

**BY ORDER OF THE SECRETARY
OF THE AIR FORCE**

AIR FORCE INSTRUCTION 41-104

21 MAY 2019



Health Services

**PROFESSIONAL BOARD AND
NATIONAL CERTIFICATION
EXAMINATIONS**

COMPLIANCE WITH THIS PUBLICATION IS MANDATORY

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This instruction implements AFD 41-1, *Healthcare Programs and Resources*, and 10 U.S.C. § 2015 pursuant to authority delegated in Under Secretary of Defense (Personnel and Readiness (USD (P&R)) memorandum, "Payment of Professional Credentialing Expenses for Military Members," July 16, 2009; Secretary of the Air Force memorandum, "Authority to Pay Professional Credential Expenses," July 27, 2009; and Assistant Secretary of the Air Force memorandum, "Delegation to the Air Force Surgeon General (AF/SG) Regarding the Credentials Program and Formal Delegation of Authority to Implement a Professional Credentialing Expense Reimbursement Program for the Air Force Medical Service," December 4, 2018. It provides requirements and procedures for applying for reimbursement and/or Temporary Duty (TDY) status for board certification and Maintenance of Certification (MOC). This AFI may be supplemented at any level, but all supplements must be routed to the OPR for coordination prior to certification and approval. The authorities to waive wing/unit level requirements in this publication are identified with a Tier ("T-0, T-1, T-2, T-3") number following the compliance statement. See AFI 33-360, *Publications and Forms Management*, for a description of the authorities associated with the Tier numbers. Submit requests for waivers through the chain of command to the appropriate Tier waiver approval authority, or alternately, to the requestors commander or director for non-tiered compliance items. Refer recommended changes and questions about this publication to the Office of Primary Responsibility (OPR) using the AF Form 847, *Recommendation for Change of Publication*; route AF Forms 847 from the field through the appropriate functional chain of command. Ensure all records created as a result of processes prescribed in this publication are maintained in accordance with Air Force Manual 33-363, *Management of Records*, and disposed of in accordance with the Air Force Records

Disposition Schedule located in the Air Force Records Information Management System. Forms affected by the Privacy Act have an appropriate Privacy Act statement. The applicable Privacy Act System of Record Notice is OPM/GOVT-1. This instruction applies to the following Air Force medical personnel: Regular Air Force and Air Force Reserve/Air National Guard personnel on Title 10 orders for 365 consecutive days.

SUMMARY OF CHANGES

Changes were made to clarify initial certification examination and Maintenance of Certification reimbursement.

1. Overview. This AFI describes the process for reimbursement of professional, board or national certification examinations for Air Force Medical Service (AFMS) personnel. This AFI includes the criteria and documentation requirements for reimbursement of fees and expenses. This AFI enables members of the armed forces to obtain, while serving in the armed forces, professional credentials that translate into civilian occupations. The AF will fund the cost of the initial certifying exam, Maintenance of Certification fee, and career field specific requirements as delineated in AFI 44-119, *Medical Quality Operations*, and the Officer and Enlisted Classification Directories. (T-1). Fees covered by this AFI are approved/dispersed locally; expense oversight is at the level of AF/SG1/8.

2. Roles and Responsibilities.

2.1. The Air Force Surgeon General Director for Manpower, Personnel and Resources (AF/SG1/8) establishes guidance and procedures that outline approved board certification entities and/or examinations, following the guidance prescribed in this Instruction and 10 U.S.C. § 2015. The Director of AF/SG1/8 Manpower, Personnel, and Resources will annually approve the list of reimbursable Certifying Agencies for each healthcare specialty. This list will be posted on the AFMS Knowledge Exchange (Kx) at <https://kx2.afms.mil/kj/kx5/AFMedicalCorps/Pages/AFI-41-104-List-of-Certifying-Agencies.aspx>.

2.2. AFMS Corps Directors. I.e. the Career Field Managers, will validate the list of Certifying Agencies annually prior to the approval of the Director of AF/SG1/8. (T-1).

2.3. MTF Commanders or Directors will:

2.3.1. Confirm a healthcare professional's examination eligibility and completion of all prerequisite requirements before approval of reimbursement of examination fees and temporary duty (TDY) expenses. (T-0).

2.3.1.1. MTF Commanders or Directors will confirm that the certification is indicated for the performance of a member's current duties and translates into civilian occupations. (T-0). When members request payment or reimbursement of qualified expenses incurred in connection with certifications tied to prior duties, MTF Commanders or Directors must determine that the certifications have continued relevance or applicability to current or future Air Force needs and translate into a civilian occupation. (T-0)

2.3.1.2. MTF Commanders or Directors will validate that the Certifying Agency is approved by the Air Force per the annual AF/SG1/8 annual memo delineated in 2.1. (T-1).

