



# PRIOR LEARNING ASSESSMENT AND CREDENTIALING OF INTERNATIONALLY-EDUCATED HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

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# GOALS FOR THIS PRESENTATION

- **Introduce the CSMLS**
- **Describe the CSMLS PLA model**
- **Note issues in PLA&C**
- **List CSMLS research projects on PLA&C**
- **Outline observations and findings**
- **Suggest implications for health human resources**



# ABOUT THE CANADIAN SOCIETY FOR MEDICAL LABORATORY SCIENCE

- **CSMLS is the national certifying body and professional association for Medical Laboratory Technologists (MLTs) and Assistants**
- **Medical Laboratory Science (MLS) is Canada's 3<sup>rd</sup> largest health profession**
- **MLS has been identified as one of five health professions targeted for HHR and IEHP policy measures<sup>1</sup>**
- **MLTs among the top ten professionals immigrating to Canada (1996-2000)<sup>2</sup>**

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1. HRSDC. (2007). Integration of internationally trained health professionals.  
<http://www.hrsdc.gc.ca/en/cs/comm/hrsd/news/2005/050425bc.shtml>

2. Citizenship and Immigration Canada LIDS data for immigrants aged 18-64. Obtained through the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship, Immigration and Settlement Unit. Toronto: MCI.

