



FAMILY MEDICINE CERTIFICATION FAQ

1. What is Family Medicine Certification?

Family Medicine Certification is a voluntary process that emphasizes ongoing participation in activities that assess important physician characteristics: Professionalism, Self-Assessment, Performance Improvement and Cognitive Expertise. We believe these characteristics encourage clinical excellence, support your dedication to continuous self-assessment of medical knowledge and lifelong learning, help you to maintain quality and safety in your practice, and encourage professional self-regulation within the specialty of family medicine. Your board certification is valid as long as you meet the continuous certification requirements.

2. What are the benefits of becoming a Board-Certified Family Physician?

Studies looking at the value and benefits of Family Medicine Certification have demonstrated the following:

- Recognition by patients, hospitals, insurers, caregivers and other physicians that you have met high standards of physician quality. Patients cite board certification as the most important thing they look for in selecting a physician, after assuring they are in their insurance network.
- Improved quality of care as reflected in quality measures for acute and chronic disease and prevention activities.
- Lower rates of adverse medical license actions as compared to non-certified physicians.

3. What is the cost for certification and what do the fees cover?

- After initial certification, you will pay a \$200 annual fee in order to have access to all certification activities needed to complete each stage. This annual fee also supports development and maintenance of Knowledge Self-Assessment and Performance Improvement activities and your subsequent examinations, and the mechanisms needed to provide regular updating of your medical license(s) in your Physician Portfolio.
- Beyond that, at each ten-year mark when you have an examination requirement you will pay a one-time \$250 processing fee.

4. What happens if there is a lapse in my certification?

If it has been less than three years since your certification lapsed (due to not meeting activity requirements, CME, payment, or successful exam attempt), we offer a three-year catch up period from the date certification stopped, in order for you to complete the requirements of the stage that was incomplete and catch up on your current stage.

For example, if you did not meet certification activity requirements for your stage ending December 31, 2019, you will have until December 31, 2022 to complete activity requirements of the missed stage and regain certification. Please note this does not change future stage date requirements. In this example, you would need to also complete activities of the current stage to avoid losing certification again on December 31, 2022.

If it has been more than three years since your certification lapsed, you will be required to complete the Certification Re-Entry Process in order to be approved to take the Family Medicine Certification examination and regain your certification status. For information refer to the [Certification Re-Entry Process](#) on our website.

5. What is the significance of Clinical Status and how do I designate this in my Physician Portfolio?

Designating your Clinical Status for certification is important because your activity requirements are customized based on your current status. There are two types of Clinical Status: Clinically Active and Clinically Inactive.

Clinically Active Diplomates provide in person or virtual patient care regardless of the practice setting or scope. They are required to have at least one medical license in the United States, its territories, or Canada, that is currently active, valid and not be subject to any practice privilege limitations.

Clinically Inactive Diplomates are those who do not provide any patient care. These physicians are exempt from completing a performance improvement (PI) activity. Clinically inactive physicians can satisfy their certification requirements by completing additional self-assessment activities to achieve the 50-certification point requirement.

It is not necessary to update your clinical status for a vacation or other short-term leave of absence. You can designate your clinical status by logging into your [Physician Portfolio](#). There is also a link on the Manage Medical License page to switch clinical status.

6. How long is Family Medicine Certification valid and how do I remain certified?

Family Medicine Certification is valid for as long as you successfully meet the Continuous Certification requirements. To maintain your certification, you will need to complete all stage requirements of the Continuous Certification process. This process is divided into 3-Year stages with an examination every 10 years. Within each stage there are minimum requirements for Knowledge Self-Assessment and Performance Improvement activities, as well as total points and CME credits. Every 10 years, you will choose to either take the one-day examination or participate in the alternative longitudinal assessment method, Family Medicine Certification Longitudinal Assessment (FMCLA), for demonstrating your cognitive expertise. Additionally, you must always remain in compliance with ABFM Guidelines for Professionalism, Licensure, and Personal Conduct. The table below can be used as a quick reference guide for your certification stage activities.

Continuous Certification Process		Years 1-3	Years 4-6	Years 7-9	Years 10-13	
Points Requirement (50 points required per 3-year stage)	Self-Assessment <i>Minimum 1 KSA or 4 CKSAs</i>	10 points	10 points	10 points	YEAR 10	10 points
	Performance Improvement <i>Minimum 1 PI activity</i>	20 points	20 points	20 points		20 points
	Additional Self-Assessment and PI Activities <i>Your choice</i>	20 points	20 points	20 points		20 points
CME Requirement	Continuing Medical Education <i>Minimum 50% from Division 1 Credit</i>	150 CME	150 CME	150 CME	Complete One-Day Examination — OR — Enroll in FMCLA Quarterly Longitudinal Assessment	150 CME
Professionalism and Licensure Requirement	Comply with ABFM Guidelines for professionalism, licensure Continually hold a valid, full, unrestricted license.	✓	✓	✓		✓
Annual Certification Fee Requirement	Submit an annual \$200 certification fee* (or \$600 per 3-year stage)	✓	✓	✓		✓

CERTIFICATION PROCESS CONTINUES

*The annual certification fee of \$200 allows you to complete all of these activities and to also utilize as many additional activities beyond the requirements as you wish for your own learning, beyond the minimum requirements.