2.3.1.3. Payment for dual certification in the same specialty will not be approved (example: a physician cannot be reimbursed for family medicine certification by both the American Board of Medical Specialties and the American Osteopathic Association). (T-1).

2.3.1.4. For Air Reserve Command personnel, only those members on Title 10 orders for 365 consecutive days are eligible for reimbursement. (T-1).

2.3.2. Approve unit funding/reimbursement for the examination fee and funded TDY (if indicated) for the initial examination if the eligibility requirements of this AFI are met and funding is available. (T-2).

2.3.2.1. MTF Commanders or Directors will not authorize reimbursements if the military has previously paid for a testing attempt for this certification/recertification or if the member has received other military or government funds for the same purpose. (T-0).

2.3.2.2. Funding will only be provided for the first attempt to pass the examination. Funding will not be approved for members after a failed attempt of the same, or similar, certification or recertification. (T-0).

2.3.2.3. The AF will not fund additional charges or fees incurred due to late registration. (T-1).

2.3.2.4. MTF Commanders or Directors will not provide funding to Airmen who have requested orders and/or have approved orders to retire or separate from the Regular Air Force in the next 12 months (T-1). Reimbursements may be subject to recoupment if members retire or separate prior to 12 months from funding approval.

2.3.3. Accommodate members to sit for a board examination in close proximity to completion of training. (T-2).

2.3.3.1. Attempts should be made to adjust the dates of official orders for routine TDYs or deployments to allow a member to sit for his/her board exam. Boards often limit the availability of test dates for certifying exams each year. Board certification sets a baseline quality standard and affords eligible officers the opportunity to begin receiving board certification pay.

2.3.3.2. The MTF Commanders or Director will coordinate with the appropriate AF/SG specialty consultant prior to requiring a member to delay, cancel or reschedule a board examination due to mission requirements. (T-2).

2.4. The healthcare professional seeking funding or reimbursement for certification examination/Maintenance of Certification (MOC):

2.4.1. Follows instructions for members as outlined below.

2.4.2. Is responsible for any payments or associated expenses made in advance of approval with personal funds if funding subsequently is denied.

3. Professional Board and Certification Examinations

3.1. To be eligible for Air Force funding, credentialing programs, to include programs offering professional board examinations or certifications, must meet all of the criteria prescribed in at least one of the following subparagraphs (T-0):

3.1.1. The program is accredited by a nationally-recognized, third-party personnel certification program accreditor.

3.1.2. The program is sought or accepted by employers within the industry or sector involved as a recognized, preferred, or required credential for recruitment, screening, hiring, retention, or advancement purposes and, where appropriate, endorsed by a nationally-recognized trade association or organization representing a significant part of the industry or sector.

3.1.3. The program grants licenses that are recognized by the Federal government or a State government or meets credential standards of a Federal agency.

3.2. Application for a Professional Board Examination or Certification.

3.2.1. Members eligible for a professional board or certification examination will engage directly with the examining agency to confirm eligibility. (T-3).

3.2.2. If the exam is available locally (precluding the need for TDY), then it must be taken locally. (T-2). Refer to the Joint Travel Regulations and Installation policy when determining the local area for purposes of this Instruction.

3.3. Required Retainability. Members must have a minimum of 1 year retainability (i.e. active duty service commitment) after completing the examination to qualify for reimbursement, unless the examination is a requirement by virtue of the Airman's assignment or position (such as, but not limited to, Graduate Medical Education Program Director/faculty). (T-2).

3.4. Examination Request Approval. A member seeking payment for an examination must submit a written request to his/her commander or director in accordance with unit TDY/reimbursement policy. (T-3). Members should submit their requests for payment of examination fees and, as needed, TDY approval, in advance of the examination; refer to [paragraph 2.3](#) for additional guidance.

3.4.1. This request must include the member's attestation that the government has not previously paid for a board examination attempt in that specialty and that other government funds have not been/will not be requested to cover the cost. The request must also include supporting correspondence or documentation verifying the examination requirements, location, fees, etc. (T-3).

3.4.2. If a member fails to request approval for examination funding prior to the test, he/she may request reimbursement of the same after the examination. Such requests will only be paid if they are submitted within the same fiscal year as the examination (T-1) and funds are available for that purpose (T-0). Travel expenses incurred without prior approval will not be reimbursed. (T-1).

