Accreditation Application Companion

Welcome to your organization's companion guide to applying for PAFA accreditation. You will find this useful if you represent a payer of prior authorization claims. This includes insurers, pharmacy benefit managers, public payers, and third-party payers and adjudicators.

Information is included that will answer your questions on making an application, the accreditation options available, and an accreditation checklist for your self evaluation before you proceed with an application.

Sections

		Page
1.	Introduction	2
2.	Accreditation Levels Overview	4
3.	Making an Application for Accreditation	6
4.	Frequently Asked Questions	9
5.	Privacy and Confidentiality	10
6.	Starting Your Application	11
7.	How Your Application is Evaluated	12
8.	When Your Application is Complete	13

Appendix I

Accreditation Checklist – Are you Ready? 14

1. Introduction

Thank you for your interest in payer accreditation through the Prior Authorization Framework and Accreditation (PAFA) Program. In all PAFA documents and our website the term **payer** refers to both public and private payers, including pharmacy benefits managers and third-party payers. As a payer, this package will provide your organization with the information and resources you need to understand PAFA and the accreditation process. You will learn more about the benefits of accreditation, accreditation levels, how to apply for accreditation, fees, and how applications are evaluated. You will also find an Accreditation Checklist in Appendix I.

You can find details of the PAFA Program, including membership, associate membership, and accreditation, in the PAFA Guide available for download from our website www.priorauthframework.ca.

If there are any questions that aren't answered in this package, you can also contact Denise Balch, executive director, at denisebalch@priorauthframework.ca or call 905 220 4260.

Background

PAFA is a Canadian non-profit in operation since 2024, founded by Denise Balch. Denise Balch is PAFA's executive director. PAFA is managed by a Board of Directors, a Framework and Accreditation Advisory Board (Advisory Board) that is made up of nine members, including the executive director, and a cross section of industry stakeholders with two positions for payer members, and an Accreditation Panel made up of five members, including the executive director and four other non-payer industry leaders. A list of members of these groups can be found on the PAFA website www.priorauthframework.ca.

- **The Advisory Board** serves as the guiding body for oversight of the PAFA program in Canada. Members ensure that PAFA remains aligned with its four foundational values to ensure payer accreditation is within reach: **Fair, Current, Relevant, and Achievable**. The Advisory Board monitors the overall progress of PAFA into the marketplace, including regular reviews of the PAFA Guide, membership and accreditation. It also contributes to the future development of the framework and accreditation requirements to ensure that the needs of patients and other stakeholders involved in the prior authorization process are met.

- **The Accreditation Panel** is responsible for the review and approval of accreditation applications submitted by payers. The Panel ensures that each applicant meets the established Framework for either Administration Efficiencies Accreditation, Electronic Prior Authorization (ePA) Accreditation, or Gold Accreditation.

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Our Goals

The primary goals of the PAFA Program are to:

- Grow a membership of payer and non-payer stakeholders to support change in prior authorization,
- Motivate payers to review and if necessary, improve their prior authorization claims processes and practices to introduce efficiencies that benefit all stakeholders, and
- Recognize payers who achieve the processes and practices in the Prior Authorization Framework and Accreditation Program through accreditation and recognition.

PAFA will also release an annual report on prior authorization.

The Benefits of Accreditation

Payers who become members demonstrate their commitment to improvements in the prior authorization process. Payer members are invited to provide input into the Framework, apply for a seat on the Framework and Accreditation Advisory Board, and apply for accreditation. Payer members are also invited to provide input into the PAFA's Annual Report on Prior Authorization and the Prior Authorization in Canada survey.

Payers who apply for accreditation commit to delivering an efficient and transparent process for patients and their healthcare team without compromising their own proprietary information, including claims criteria.

Those payers who achieve accreditation have demonstrated efficient and cost-effective practices and processes that benefit all stakeholders in the prior authorization process. They will be recognized by PAFA and the benefits industry for their commitment to excellence and they will gain a competitive advantage over their non PAFA accredited competitors.

There are three accreditation levels which are described in the next section.