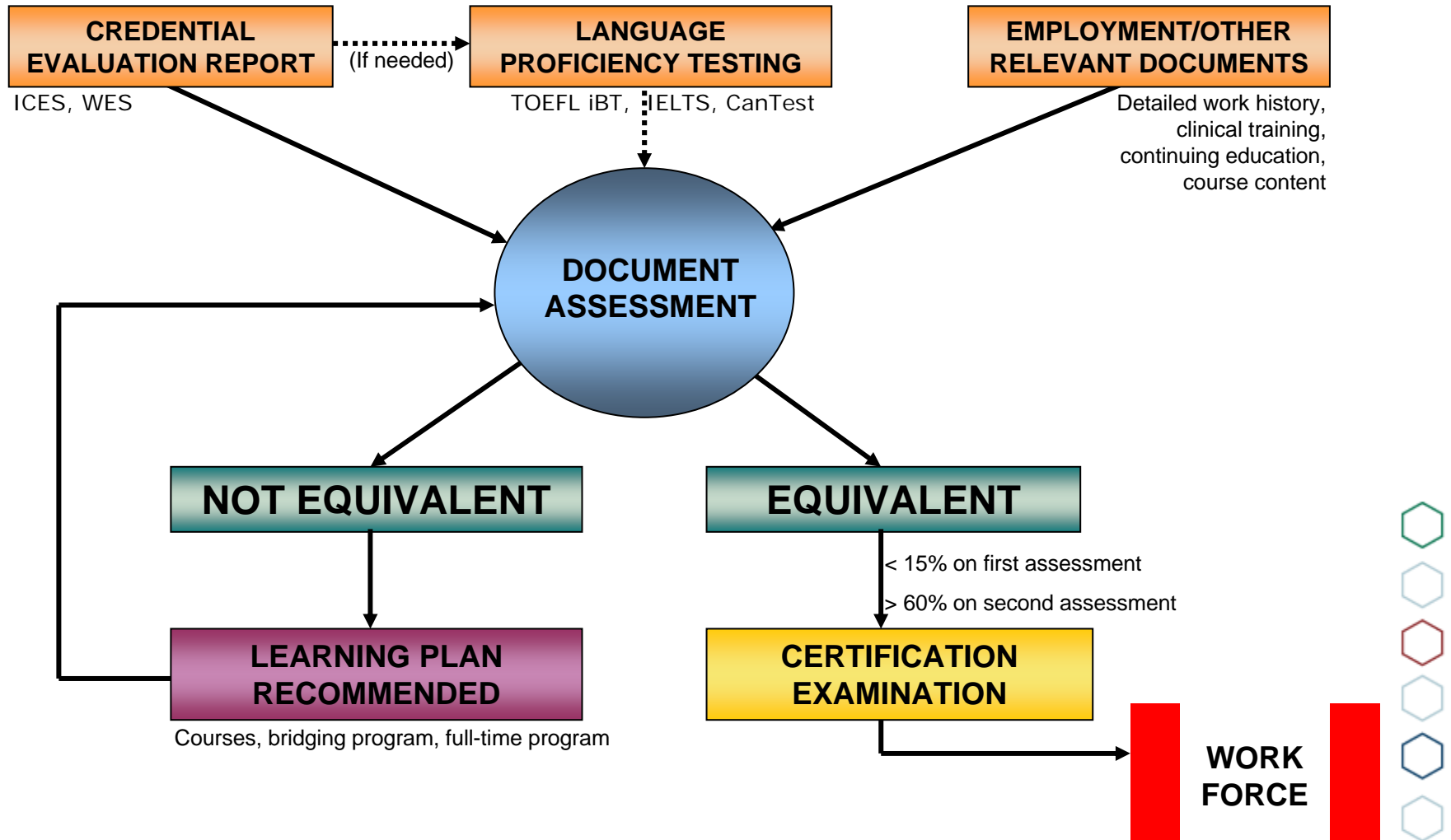


# THE CSMLS PLA MODEL

- **A 'true' PLA process as a means of establishing IEHP eligibility to write the CSMLS national certification examination**
- **CSMLS goals for PLA**
  - To maintain the standards of the profession
  - To ensure a fair, equitable, and transparent process
  - To meet the needs of the profession, the public, and employers
- **In operation in its current form since 1999**
- **Services available in both official languages**
- **Over 300 applications per year; currently over 700 open files**
- **Single access point for credentialing**
- **Highest uptake into PLA&C of Canadian health professions<sup>3</sup>**



# THE CSMLS PLA MODEL



# ISSUES IN CREDENTIAL RECOGNITION (1)

## FOR CSMLS

- **Costly and resource-intensive PLA processes (sustainability, responsible use of members' fees)**
- **Increasing numbers of ESL applicants**
- **Dilemma: HHR-related pressures vs. upholding standards for high quality health care**
- **Risk management: maintaining national standards for safe and competent practice**
- **Documentation authentication challenges**
- **Skeptics in the profession**
- **Language proficiency a MUST – but a contentious issue**
- **Lack of precedents or models**
- **Commitment to avoid 'setting up applicants for failure'**



# ISSUES IN CREDENTIAL RECOGNITION (2)

## FOR IEHP CLIENTS

- Time (from application to employment)
- Cost (documentation, fees, courses)
- High-stakes situation
- High language standards
- Lack of sufficient/appropriate support mechanisms
- Original documentation often difficult to obtain
- Amount of detail required
- Lack of accurate information prior to arriving in Canada
- Disagreement with assessment report
- Frustration with the process



# ISSUES IN CREDENTIAL RECOGNITION (3)

## FOR EMPLOYERS AND GOVERNMENTS

- **Process too slow to meet workforce needs**
- **Perception that professional associations are obstacles to resolving HHR issues**
- **Employer dissatisfaction with IEHPs**



# CSMLS PLA RESEARCH PROJECTS

## COMPLETED/IN PROGRESS

- Third party evaluation by the Canadian Association for Prior Learning Assessment (2006) (HRSDC)
- Language benchmarking and language proficiency testing alternatives (Ontario MCI, 2007-2008)
- 'Plain language' for PLA documents (HRSDC, 2007-2009)

## PLANNED

- Online self-assessment tool (2008-2010)
- Validation of language benchmarks (2008-2009)



# FINDINGS & OBSERVATIONS

## CRITERIA FOR LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY TESTS

- Timing of language proficiency testing & level of language competency expected
- Use of appropriate language benchmarks and standards

## LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY TESTS

- Accessibility of testing tools
- Monologic vs. interactive/static vs. dynamic tests of speaking ability
- Suitability of general/academic vs. profession-specific language proficiency testing tools
- Sociocultural competence vs. technical/linguistic competence
- Limitations of language proficiency testing as a predictor of success in the workplace
- Language proficiency testing and workplace performance conditions ('high stakes' situations, noise, interruptions, jargon)

## OTHER FACTORS

- Sufficiency of English as a language of instruction for IEHPs
- Importance of clarity/accessibility of PLA documentation and related materials
- Value of bridging programs, practice tests, and other supports
- Need for IEHP experience in Canadian workplace before certification



# IMPLICATIONS FOR HHR

To best meet HHR needs, organizations offering PLA&C must maximize effectiveness through accountable and equitable practices

- Identifying obstacles in PLA&C processes
  - Procedural
  - Communicative
  - Systemic
  - Economic
- Validating standards
  - Language proficiency benchmarks
  - Examination processes
- Implementing/advocating support mechanisms
  - Bridging programs
  - Self-assessment tools for IEHPs
  - Single-site/single-process access mechanisms
  - Flexibility



# THANK YOU

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