3.4.3. The commander or director will validate that the Certifying Agency is approved by the Air Force (per the AFMS Knowledge Exchange link in [paragraph 1](#)). For Enlisted members, the commander or director will validate that certification is required per the Air Force Enlisted Classification Directory and for the member to perform his or her duty. (T-1). The commander's or director's approval of the written request is required to authorize reimbursement for the examination and TDY status to take the examination. (T-3).

3.5. Individuals not assigned to medical units. Members assigned to staff agencies shall obtain approval for professional board and certification examinations, and any necessary TDY expenses, at the director level (any Service if joint) or the senior AF medical officer (minimum O-6 grade) in the direct functional authority. (T-2). A member assigned to installation-level non-medical units shall obtain approval from his/her line commander. (T-2). Line commanders are encouraged to contact the supporting military treatment facility commander or director for concurrence prior to approving funding. Directors, senior medical officers and line commanders who approve funding of professional board and certification examinations for members not assigned to medical units, will fulfill the responsibilities otherwise assigned to “MTF Commanders or Directors” in [paragraph 2.3](#) as well as [paragraphs 3.4, 4.1, 4.3, 5.4, 5.5, 6.1, and 6.2](#). (T-2).

3.6. Officer-specific guidance. The Air Force will not pay or otherwise reimburse for expenses associated with obtaining professional credentials that are a prerequisite for appointment in the Armed Forces. (T-0). Similarly, the Air Force will not pay for credentialing solely as a component of accession, retention, recruiting, transition programs, or to acquire an educational degree. (T-0).

3.7. Enlisted-specific guidance.

3.7.1. If a graduate from an accredited course, follow existing course guidelines to enroll in the examining agency’s database.

3.7.2. In most instances, the Education and Training Officer or Unit Training Manager is the point of contact to assist with contacting certification agencies and to request these examinations at the duty location.

3.7.3. An enlisted member should consult the Air Force Enlisted Classification Directory to determine if his/her AFSC has a mandatory certification.

3.7.4. For an enlisted member with a failed testing attempt for career-field mandated certifications, the Career Field Manager, along with the member’s supervisor, must review the member’s standing. The review should include reviewing the member’s performance, testing capability, attitude etc., to assess the probability that the member can successfully pass the exam. (T-1). Subsequent attempts will not be reimbursed. (T-0).

4. Professional Board Examinations: Re-Certification and Maintenance of Certification (MOC)

4.1. Reimbursement. MTF commanders or directors will approve funding/reimbursement for subsequent re-certification examinations and MOC fees to specialty boards if funding is available and the certification is required to perform a member’s duties and translates into a civilian occupation. (T-2). Members not assigned to a medical unit follow the guidance in [paragraph 3.5](#) to determine approval authority.

4.1.1. Re-certification examinations will only be funded by the military once per certification/currency cycle. (T-2). Boards vary on the length of time between certification cycles – this can range from one year to multiple years.

4.1.2. MTF Commanders or Directors shall only approve requests for Maintenance of Certification fee reimbursements that are submitted for approval in the same fiscal year that payment is made to the specialty board (T-1) and only if funds are available for that purpose (T-0).

4.1.3. MTF Commanders or Directors will approve a funding/reimbursement request for an enlisted member's subsequent re-certification examination once per certification/currency cycle if the certification is required to perform the member's duties, the certification will translate into a civilian occupation, the member meets all other eligibility requirements, and funding is available. (T-0).

4.2. Application for a Professional Board Re-Certification and MOC

4.2.1. Members eligible for a professional board re-certification examination and MOC activities will engage directly with the examining agency to confirm member's eligibility. (T-3).

4.2.2. If exam is available locally (precluding the need for TDY), then it must be taken locally. (T-2).

4.2.3. Required retainability. Member must have a minimum of 1 year retainability (i.e. active duty service commitment) after completing the re-certification examination or MOC activity to qualify for reimbursement, unless the re-certification examination or MOC action is required by virtue of the member's assignment or position (such as, but not limited to, Graduate Medical Education Program Director/faculty). (T-2).

4.3. Re-Certification Examination and MOC Request Approval

4.3.1. A member will submit a written request to his/her commander or director in advance of the re-certification examination to request unit funding approval for examination fees. Although TDY for re-certification and MOC exams generally is unnecessary, if a TDY is required, the member must obtain approval of the TDY in advance of travel. (T-3). The member must include in their request copies of correspondence or other documentation that verifies the examination requirements, location, fees, and other information necessary to justify the necessity of the TDY. (T-3).

