

PRACTICE TIPS: CDR Certification vs State Licensure: What is the Difference?

While the Commission on Dietetic Registration (CDR) certification and state licensure both help consumers identify practitioners who have the required knowledge, skills, and competencies to provide nutrition-related care, it is important to know that they are unique processes that have different eligibility requirements and purposes. This practice tip will explain the nuances between CDR’s Registered Dietitian (RD) certification and state licensure.

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Relevant Terms and Abbreviations

- RD/RDN: Registered Dietitian/Registered Dietitian Nutritionist
- DTR/NDTR: Dietetic Technician Registered/Nutrition and Dietetic Technician Registered
- CDR Exam: Commission on Dietetic Registration Credentialing Exam for the RD or DTR
- ACEND: Accreditation Council for Education in Nutrition and Dietetics
- Academy: Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics

Definitions

CDR Certification: A professional certification awarded to individuals who have successfully completed specific academic and supervised practice requirements and passed the CDR Registration Examination for the RD or DTR credential.

State Licensure: Most states require nutrition and dietetics practitioners (RDs or others) to hold a state license or certification to legally practice or utilize a protected title within that state. Requirements vary from state to state.

Eligibility Requirements

CDR Certification: There are multiple “paths” to becoming an RD, all of which require one to complete specific academic and supervised practice requirements and then pass the registration exam for RDs validated by CDR. For more information on how to become an RD, see the links below.

- CDR exam eligibility requirements: <https://www.cdrnet.org/RDNeeligibility>
- Types of ACEND accredited programs: <https://www.eatrightpro.org/acend/accredited-programs/about-accredited-programs>
- ACEND programs FAQs: <https://www.eatrightpro.org/acend/accreditation-process/frequently-asked-questions/faqs-about-types-of-acend-accredited-programs>

State Licensure: Each state that regulates the practice of dietetics and nutrition has its own statute and regulations that outline the specific procedures and requirements for obtaining a state license or certification or meeting the state title use requirements. These standards can be found [here](#).

***NOTE: Some states offer accelerated pathways and/or exemptions for unique situations (see explanations below).**

Accelerated Pathways to Licensure (*application, fees, maintenance requirements, etc. required*)

- **Endorsement of RD Credential:** you may use your RD credential to reduce the amount of paperwork needed when applying for a state license or certification. This is usually the easiest route if a state provides for it.
- **Reciprocity or Endorsement of Licensure or Certification:** you may use a current state license or certification to reduce the amount of paperwork needed when applying for a state license or certification in another state. *Most states with this option require that the education, experience, and exam requirements are substantially similar among/between states.*

Other Exemptions/Pathways

- **License waivers:** some states may waive the requirement for a license or certification to practice, generally for a limited time. This type of waiver is most often listed in exemptions or exceptions to licensing or certifying requirements within state licensing or certification statutes. However, in recent years states are increasingly working to address the expansion of telehealth. To do this, some states have passed telehealth laws applicable to all licensed or certified health professions, that provide waivers so long as one is licensed in a state. The [Center for Connected Health Policy](#) is a helpful tool that can be utilized to review state specific telehealth laws.
- **Temporary or Provisional Licenses:** if you are eligible to take the CDR exam (i.e., you have completed the academic and supervised practice requirements), you may be able to practice for a limited time, usually under the supervision of a licensed practitioner, using a temporary or provisional license. This option allows you time to pass the CDR exam while being able to lawfully practice.

Contact information for state licensing boards/agencies, eligibility requirements, application procedures, pathway options, etc. can be found using the links below.

- State Licensure: <https://www.cdrnet.org/licensure>
- Licensure Map and Statutes by State:
<https://www.eatrightpro.org/advocacy/licensure/licensure-map-and-statutes-by-state>

Categories/Types

CDR Certification: CDR administers two primary credentials, the RD and the DTR, and eight specialist or advanced practice certifications. All CDR certifications may be found [here](#).