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2. Accreditation Levels Overview

There are three levels of accreditation, described below. Organizations can apply for Level 1 or Level 2 in any order, or they can apply for levels 1 and 2 concurrently. Once an organization has achieved accreditation at both levels 1 and 2, they will receive their level 3: Gold Accreditation.

Level 1: Administration Efficiencies Accreditation provides the foundation for further improvements in the prior authorization process. It demonstrates a payer's commitment to providing a high standard of service to patients and their healthcare team through the prior authorization journey. Accreditation evaluates payers on their ability to:

- Make use of the best available resources to evaluate clinical requirements for new medications and diagnostics
- Demonstrate their ability to communicate clearly in an accessible format through several modes
- Demonstrate the ability respond to claims within reasonable timelines
- Adapt coverage requirements to the changing needs of patients and facilitate the transfer of coverage from a prior carrier.

Level 2 (A&B): Electronic Prior Authorization (ePA) Accreditation delivers efficiencies in the time for claims submission and adjudication. EPA delivers a direct savings to payers and ultimately plan sponsors. Payers can achieve ePA accreditation Part A and B concurrently or separately based on their ability to deliver:

A. **Electronic form completion and submission** of prior authorization claims versus manual completion and email/mail/fax submission. Claims, including medical records, are completed and submitted electronically by a patient's healthcare team through an application programming interface (API) or payer portal. Electronic completion and submission results in time savings for physicians, patients, patient support programs, and payers.
B. **Automated adjudication** with the assistance of machine learning to inform artificial intelligence (AI) to meet specific patient needs. This results in less time adjudicating prior authorization claims and less manual intervention.

EPA results in administrative cost savings for payers and opportunities for improved data collection, analytics, and monitoring of health outcomes.

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Level 3: Gold Accreditation is available to organizations who achieve both Administration Efficiencies and Electronic Prior Authorization Accreditation Part A and B. Organizations can achieve Gold Accreditation status in two ways:

1. Your organization applies for both Administration Efficiencies and ePA Accreditation, Part A and B, concurrently and your organization is approved for both.
2. Your organization has already achieved one of the first two levels and is later approved for the second of the two levels.

Once you have achieved both accreditation levels you will automatically achieve Gold Accreditation.

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3. Making an Application for Accreditation

When your organization commits to becoming an accredited payer, PAFA wants you to be successful. Everything your organization needs to help you with your application is in this application package, including an accreditation self assessment checklist (Appendix I). The checklist will help your organization assess whether you are ready to apply for accreditation.

When your organization is confident it is ready to apply, the accreditation application should be completed, along with the documentation requested in each question.

Important things to remember about completing your application for accreditation:

- You will be asked to create a username and password when you begin the application process.
- You can complete the application online and can be complete. Your organization's application will automatically be saved, and you can go back later and answer additional questions or upload additional documentation.
- You will find links through the application to upload any additional information or documentation relevant to your application, and a further opportunity to upload documents at the end of your application.
- If you have already submitted your application but would like to add to your application, you can do so by sending an email with the subject line **'Accreditation Application for YOUR COMPANY NAME'** to the attention of denisebalch@priorauthframework.ca.

When PAFA has received your organization's completed application, the person you named as a primary contact will receive an email from a member of the PAFA Accreditation Panel to arrange an online meeting or in person interview for one or more members of your submission team. During the interview, members of the PAFA Accreditation Panel will ask for more detail on some aspects of your organization's application. Your responses should be candid and based on the interviewees knowledge and understanding of your organization's prior authorization administration or ePA policies and practices.

Once an application has been reviewed and interviews are complete, the Accreditation Panel will issue an accreditation evaluation report to your organization. The report will provide your organization with a review of results and your score, as well as areas of improvement. Your organization must achieve a score of at least 80% in each category to receive accreditation, and 90% or higher to achieve accreditation with distinction. Accreditations must be renewed every three years to remain current.

The application fee for the Administration Efficiencies, electronic Prior Authorization (ePA) Accreditation and the Gold PA Accreditation vary based on the size of your organization.

