



April 14, 2023

Competition Bureau comments on the Creation of Emergency Class Certificate of Registration

Thank you for the invitation to comment on the creation of emergency classes of registration as required by Ontario Regulation 508/22 under the *Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991* (Amendments).

The Competition Bureau (Bureau), as an independent law enforcement agency, ensures that Canadians prosper in a competitive and innovative marketplace. As part of its mandate, the Bureau promotes and advocates for the benefits of competition.

Why competition matters

Ontario's health regulatory Colleges (Colleges) play a critical role in protecting the public by making sure healthcare professionals are safe, ethical and competent.¹ Pro-competitive policies can help to advance these goals, as described in our market study: [Empowering health care providers in the digital era](#). The study explained how policymakers can leverage technology to gain the benefits of competition including improved quality of care, access to care and fostering innovation and its adoption. Pro-competitive policies can have other benefits in healthcare, including contributing to the resilience of the workforce by lowering barriers to entry. As made evident by the COVID-19 pandemic, this is particularly important during emergencies, which can create additional shortages and pressures on healthcare workers.

The Bureau recommends that the Colleges create these emergency classes of registration to maximize the benefits of competition, such as increasing the supply of qualified healthcare workers, and advance their goal of protecting the public. Further, the lessons learned in the process may also be used to benefit competition and public safety during times of non-emergency.

Competition assessment in policymaking

The Bureau's [Competition Assessment Toolkit](#) was designed to assist policymakers in identifying competition issues and tailoring policies to maximize the benefits of competition. Once a policy is identified for assessment, the policymaker should consider whether it has the potential to restrict competition. This may be the case if it makes it difficult for businesses to emerge or compete, or for consumers to make informed choices or switch products or services.

The policymaker should then consider whether a feature in the policy that could restrict competition is necessary, narrowly cast and proportionate. If there is an alternative that

¹ Health Profession Regulators of Ontario (2023). [Professions and their Regulatory Bodies](#).



achieves their policy goal in a more competition friendly manner, they should implement it accordingly and monitor its effects moving forward for any unintended consequences.

Restrictions and alternatives

The various registration requirements set out by the Colleges for healthcare workers to practice are barriers to entry for future workers. Such barriers are intended to keep the public safe by ensuring that healthcare workers are ethical and competent to practice. During an emergency though, increased demand for healthcare services and strains on healthcare workers can result in labor shortages that may present their own risk to public safety.² Temporarily easing these registration requirements with an emergency class of registration (and thereby increasing or speeding up the entry of healthcare workers) can balance these risks.

By setting up the emergency class of registration to only be as restrictive as necessary during times of emergency, the Colleges can maximize the benefits of competition (i.e. a more resilient healthcare workforce and patient safety). The Amendments require the Colleges to establish registration requirements for individuals joining the emergency class. These requirements can be used to lower barriers to enter the profession. For example, by allowing for competent healthcare students, recent graduates or accredited workers from other jurisdictions to register and by exempting certain requirements for emergency class registrants to move to another class. To strike the right balance between the risks and benefits associated with temporarily lowering these barriers requires the medical expertise of the Colleges. The Bureau hopes that the framework of a competition analysis presented in the Competition Assessment Toolkit may be helpful in doing so.

The Bureau also encourages the Colleges to consider how pro-competitive policies can benefit patients and healthcare workers outside of times of emergency as well. The Amendments require the Colleges to specify a path for healthcare workers in the emergency class to move into other classes of practice and to be exempted from certain registration requirements in doing so. Such exemptions will lower barriers to entry for those workers on a more permanent basis. These lowered barriers are likely to result in faster entry and more licensed healthcare providers, and as a result, a more resilient workforce. As such, the competitive benefits of the emergency class certification extend outside of times of emergency. We encourage the Colleges to use their expertise to make these exemptions as broad as possible to maximize the benefits of competition, while still meeting the central health and safety objectives of registration requirements.

In making these decisions, as in performing any competition assessment, the Colleges should base their decision to the greatest extent possible on objective empirical evidence.³ To the extent data on the effects of similar exemptions in other jurisdictions or during the COVID-19 pandemic are available, this could inform their decision. It may also be beneficial to track data on worker entry and patient safety for healthcare workers operating under the emergency class provisions going forward. This data could be used to make future adjustments to the exemptions provided for under the emergency class, relaxing or

² Canadian Institute for Health Information (November 2022). [Health workforce in Canada: In focus \(including nurses and physicians\)](#).

³ Competition Bureau (2020). [Strengthening Canada's economy through pro-competitive policies](#). See Step 3: Identify alternatives to address policy goals, if necessary.



tightening them as needed.⁴ Perhaps more importantly, this same data could also be used to determine whether the regular registration requirements are as necessary, narrowly cast and proportionate as can be. Having identified how much these barriers to entry can be safely lowered to offset the risk of worker shortages during times of emergency, those lessons may be used to maximize the benefits of competition in ordinary times.

We're here to help

The Bureau's goal is to promote the benefits of competition across the Canadian economy. On the other end, policymakers, as subject matter experts and authorities, are in a unique and critical position to seize upon these benefits. By incorporating competition analysis into your policy assessment, you can maximize the benefits of competition while still achieving your policy goals.

Such competition analysis can be complex, but is worthwhile and the Bureau can help. If you would like to discuss the Competition Assessment Toolkit, or have questions about particular policy proposals or the suggestions above, please contact our Competition Promotion Branch.

Yours Truly,

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⁴ *Ibid.* See Step 5: Conduct an ex-post assessment.