

## A Career in Genetic Counselling



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Canadian Association of Genetic Counsellors  
Association Canadienne des Conseillers en Génétique  
*Helping people understand and cope with hereditary conditions.*

## What is Genetic Counselling?

Genetic counselling combines providing information about genetic conditions with counselling support so that individuals can make personal decisions about the management of their health, their children's health or their pregnancies. Genetic counselling may be helpful to people interested in knowing more about:

- The chances of having or developing an inherited condition.
- A family history of cancer.
- A family history of a condition that might be inherited.
- The chances of having a child with an inherited condition.
- Prenatal testing for high-risk pregnancies.



## Genetic Counselling as a Career

Genetic counsellors complete a Master of Science degree in genetic counselling from a recognized university program. Their educational backgrounds include biology, nursing, social work and psychology. Training consists of coursework in genetics and counselling theory as well as clinical rotations within genetics departments.

In Canada, most genetic counsellors are certified by the Canadian Association of Genetic Counsellors.

## Who is Genetic Counselling available to?

Genetic counselling is available to individuals, couples and families who have genetic concerns, including questions about the risk of developing a genetic condition.

## What Genetic Counsellors do

The traditional role of genetic counsellors is in a clinic setting. Clinical genetic counsellors work as members of a health care team offering genetic information and support to prenatal, paediatric and adult patient populations. Genetic counsellors are skilled at interpreting genetic information and helping families to make sense out of their genetic risks and/or test results. The genetic counsellor helps these individuals to make their own informed decisions about their health care and genetic testing. They do this by helping people to:

- Understand the way genetics contributes to a medical condition and its risk of recurrence;
- Understand the medical facts, including the diagnosis, probable course of the condition, and the available management;
- Understand the available tests, which the genetic counsellor can then organise or facilitate;
- Understand the alternatives for dealing with the risk of recurrence of a genetic condition;
- Choose the course of action which seems appropriate to them in view of their risk, their family goals, and their ethical and religious values; and
- Make the best possible adjustment to the condition in an affected family member and/or to the risk of recurrence of that condition.



After Fraser FC. 1974. *Am J Hum Genet* 26:636-659.

Genetic counsellors also work in a variety of other settings including:

- Education
- Research
- Diagnostics
- Public Health and Policy
- Pharmaceutical industry

## About the CAGC

The Canadian Association of Genetic Counsellors (CAGC) was incorporated in 1990. Its mission is to promote high standards of practice, encourage professional growth and increase public awareness of the genetic counselling profession in Canada. The CAGC:

- Has a professional scope of practice, which outlines the skills, knowledge and training required to practice in Canada;
- Has a certification process for genetic counsellors practicing in Canada;
- Holds annual educational conferences and publishes a quarterly members' newsletter that includes information about new developments in medical genetics and Canadian health care policies;
- Advocates for continuous improvements in the delivery of medical genetics services in Canada.

## How can I get more information?

Please visit the web site of the Canadian Association of Genetic Counsellors to obtain more information about this profession and a career in genetic counselling.

[www.cagc-accg.ca](http://www.cagc-accg.ca)

Other Useful Links:

Genetic Counselling Training Programs  
[www.kumc.edu/gec/prof/gcprogs.html](http://www.kumc.edu/gec/prof/gcprogs.html)

National Society of Genetic Counselors  
[www.nsgc.org](http://www.nsgc.org)