Level 1: Administration Efficiencies application fees are based on a sliding scale as follows*:

a. Large insurers and PBMs i.e. market leaders - $50,000 payable every three years plus maintaining membership in good standing - $15,000 annually
b. Mid insurers and PBMs - $20,000 payable every three years plus maintaining membership in good standing $10,000 annually

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c. Small insurers and third-party payers – $10,000 every three years plus maintaining membership in good standing $10,000 annually.

Level 2 (A and B): Electronic Prior Authorization A and B application fees are based on a sliding scale as follows*:

a. Large insurers and PBMs i.e. market leaders - $50,000 payable every three years plus maintaining membership in good standing - $15,000 annually
b. Mid sized insurers and PBMs - $20,000 payable every three years plus maintaining membership in good standing $10,000 annually
c. Small insurers and third-party payers – $10,000 every three years plus maintaining membership in good standing $10,000 annually.

Application fees for those applying for only Part A or Part B accreditation, but not both, are pro rated to 60% of the fees noted for Level 2.

Level 3: Gold Accreditation application fees are based on a sliding scale as follows*:

1. When an organization has achieved both accreditations, the payer is automatically awarded Gold Accreditation after both accreditations are approved. There is no additional accreditation fee.
2. When both Administration Efficiencies and Electronic Prior Authorization (Part A and B) accreditation applications are submitted and approved in one submission concurrently, fees for Gold Accreditation are as follows:
   a. Large insurers and PBMs i.e. market leaders - $75,000 payable every three years plus maintaining membership in good standing - $15,000 annually
   b. Mid sized insurers and PBMs - $30,000 payable every three years plus maintaining membership in good standing $10,000 annually
   c. Small insurers and third-party payers – $15,000 every three years plus maintaining membership in good standing $10,000 annually.

***If you are unsure which category your organization falls into, you can contact Denise Balch at denisebalch@priorauthframework.ca.**

Application Evaluation

Organizations should allow up to three months for a complete review of their application and scheduling of in person or virtual meetings. Applications that do not qualify for accreditation will receive an evaluation stating how their application could be improved and have 6 months following the date of the evaluation to resubmit their application for review. There is no additional charge for the review.

Maintaining Accreditation status

To maintain accreditation status, members must pay membership fees annually, including in the year of accreditation.

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Accreditation must be renewed through the accreditation application process, every 3 years on the accreditation anniversary. It is strongly recommended that organizations apply for renewal of their accreditation status at least 3 months prior to the accreditation expiry date.

Fees for those organizations renewing their accreditation are discounted by 25% of the accreditation fees in effect on the date of renewal.

Payment
Organizations must pay for submissions at the time of application. An invoice will be issued when the application is received. Payment can be made either by EFT or by cheque payable to Prior Auth Framework and Accreditation Program Inc.

All membership and accreditation fees are subject to applicable provincial and federal taxes.

For banking information and payment by EFT contact denisebalch@priorauthframework.ca

Cheques can be mailed to Denise Balch, Executive Director, PriorAuth Framework and Accreditation Program Inc. and mailed to Accounts Payable, Prior Auth Framework and Accreditation Inc., 59643 Pearson Drive, New Liskeard, Ontario P0J 1P0.

Questions
Contact Denise Balch at denisebalch@priorauthframework.ca or call 905 220 4260.

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4. Frequently Asked Questions

We have addressed the most frequently asked questions here, but if you have additional questions, please contact denisebalch@priorauthframework.ca.

1. **Is this initiative tied to a specific ePA platform, or is it a broader accreditation intended to signal our commitment to improvements in prior authorization process and electronic prior authorization, regardless of the vendor?**
   PAFA has no allegiance to any one ePA platform. PAFA is a non-profit accreditation program only managed by an independent Board of Directors, Framework and Accreditation Advisory Board and Accreditation Panel.

2. **How long does it take to review an application for accreditation?**
   You should allow three months for a full review and interviews, but you will hear back from us to set up interviews no later than four weeks after your application.