7. I have CME Credits with AAFP. Why am I not seeing these listed in my Physician Portfolio?

If you are currently an active member with the American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP) you likely report your CME through the AAFP website. Once you have completed 150 CME credits within your three-year cycle, you will see the ABFM CME requirement show as satisfactorily completed in your Physician Portfolio. You will not see incremental updates before the 150-credit threshold.

8. I have recently retired. How do I notify ABFM of my retirement status?

Congratulations on your Retirement! If you are no longer seeing patients or you have completed your professional career and would like to indicate this with ABFM, you may update your status by contacting ABFM Support Center at [1-877-223-7437](tel:1-877-223-7437) or by logging into your [Physician Portfolio](#). If you are currently certified, your certification status will remain current until you are no longer participating in certification requirements. If you self-designate as retired, you

may choose to continue being board certified by maintaining your certification requirements. All physicians who self-designate will be listed as retired in the ABFM [Find a Physician](#) directory and the ABMS physician directory. This allows the public and credentialing entities to accurately know your status.

9. I'm a retired Diplomate with 35 plus years of certification with ABFM and I'm listed as "Not Certified". Is there a special designation available to more accurately reflect my certification history to the general public?

Yes. At ABFM, we want to congratulate you for being board certified in Family Medicine for 35 years or more. Your commitment to clinical excellence in Family Medicine through lifelong learning and self-assessment is to be commended. If you are a Diplomate who is retired and were certified for 35 years -or more, you can self-designate as a Retired and Long-Standing Diplomate by logging into your [Physician Portfolio](#). You must first select Retired, and then, if eligible, a window will appear which will allow you to make the additional designation to Long-Standing Diplomate.

10. What is the age requirement for the Senior Discount on Certification activities?

If you are age 70 or over and have been initially certified and re-certified at least once during your career, ABFM wants to recognize your dedication and commitment to our specialty by offering a 50% discount on your Family Medicine Certification fees. If you are a Diplomate in this category, this payment option will be appropriately reflected in your [Physician Portfolio](#) on your 70th birthday.

11. Are the certification requirements due before the application for the exam?

It is not necessary to complete certification requirements prior to making an application for the ABFM examination, regardless of whether you take the one-day examination or the longitudinal assessment option (FMCLA). However, all certification requirements must be completed before you can take the examination. Deadlines for completion of requirements are determined by the exam date you selected and are outlined in the Candidate Information Booklet inside your [Physician Portfolio](#).

American Osteopathic Association (AOA) Training Pathway

1. What is the AOA Training Pathway?

- a. The AOA Training Pathway has been designed to support physicians who have graduated from an Osteopathic Association Medical School in the United States. If you have trained in a three-year AOA-Accredited Family Medicine Residency Training Program, or an AOA program that received ACGME accreditation or pre-accreditation, you may be eligible to apply for Family Medicine Certification through a special AOA Training Pathway. Access to this pathway is time limited, beginning on December 1, 2017 and continuing through December 31, 2022. For more information refer to our webpage on [AOA Training Pathway](#).

2. Why was a time-limited AOA Training Pathway developed?

- a. As of June 30, 2020, the American Osteopathic Association (AOA) no longer accredits residency programs in the U.S., and the American Council on Graduate Medical Education (ACGME) will be the single accreditation body for all approved family medicine training programs. An agreement between the ACGME and the Osteopathic community provides a grace period at the end of the transition period to allow any residents in AOA programs that have not received ACGME accreditation to complete their training in these programs before they are closed. In light of this change, the ABFM has created a time-limited option, called the AOA Training Pathway, to provide an opportunity for all Family Medicine trainees to gain ABFM certification regardless of the status of their program in the accreditation process when the transition to the single ACGME accreditation system took place.

3. **Once I'm qualified and start the AOA Training Pathway, how long do I have to complete the requirements?**
 - a. You will have three full calendar years after the year in which you start the AOA Training Pathway, or until December 31, 2022, whichever date comes first, to complete the requirements.

4. **Can AOA advanced placement credit be applied for PGY-2 or PGY-3 in an ACGME family medicine residency program?**
 - a. No, only the PGY-1 year may be fulfilled by an AOA-approved internship year. Residency training beyond the PGY-1 year must be completed in an ACGME-accredited Family Medicine residency program in order to comply with requirements for continuity of care in the Resident Teaching Practice.

5. **What happens if I attempt the ABFM Family Medicine Certification Examination and am unsuccessful?**
 - a. If you complete all of the AOA Training Pathway requirements and are unsuccessful on the initial ABFM Certification Examination prior to December 31, 2022, you will be eligible to continue working toward certification for up to 7 years from January 1, 2018 (the start of AOA Training Pathway policy), or the date of completion of AOA-accredited family medicine residency training, whichever occurs later.

6. **What if I start the AOA Training Pathway but don't attempt the ABFM Certification Examination prior to December 31, 2022?**
 - a. In this circumstance, the AOA Training Pathway will no longer be available. The only opportunity you would have at this point to gain ABFM certification would be through completing a three-year ACGME accredited family medicine residency.

For additional help, contact our Support Center

Phone: 877-223-7437

Email: help@theabfm.org

Live Chat

Fax: 859-335-7516