

Becoming a Licensed Pharmacist in California

An Insider's View

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The California State Board of Pharmacy licenses pharmacists in California. The goal of licensing is consumer protection: the board is required to ensure that before practicing pharmacy, every applicant meets the minimum requirements. Once proof of achievement of the requirements is provided to and approved by the board, the board issues the individual a pharmacist license.

Pharmacy is regulated at the state level, so states have their own licensure requirements, although most states have similar requirements. Each requirement has a purpose. The requirements themselves have their origin in California statutory laws (enacted by the Legislature) or in regulations (rules promulgated by the board).

For many applicants, the process will take four to five months. For others it will take six months, and for a few, longer than six months. Most applicants can take steps to minimize the timeframe required to become licensed to the shorter end of the range. This article describes these steps.

Here are the basic components (note: please use the directions for the online examination application to provide you with the specifics of each component). The more complete your application is when you submit it, the shorter the process will be for you.

I. Becoming Eligible to take the Examinations

1. **Education:** each applicant must be either:
 - A graduate of an ACPE-accredited school of pharmacy, or
 - If a foreign-educated pharmacist, certified by the Foreign Pharmacy Graduate Education Committee.
2. **Experience:** each applicant must provide proof of experience working as an intern pharmacist or if licensed in another state, experience as a pharmacist. Satisfactory evidence of experience must be one of the following:
 - 1,500 hours of intern experience provided on affidavits available from the board if registered in California as an intern.
 - 1,500 hours of intern experience earned as a pharmacist intern in another state - these hours must be certified by the board of pharmacy in the state where the hours were earned.
 - Proof of licensure as a pharmacist in another state for one year – this requires a license certification from the board of pharmacy in the state where the individual is licensed.
3. **Criminal Background Check:** All pharmacist applicants must undergo a criminal background check by submitting finger-

prints for evaluation by the California Department of Justice and Federal Bureau of Investigation. Even if you have previously submitted prints to the California board for an intern or pharmacy technician license, you must submit new prints with the classification of “pharmacist” listed on the fingerprint form. There are two ways to submit fingerprints:

- If you are located in California, you must submit prints via LiveScan. This is faster, and the California Department of Justice is insistent that LiveScan be used for those residing in California.
- If you are outside California, request that the board mail you fingerprint cards. You need to submit two cards along with a separate fee (made payable to the board).

4. **License Verification:** we require a license verification from every state in which you are licensed as a pharmacist. The state boards of pharmacy in the respective states need to provide these certifications.

II. Being made Eligible for the Examinations

Once the board has a complete application, the board will make you eligible to take the CPJE and NAPLEX exams. We will send you a letter notifying you that you are “eligible,” and how to schedule your CPJE and NAPLEX exams. You can take the exams in any order.

- The board does provide some leeway for fingerprint clearances: if we have proof you have submitted prints for a pharmacist license, we will make you eligible without having the background clearances (however, you will not be licensed until we receive the clearances).
- If you passed the NAPLEX after January 1, 2004, you will not need to retake this examination if NABP can transfer the score to California. Contact NABP (www.nabp.net) for more information on how to share prior NAPLEX scores with California.
- Unless we have a quality assurance review (see below) underway for the CPJE, we will mail the scores to you typically within 14 days of when you take the exams.

III. Becoming Licensed

After the board has the two passing scores on the required examinations, the board will send you a green sheet titled “Request for Issuance of Pharmacist License.” You will be asked for a license fee and advised of any deficiencies remaining in your application. Typically the only deficiencies at this stage are results to the background clearances. If you believe that you have already

corrected the deficiency, use the “Contact Us” feature from the board’s website to email us or attach a note to the green sheet when you return it to the board.

We try to process these applications very quickly. The fastest way to know you are licensed is to use the license verification feature on the website (http://www.pharmacy.ca.gov/verify_lic.htm) and checking your name. Once your name appears as a licensed pharmacist, you are licensed. California law provides that verification of licensure from the website is proof you are licensed. You will receive a green, wallet-size license in about 8 weeks (another agency prints and mails these for the board). The large wall license will be mailed within four months.

TIPS for faster and smoother processing, remember:

1. Use one of the processes we suggest for verifying that the board received your application.
2. Status checks are a problem for the board to perform. It diverts limited staff away from processing activities to simply answering a question for someone. We will not generally respond to status inquiries on applications that are less than 60 days old with the board. Instead we direct staff to process applications. Please be patient – and use a technique listed elsewhere in this article to make certain you know we received your application.
3. However, there are times when applicants need to reach us. Use the appropriate email address under “Contact Us” on the website. Certainly email the board if it has been more than 60 days, and you have heard nothing from the board – this is a problem you need to call to our attention. Also, if it has been more than 30 days after you believe your deficiency has been corrected, contact us.
4. If you receive a letter advising you that the board is missing some items (what we call a “deficiency letter”) – this truly means we do not have the listed items. To get through the system faster, you need to provide the item, even if you may think we already have it. So what is most often missing?
 - Transcripts from colleges with the pharmacy degree posted (these must come directly from the school of pharmacy to the board). Oddly, some colleges do not post the PharmD degree to transcripts until 2-3 months after graduation.
 - Fingerprint clearances are sometimes a problem (we run both federal and state background checks). Sometimes we need to ask applicants to resubmit prints because something is preventing the board from receiving the documentation; the board will contact you if additional information is required.
 - Intern hours are missing or less than the 1,500 hours required.
5. Make certain your name matches identically on your government identification, with your social security card and with your name of record that you file with the board (this is the name that will appear on your pharmacist license). Identically

means identically (see the board’s website for more information). Resolving name conflicts is the one area where you should not wait 60 days before resolving the problem.

6. The board periodically conducts quality assurance reviews of the CPJE. When this occurs, no CPJE scores are released until the assessment is completed. The board makes every effort to release scores as soon as we can, but a quality assurance check usually runs 2-3 months or until approximately 400 individuals take the test. We know this is frustrating, but it is necessary. We post this information on the website.
7. Background checks - if you have a prior conviction, you need to disclose it in the required place on the application and describe it fully. (You need to do this if you have reported the conviction on prior applications.) Even if you think a conviction has been expunged or set aside and dismissed, the clearance check usually picks up these records. If you state you have no convictions and yet a background check shows you do, this will become an “enforcement issue.” Enforcement issues will delay the processing of your application or issuance of a license until all enforcement matters are resolved (typically this adds at least two months).

What can you do?

1. Submit as complete an application as you can. This means you should submit in one package:
 - All required application forms
 - The required fee
 - Proof of at least 1,500 hours of intern experience
 - Verifications of pharmacist licensure from all states in which you are licensed
 - LiveScan Receipt showing submission of your fingerprints or if you are out-of-state, enclosing the fingerprint cards and additional processing fee.
2. How to verify the board has received your application:
 - Enclose a self-addressed, stamped post card, or simply an envelope addressed to you with your application package. Board staff will mail these to you when the board receives your application – so you know we have your application.
 - Check to see if the bank has cashed your check. The board cashes all checks it receives very quickly – within two working days of receipt. If the check has been cashed, we received your application.
3. Contact us if it has been more than 60 days since you submitted your application and you have heard nothing from the board, or more than 30 days since you have taken steps to correct a deficiency and you have had no response from the board.

The board wants all qualified applicants to become licensed as quickly and effortlessly as possible. Use the information above to aid you in getting through the process as expediently as possible. ♦