3. **What if my organization's application for accreditation is not approved?**
   PAFA strongly suggests that you review the Accreditation Checklist in Appendix I before you begin your application to help you evaluate your capabilities against the Accreditation Framework and whether your organization is ready to apply for accreditation. Organizations can reapply within 6 months at no additional cost if the first application is not successful.

4. **How long does accreditation last? Does it expire?**
   Accreditation expires after three years from the date you received your accreditation. You can renew it at a discount of 25% of the current accreditation fees. Remember that your organization must be a member of PAFA to apply for and maintain your accreditation status between accreditation applications.

5. **My organization isn't ready to apply for both Administration Excellence and ePA Accreditation.**
   If your organization applies for and receives Administration Excellence accreditation first, you are encouraged to apply and receive your ePA Accreditation when you are ready. When applying for ePA Accreditation your organization can apply for ePA part A or part B separately or together. If you are applying separately, contact PAFA for information on accreditation fees.

   If you apply for both levels separately then you will be awarded Gold Accreditation once, you have achieved both levels at no additional charge.

6. **What safeguards are in place to ensure the confidentiality of accreditation applications?**
   Based on confidentiality agreements and the Accreditation Panel's Terms of Reference, only Accreditation Panel members will see your organization's application(s). Members of the Accreditation Panel must not have an agreement or affiliation with any payer's prior authorization process.

7. **While the accreditation appears to focus on structural readiness, are there any implications for a payer's autonomy when evaluating prior authorization requests?**

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PAFA and accreditation does not have any say over a payer's autonomy on whether to pay a claim that has been submitted through their prior authorization process.

8. **When does accreditation renew If we receive Gold Accreditation but our Administration Excellence and ePA accreditation were achieved on separate dates?**
   When your Administration Excellence or ePA accreditation renews, your Gold Accreditation status won't change if you renew the accreditation that is expiring before the expiry date.

9. **If my application is declined, will feedback/reasons for decline be provided?**
   Your organization will be provided with feedback and reasons for decline and how to improve your application for next time.

10. **Is there an appeal process if the organization feels that the decline was not justified?**
    Your organization can appeal the decline and meet with the Accreditation Panel, and on request with the Framework and Accreditation Advisory Board.

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5. Privacy and Confidentiality

Any information provided to PAFA as part of the accreditation process is kept confidential by PAFA. All Board members, Advisory Board and Accreditation Panel members have signed confidentiality agreements.

PAFA and Your Information

The Prior Authorization Framework and Accreditation (PAFA) Program is committed to maintaining the confidentiality of information each organization provides to us as part of the accreditation process, plus information provided as part of our annual reporting requirements within the following parameters:

1. Completed accreditation applications will be released to the Accreditation Panel for the review and assessment. The Accreditation Panel is made up of five industry leaders with expertise in prior authorization. To sit on the Accreditation Panel, members must not have an affiliation or contract with any payer, adjudicator, or patient support program.
2. To support the development of the PAFA's Annual Prior Authorization Report some information provided to PAFA will be made publicly available on a **non identifying aggregate basis** along with information from other payers who become accredited.

Storage of Information

Information provided to PAFA is stored securely in Canada with cloud back up in Canada. The Accreditation Panel is given access to application information through a secure link.

Retention of Information

Applications and any other information provided to PAFA are kept in our records for as long as organizations are members of PAFA. If membership is not renewed information will be kept for twelve months after which time it will be destroyed.

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6. Starting Your Application

Before you start your application, PAFA recommends that you complete the Accreditation Self Assessment Checklist in Appendix I. When you are confident that your organization is ready to apply, contact denisebalch@priorauthframework.ca for your unique link to the accreditation applications, where you can also upload the required documentation or any materials you would like PAFA to consider to support your application.

When you activate your link, you will be asked to create a username and password and provide your primary contact's name, title, email/phone, and the name of your organization.

Please remember that to consider your application it must be completed online with supporting documents that must be uploaded when you complete your application. If there are additional comments you would like to make, or documents you would like to attach, please do so in your application. If you have any questions, please contact denisebalch@priorauthframework.ca.