State Licensure: Each state regulates the profession of dietetics differently and these variations are often described in the state's regulations. For example, some states specify that only licensed practitioners may provide medical nutrition therapy (MNT), but general nutrition education can be provided by those without a state license or certification. While other states specify that only licensed practitioners may provide any type of nutrition and dietetics services. Only one state (Maine) offers state licensure for DTRs. For more information, review the state-specific statutes and regulations or contact the state licensing boards/agency using the links on [CDR's licensure webpage](#).

Practicing in Multiple States

CDR Certification: The RD credential is nationally recognized.

State Licensure: Depending on the state statute/regulations, you may be required to hold a state license or certification to practice or utilize regulated titles. CDR, in partnership with the Academy, The Council of State Governments, and the Department of Defense are working to support the formation of a [Dietitian Licensure Compact](#), which would support lawful practice across multiple states.

***NOTE:** CDR and the Academy strongly recommend that practitioners hold licensure or certification in all states where their clients or patients are located when services are provided, except in cases where exceptions/exemptions apply (see section on other Exceptions/Pathways) or when a state has no requirements for licensure or certification.

"The legal status of cross-border practice is determined by the location of the client. For licensure purposes, the RD's location is not relevant. For example, if services are provided via telehealth to a resident of Pennsylvania, then Pennsylvania law applies. If that Pennsylvania client travels across the border to see a Maryland RD, then Maryland law applies. If the Pennsylvania client temporarily relocates to Florida, then Florida law applies."

<https://www.eatrightpro.org/advocacy/licensure/telehealth-and-licensure>

Maintenance Requirements

CDR Certification: RDs must pay an annual registration maintenance fee to CDR, and complete and submit at least 75 CDR-approved continuing professional education units (CPEUs) every 5 years (one CPEU must be ethics related).

State Licensure: Maintenance requirements differ by state ([see state licensure website](#)).

Benefits of Credentialing

- **Recognition:** RDs are recognized as professional experts in food and nutrition, and their credential is nationally recognized. The requirements to obtain the RD credential qualify one for licensure or certification in all states that regulate the practice of dietetics and nutrition.
- **Expanded job options:** many positions require the RD credential, especially those that provide complex nutrition services like MNT.
- **Opportunities for career specialization:** CDR specialist/advanced practice certifications or other professional certifications may require the RD credential for eligibility.
- **Insurance reimbursement:** some insurance providers require the RD credential to identify a qualified provider who is eligible to receive reimbursement for providing nutrition services.

Benefits of State Licensure

- **Licensure laws aim to protect the public** by setting standards for entry to a profession, identifying competent practitioners, qualified to deliver services, and regulating practice of a profession.
- **Practice at level of competence:** licensure or certification laws allow dietitians to practice medical nutrition therapy, a carve out of the practice of medicine. Without such laws, RDs may not have legal authority to practice at their level of competence, hindering access to qualified, timely nutrition care.
- **Payer recognition:** some government programs (e.g. Medicaid) or private insurance providers may require state licensure or certification to identify qualified providers eligible to receive reimbursement for providing nutrition services.

Both the CDR Certification and State Licensure:

- help consumers identify qualified practitioners who have the required knowledge, skill, and competency to provide safe and ethical nutrition-related care that minimizes the likelihood that consumers will receive unsafe or inaccurate medical nutrition therapy, nutrition information, and/or interventions that may lead to poor or even dangerous health outcomes.
- offer mechanisms to report fraudulent, unethical, or harmful activity and to impose penalties when necessary.

Links to Additional Information

CDR Website

- RDN/NDTR Credential Use or Misuse: <https://www.cdrnet.org/use-misuse>
- Telehealth: <https://www.cdrnet.org/telehealth>
- Scope and Standards of Practice: <https://www.cdrnet.org/scope>
- Practice Tips, Case Studies, and Credentialing Tips: <https://www.cdrnet.org/tips>

Academy (requires membership to access)

- Licensure Protects the Public:
<https://www.eatrightpro.org/advocacy/licensure/why-licensure>
- Licensure Office Hours: [Bi-Weekly Zoom call](#) to answer specific questions on licensure, consumer protection, and professional regulation issues (1:00-2:00 CST)
- Additional licensure questions may be addressed through the [member contact form](#).
Academy staff will respond within 7-10 business days.