it become mandatory to complete a CCP Activity Log online when selected for a CCP Compliance Audit?**

In 2014, audited individuals were provided the option to submit the required CCP Compliance Audit documentation by hard copy or by utilizing the new online Compliance Audit process. Approximately half of all audited individuals submitted their Compliance Audit documents, in part or whole, through the online process. Those individuals who utilized the online program were unanimously in favor of it, and commented on how simple it was to navigate once they sat down with an open mind to give it a try. In addition to the positive feedback, the online CCP Compliance Audit resulted in a streamlined process for the CMLTA and a decreased processing time. This was due to individuals being guided using a step-by-step process during the online CCP Compliance Audit as to which documentation the CMLTA actually needed – rather than submitting excess or unnecessary information. The decreased paper flow allowed staff more time to field

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questions regarding the CCP Compliance Audit. For these reasons, the CMLTA instituted mandatory online submission of all CCP Compliance Audits.

**I completed my online CCP Activity Log, but I cannot figure out how to submit it to the CMLTA?**

Regulated Members are encouraged to complete the CCP Activity Log in real-time; however, the submission of the CCP Activity Log is only activated once an individual is selected for (and notified of) a CCP Compliance Audit.

**When can I access my CCP Activity Log?**

The CCP Activity Log becomes available for data entries once a Regulated Member has submitted their applicable Learning Plan during the online renewal.

**Why doesn't the CMLTA simply require specific course completion rather than a Self-Assessment and a completed Learning Plan each year?**

Literature suggests that “Adults are competency-based learners, meaning that they want to learn a skill or acquire knowledge that they can apply pragmatically to their *individual* circumstances. Life or work-related situations present a more appropriate framework for adult learning than academic or theoretical approaches (Edmunds, Lowe, Murray and Seymour, 1999).”<sup>1</sup> The CMLTA considers the current CCP, using the Self-Assessment of Practice to determine individual learning needs, to be a more practical and effectual tool for improving one’s competence than simply completing an arbitrary course.

1 Edmunds, C., K. Lowe, M. Murray, and A. Seymour. 1999. *The Ultimate Educator*. Washington, DC: U.S.