IMPORTANT: To apply for accreditation, you must be a member of the Prior Authorization and Accreditation (PAFA) Program. Is your organization a current member?

- ☐ **Yes**
- ☐ **No**

If you answered no, you must apply for membership before applying for accreditation. You can find the membership application at www.priorauthframework.ca/payer-membership/. If you have any questions about membership or accreditation, please contact denisebalch@priorauthframework.ca or call 905 220 4260.

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7. How Your Application is Evaluated

There are two elements of the evaluation: **the application form** and **interviews**.

Application Form: Each question in the accreditation applications has a maximum point value for evaluation purposes. When the Accreditation Panel reviews completed applications, they will assign points based on your responses and the allowable points for each question. There are some questions where the applicant must score maximum points to receive accreditation. Here is a guide to point allocation:

- **Meets all requirements:** The applicant fully aligns with the PAFA framework – three points
- **Meets most but not all requirements:** Meets most but not all requirements in the PAFA framework - two points
- **Partially meets requirements:** Aligns with intent but lacking in detail or full implementation – one point
- **Does not meet requirements:** Does not align with intent and lacks structure or documentation - no points

Interviews: These will be arranged and completed with one or more members of the Accreditation Panel and one or more members of your organization's team after the accreditation application has been reviewed.

Report: The Accreditation Panel will issue a confidential report of results to each applicant after interviews have been completed. The report will also include an overall score.

Results: Will fall into one of three categories

- **Pass with distinction** – An overall score of 90% or more, including a score of 80% or more in each category.
- **Pass** – Including an overall score of 80% or more, including a score of 80% or more in each category.
- **Improvement required** - An overall score of less than 80%, or a score below 80% in one or more category.

Your application will be acknowledged on receipt, and you will be given a timeline for review.

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8. When Your Organization's Application is Complete

Once your application has been reviewed and is successful, you will receive a certificate of accreditation with your report. Accreditation is valid for three years provided your organization satisfies PAFA's annual reporting requirements listed in accreditation levels. Accreditation must be renewed by the third anniversary to remain current. A reduced accreditation fee equal to 25% of your original application fee applies at renewal.

You will be provided with the PAFA accreditation branding for your organization's use. Your organization must not alter the branding without written prior permission from PAFA.

There are several other ways PAFA will recognize your achievement, including recognition on the PAFA website, a press release, and a blog and podcast release. An annual PAFA lunch/gala is under review. PAFA is open to other opportunities to recognize your achievement.

Those who are not successful and require improvement to achieve accreditation will receive a report with their score, as well as details of the improvements necessary to be successful. Those organizations who are not successful will be given six months to reapply at no additional cost.

You can inquire about the status of your application anytime by emailing denisebalch@priorauthframework.ca.

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Appendix I

Accreditation Checklist – Are you Ready?

Self Assessment

Use this self assessment to determine your organization's readiness to apply for accreditation.

Is your organization a PAFA member?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No – your organization must apply for membership before making an application for accreditation.

You must be able to answer yes to the following two questions to be eligible to submit your application for accreditation.

- ☐ Is your organization a private or public payer?
- ☐ Is your organization a Prior Authorization Framework and Accreditation Program payer member?

Administration Efficiencies

As part of your application process you will be asked questions related to the following, to which you must be able to respond. Some of the questions in the application will be more detailed than they are in this checklist. The pass for administration efficiencies accreditation is 80%.

1. Your organization has an advisory or review committee that identifies medications and decides whether they will be subject to prior authorization, and they establish and review reimbursement criteria
   OR
   Your organization uses an external organization for the above purpose.

2. Your organization's advisory or review committee includes members with clinical expertise (physician, pharmacist, etc.) or consults clinicians as part of the review process.

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3. Your advisory or review committee consults evidence-based/clinical resources when determining formulary listing and reimbursement criteria (e.g. clinical practice guidelines, Canada's Drug Agency, cost-effectiveness analyses, real world evidence etc.)