4.3.2. To request reimbursement after completion of the examination/MOC requirements, a member must submit proof of the examination/MOC completion, receipt for fees, and any additional unit-required documentation for his/her commander or director to review. (T-0)

4.3.2.1. Many specialty boards, such as the American Board of Medical Specialties and American Osteopathic Association for physicians, have extensive requirements for MOC; these requirements vary by specialty with some having annual required payments and others requiring lump sum payments for a multi-year cycle. Members and units should consult each specialty board or agency for specifics on that their MOC fee requirements. When a qualified specialty board or agency provides re-certification strictly through a multi-year cycle assigned a single lump sum payment, and does not offer an option of renewing the certification annually, the commander or director is authorized to pay the multi-year cycle fee in order to maintain a Member's certification.

4.3.2.2. If a member fails to request approval for examination funding prior to the test, he/she may request reimbursement of the same after the examination. Such requests will only be paid if they are submitted within the same fiscal year as the examination (T-1) and funds are available for that purpose (T-0). Travel expenses incurred without prior approval will not be reimbursed. (T-1).

5. Special Situations.

5.1. **Air Reserve Component.** Air Force Reserve and Air National Guard personnel qualify for reimbursement of recertification if they are not serving a training obligation, have completed their initial Active Duty Service Commitment (ADSC), are currently serving on an extended active duty tour of 365 consecutive days, and will have at least 1 year retainability after they complete the professional board examination. (T-2).

5.2. **Military Graduate Medical Education.** Programs are encouraged to budget and fund initial board certification exams for their respective military residents and fellows in training. Air Force Institute of Technology is encouraged to fund initial board certification exams for those active duty members in civilian-sponsored Graduate Medical Education programs.

5.3. **Multiple Board Certifications.** Commanders or directors may reimburse for more than one certification as needed for the performance of duties/Air Force mission and both certifications translate into civilian occupations. For example, a physician may be double-board certified in Aerospace Medicine and Occupational Medicine.

5.4. **Membership Fees.** Commanders or directors shall not reimburse members for annual or recurring personal membership fees in professional organizations (such as state licensing fees or medical society/academy membership fees). (T-0). See AFMAN 65-605, Volume 1, *Budget Guidance and Technical Procedures*, for further guidance.

5.5. **Members Serving OCONUS.** Members serving Outside the Continental United States (OCONUS) may receive funded TDY for Parts I and/or II of professional specialty board or certification examinations, if local exam is not available. Before approving CONUS orders for a board exam an OCONUS commander or director must:

5.5.1. Consider the feasibility of the member taking the examination in an overseas area closer than CONUS or request that the senior Air Force functional leader in the geographical area coordinate with the responsible agency to determine the most feasible, cost-effective testing location. (T-2)

5.5.2. Ensure OCONUS members have at least 6 months left to serve in the OCONUS assignment at the time of the examination and meet retainability requirements in [paragraph 3.3](#). (T-2).

5.6. **Residents and fellows in civilian-deferred status.** Members are not eligible for reimbursement for any payments made prior to entering active duty status, even if the test is later taken while on active duty.

5.7. **Changes/additions to the list of Air Force approved Certifying Agencies.** Units should contact the corresponding Corps Director in AF/SG1/8 (Medical, Dental, Nurse, Biomedical Sciences, Enlisted) and include a justification for the proposed change.

5.8. **Funding questions.** Inquiries regarding funding parameters or policy on use of MTF or medical unit Defense Health Program funds will be addressed to AF/SG1/8Y. (T-1).

6. Post-Examination Responsibilities

6.1. Reimbursement Process.

6.1.1. For reimbursement of certification/recertification examination or Maintenance of Certification fees, the member will file an Optional Form 1164, *Claim for Reimbursement for Expenditures on Official Business*. (T-3).

6.1.1.1. Member must attach relevant receipts with a copy of the commander's or director's approval for reimbursement, and proof of completion of the recertification examination or MOC activity. (T-3).

6.1.1.2. The voucher must be routed through the member's unit Resource Advisor to add the local unit fund cite and submitted to the base Finance Office for payment. (T-3).

6.2. In order to properly record costs in the accounting system, individuals that traveled TDY will separate their examination/certification fees from their travel costs. (T-3).

6.2.1. Individuals will consult their Resource Advisor for guidance on how to allocate the separate costs within the Defense Travel System. (T-3).

6.2.2. If costs cannot be allocated in the Defense Travel System, then individuals will omit the examination/certification fees from the travel voucher (DD Form 1351-2, *Travel Voucher or Sub voucher*) and claim those costs on Optional Form 1164. (T-3).

