

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 the CDR 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/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/DTR. Requirements do NOT differ from state to state and use of the certification/credential is nationally recognized.

State Licensure: Most states require nutrition and dietetics practitioners (RDs or other) to hold a state license/certification in order to legally practice within that state. Requirements vary from state to state, and there are a wide range of licensure and certification types.

Eligibility Requirements

CDR Certification: There are multiple “paths” to becoming an RD, all which require you 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/RDNeligibility>
- 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 has its own statute and regulations that outline the specific procedures and requirements for obtaining a state license/certification, which can be found [here](#) by clicking “board/agency website” under each state.

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

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

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

Other Exemptions/Pathways

- **License waivers:** you may be able to waive the requirement for a state license/certification to practice, generally for a limited period of time.
- **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, without supervision, using a temporary or provisional license. This option allows you time to pass the CDR exam.

Contact information for state licensing boards/agencies, as well as information about 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 (member sign-in required):
<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. <https://www.cdrnet.org/>

State Licensure: States typically regulate the profession of dietetics using one of the following provisions. However, there are variations within each of these categories that are 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/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.

- **Practice Exclusivity:** state statutes/regulations specify that only licensed practitioners may:
 - provide medical nutrition therapy (MNT) and/or other nutrition services **and**
 - use specific titles (titles vary by state).
- **Licensure/Certification of Titles:** state statutes/regulations specify that only licensed practitioners:
 - may use specific titles (titles vary by state), but do not specify in the practice act who can provide MNT and/or other nutrition services.
 - some states that regulate the use of titles only may provide a state certification that individuals can use in place of a license for situations when a state license is required for employment and/or for insurance reimbursement.
- **Title Protection:** the state restricts the use of specific titles to certain credentialed professionals, but no licensing board/agency exists, and the state has no practice act regulating the practice of dietetics.

Practicing in Multiple States

CDR Certification: The RD credential is nationally recognized. Once awarded, there are no restrictions on the use of the credential/certification in any state, as long as the general maintenance requirements are met (requirements explained below).

State Licensure: Depending on the state statute/regulations you may be required to hold a state license/certification to practice.

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

“The legal status of cross-border practice is determined by the location of the client. For licensure purposes, the RDN’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 RDN, 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 in each state ([see state licensure website](#)).

Benefits for Practitioners

CDR Certification:

- Recognition: RDs are known as THE professional experts in food and nutrition and the credential is nationally recognized.
- 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 be eligible to receive reimbursement for providing nutrition services.

State Licensure:

- Expanded job options: many positions require state licensure/certification (if available), especially those that provide complex nutrition services like MNT. Note, some exceptions are made for government employees (e.g., RDs who work for the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs).
- Insurance reimbursement: some insurance providers require state licensure/certification (if available) to be eligible to receive reimbursement for providing nutrition services (check with insurance companies).

Benefits for the Public

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 Website (requires membership to access)

- Consumer Protection Issue Brief and Leave Behind: <https://www.eatrightpro.org/advocacy/licensure/why-licensure>
- Licensure Office Hours: [Weekly Zoom call](#) to answer specific questions on licensure, consumer protection, and professional regulation issues (1:00 – 2:00 CST)
- Email address for Academy staff experts: licensure@eatright.org
- Contact information for affiliate Consumer Protection Coordinator and Public Policy Coordinators: <https://www.eatrightpro.org/leadershipdirectory> choose “affiliates” link.