4. Information on the following can be found in a plan member booklet, or online either on your organization's website or through a member portal:

    - How to confirm coverage
    - Which medications require PA
    - Where to find PA claim forms
    - How to submit a PA claim
    - Expected response and approval timelines
    - Reasons why a claim may be denied
    - The appeals process
    - Contact information for assistance and/or inquiries

5. All information provided is available in an accessible format and plain language in English and French.

6. Plan members can designate individuals including a member of their healthcare team (physician, pharmacist, patient support program, drug access navigator), to communicate on their behalf, submit additional documentation, and receive communications regarding their PA application.

7. All communications regarding a PA application use plain language and are sent in a timely manner.

8. Your organization has a policy to ensure that temporary changes in prescribed medications do not impact the ability of the plan member to recommence treatment with the original approved PA medication within a clearly communicated period.

9. Your organization has a policy to ensure that plan members who are stable on a medication for more than 6 months for a long-term, chronic condition have fewer information requirements when applying for a renewal.

10. In cases involving a change of carrier, your organization has a policy of facilitating access to the necessary information to ensure a plan member can continue their medication during the transition period.

11. Tracking, Surveying and Reporting – Your organization either currently does or will commit to the following as detailed in the Prior Authorization Framework and Accreditation Guide and accreditation applications:

    a. Track and record key performance indicators related to the PA process
    b. Meet the administrative guidelines for urgent and non-urgent claims
    c. Administer a patient experience survey to all patients making prior authorization claims or renewing their claim for approval.

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Tracking and survey administration must begin no later than the date your organization's accreditation is approved. Therefore, your organization must be ready to implement immediately following your accreditation application.

Reporting of your results to the Prior Authorization Framework and Accreditation Program for the period from the date of accreditation to December 31st in the first year after accreditation and every twelve months thereafter.

Your organization's results will be combined with those of other payers and will be included in aggregate in PAFA's Annual Prior authorization Report that will be publicly available.

When your organization can meet the key points of the accreditation program, you are well positioned to apply for PAFA accreditation.

Electronic Prior Authorization – Part A and Part B

As part of your application process you will be asked questions related to those listed below, to which you must be able to respond. Some of the questions in the application will be more detailed than they are in this checklist. The pass for electronic prior authorization accreditation is 80%.

1. **Part A and B**
    a. All prior authorization forms are available online either on your organization's website or through a member portal for plan members to access.
    b. A plan members healthcare team or designates can access PA forms and begin an application on behalf of a plan member.
    c. Prior authorization claim forms meet current Canadian accessibility standards.
    d. Tracking, Surveying and Reporting – Your organization either currently does or will commit to the following as detailed in the Prior Authorization Framework and Accreditation Guide and accreditation applications:

        - Track and record key performance indicators related to the PA process
        - Meet the administrative guidelines for urgent and non-urgent claims
        - Administer a patient experience survey to all patients making prior authorization claims or renewing their claim for approval.

        Tracking and survey administration must begin no later than the date your organization's accreditation is approved. Therefore, your organization must be ready to implement immediately following your accreditation application.

        Reporting of your results to the Prior Authorization Framework and Accreditation Program for the period from the date of accreditation to December 31st in the first year after accreditation and every twelve months thereafter.

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Your organization's results will be combined with those of other payers and will be included in aggregate in PAFA's Annual Prior authorization Report that will be publicly available.

2. **Part A only**
    a. Prior authorization claims can be completed electronically and submitted to your organization through an application programming interface (API) or through a portal.
    b. Communication about the prior authorization process including claim status, requests for further information, approvals and denials are sent and received to plan members electronically via a patient's PSP or to a healthcare provider.
    c. Patient support programs can view the status of a patient's application electronically.

3. **Part B only**
    a. Your organization currently incorporates electronic adjudication with the assistance of machine learning to inform artificial intelligence (AI) to adjudicate at least some prior authorization claims on their individual merit.

When your organization can meet the key points of the accreditation program, you are well positioned to apply for PAFA accreditation.

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