6.3. Personnel Records Updates.

6.3.1. Officers.

6.3.1.1. The officer will notify his/her commander or director and the leader's command support staff or servicing MTF of the completion of a specialty certification examination by providing a copy of the certification letter or certificate. (T-3).

6.3.1.2. Member should follow guidance for completing an AF Form 2096 at their location, *Classification/On-The-Job Training Action*, to request the addition of an "M" prefix for the AFSC directly related to the field in which the officer obtained certification, as identified in *Air Force Officer Classification Directory*.

6.3.1.3. An officer's servicing MPF grants final approval of the AF Form 2096 request and awards the "M" prefix to an officer's AFSC in the Personnel Data System.

6.3.1.4. The approved professional certifications for which officers may receive award of the "M" prefix are detailed in the Air Force approved list of Certifying Agencies (see [paragraph 2](#)). Individuals with certifications earned and approved under previous policies can maintain the "M" prefix for the entire certification period, but must maintain active certification in order to retain the "M" prefix. (T-1).

6.3.1.5. In addition to gaining the "M" Prefix on their AFSC, officers (except Biomedical Science Corp members) should update their personnel record with a copy of their board certification. Officers should submit their board certification certificate to AFPC via myPers for inclusion in Personnel Records Display Application (PRDA).

6.3.2. Enlisted Personnel. Enlisted personnel must provide a copy of the certification documentation from the professional organization to the unit Education and Training Office, Unit Training Manager, and/or Supervisor to update training or personnel records as appropriate. (T-3).

6.3.3. Privileged Providers. Providers who hold privileges at a MTF per AFI 44-119 will provide a copy of all professional certifications achieved to the unit Credentials Manager for verification and inclusion with the provider's credentialing documents. (T-2).

6.4. Medical, Dental, Nurse and Biomedical Science Corps Officers Board Certification Pay

6.4.1. Certain AFSCs may also qualify for board certification pay. Special pay guidance, forms and instruction for Biomedical Sciences Corps, Dental Corps (DC), Medical Corps and Nurse Corps officers are available at https://mypers.af.mil/app/answers/detail/a_id/29350/p/9/c/447.

DOROTHY A. HOGG
Lieutenant General, USAF, NC
Surgeon General

Attachment 1**GLOSSARY OF REFERENCES AND SUPPORTING INFORMATION*****References***

AFPD 41-1, *Healthcare Programs and Resources*, 03 Oct 2018

AFI 41-104, *Professional Board and National Certification Examinations*, Kx for Certifying Agencies <https://kx2.afms.mil/kj/kx5/AFMedicalCorps/Pages/AFI-41-104-List-of-Certifying-Agencies.aspx>

AFI 44-119, *Medical Quality Operations*, 16 Aug 2011

AFMAN 33-363, *Management of Records*, 30 May 2018

Air Force Officer Classification Directory (AFOCD), 31 Oct 2018

Air Force Enlisted Classification Directory (AFECD), 31 Oct 2018

Education and Training Course Announcements (ETCA) <https://health.mil/Training-Center/Education-and-Training-Course-Announcements>

Joint Travel Regulations (JTR), 1 May 2018

<http://www.defensetravel.dod.mil/Docs/perdiem/JTR.pdf>

Under Secretary of Defense (Personnel and Readiness (USD (P&R))) memorandum, "Payment of Professional Credentialing Expenses for Military Members," July 16, 2009

Secretary of the Air Force memorandum, "Authority to Pay Professional Credential Expenses," July 27, 2009

Assistant Secretary of the Air Force memorandum, "Delegation to the Air Force Surgeon General (AF/SG) Regarding the Credentials Program and Formal Delegation of Authority to Implement a Professional Credentialing Expense Reimbursement Program for the Air Force Medical Service," December 4, 2018.

10 U.S.C. § 2015

37 U.S.C. § 335

Adopted Forms

AF Form 847, *Recommendation for Change of Publication*

AF Form 2096, *Classification/On-The-Job Training Action*

Optional Form 1164, *Claim for Reimbursement for Expenditures on Official Business*

DD Form 1351-2, *Travel Voucher or Subvoucher*

Abbreviations and Acronyms

AFI—Air Force Instruction

AFPC—Air Force Personnel Center

AFSC—Air Force Specialty Code

CONUS—Continental United States

MAJCOM—Major Command

MOC—Maintenance of Certification

MPF—Military Personnel Flight

MTF—Medical Treatment Facility

OCONUS—Outside the Continental United States

PRDA—Personnel Records Display Application

TDY—Temporary Duty