

MECHANICAL SERVICES – LICENSING REQUIREMENTS FOR HOSPITALS AND HEALTH SERVICES

From 1 January 2020, mechanical services licences have been introduced for mechanical services work of any value. There are three (3) mechanical services streams; plumbing, air-conditioning and refrigeration, and medical gas. These licence classes recognise the mechanical plumbing work involved in heating and cooling systems, as well as expertise for the installation of air-conditioning and refrigeration work and medical gas systems. These systems contribute to the overall health and safety of the community and can have fatal consequences if incorrectly installed or maintained.

It is important that public and private hospitals and health services are aware of the changes to the licensing of mechanical services work in Queensland. These include:

- Public hospitals and health services do not require a licence to perform mechanical services work. Their employees also do not require a licence; however, if public hospitals and health services are engaging contractors to carry out mechanical services work, they must ensure that they are appropriately licensed.
- Private hospitals and health services who undertake mechanical services work through their employees will require a contractor's licence and their relevant employees will require a Mechanical Services Occupational licence. Private hospitals and health services that contract out all mechanical services work will not be required to hold a licence; however, they must ensure that they engage appropriately licensed contractors to carry out this work.

WHAT IS MECHANICAL SERVICES WORK?

Mechanical services work involves the construction, installation, replacement, repair, alteration, maintenance, testing or commissioning of a mechanical heating or cooling system in buildings, for example air-conditioning, refrigeration and air handling systems.

Mechanical services work also includes work on medical gas systems found in hospitals and other health services such as dental facilities.

WHAT IS MEDICAL GAS?

Medical gas is any gas or mixture of gases or other substance or process used for hospital or medical use that is supplied to, removed from or conducted at, a hospital or other place where medical procedures are carried-out, by way of a pipeline reticulation system and includes: oxygen; helium;

nitrous oxide; medical air; surgical tool gas; carbon dioxide; common mixtures of those gases; and anaesthesia waste and suction.

WHAT DOES THE MECHANICAL SERVICES - MEDICAL GAS LICENCE COVER?

The licence scope covers constructing, installing, replacing, repairing, altering, maintaining, testing or commissioning a medical gas system in a building. 'Medical gas system' means any fixed component used either in a reticulation system for the supply or removal of a medical gas from the gas source to wall outlet, or for patient care, therapeutic, diagnostic purposes or surgical tools.

WHAT ISN'T MECHANICAL SERVICES WORK?

Mechanical services work does not include:

- gas work regulated under the *Petroleum and Gas (Production and Safety) Act 2004*;
- any treatment of cooling water;
- connecting or disconnecting a system from a water supply other than disconnecting a system from a water supply at an isolating valve adjacent to a mechanical component of that system;
- design work that is a professional engineering service under the *Professional Engineers Act 2002*;
- manufacturing of pipe or ducting, or components manufactured off-site;
- installing a single head split-system;
- installing ductwork and enclosures for air-conditioning, air handling and mechanical ventilation systems;
- mechanical services work on a Class 1a (detached dwelling) or Class 10 (sheds, garages) building;
- mechanical services work on buildings located on certain land (e.g. land to which the *Geothermal Energy Act 2010* or the *Greenhouse Gas Storage Act 2009* applies - refer to schedule 1A of the QBCC Regulation 2018); and
- work that is part of an environmentally relevant activity under the Environmental Protection Regulation 2019.

KEY DATES YOU NEED TO KNOW

The new licensing framework will roll-out in stages.



FROM 1 JANUARY 2020:

The Mechanical Services Licensing Framework commenced on 1 January 2020.

Existing businesses have until 1 July 2020 to obtain a mechanical services licence. A Contractor's licence is required by company or individual entities engaging with clients to perform work. Nominee Supervisors also need to hold a relevant licence.



FROM 1 JULY 2020:

Contractors (companies and individuals, including a hospital entity that undertakes the work for themselves) and Nominee Supervisors must be licensed to carry out mechanical services work, regardless of the value of work performed.



FROM 1 JANUARY 2022:

All individual workers will need to hold a current mechanical services occupational licence to carry out mechanical services work, regardless of the value of work performed. This includes full-time, part-time and casual employees; however, employees do not need a licence to carry out building work only (e.g. carpentry). In order to ensure workers have the required licence by 1 January 2022, the QBCC recommends they apply by October 2021 to allow sufficient time for the processing of applications.

WHY IS QBCC REGULATING MECHANICAL SERVICES WORK?

Mechanical services work within hospitals or health service facilities can present critical safety issues to the community and, in some cases, has resulted in fatalities. Improperly installed and maintained heating and cooling systems can lead to dangerous bacteria, such as legionella, growing and spreading through systems. Improperly installed medical gas systems can be fatal (e.g. nitrous oxide incorrectly administered through an oxygen outlet). For this reason, licensing for mechanical services trades has been changed to reflect the important and specialised skills involved in this work.

The intent of the new mechanical services framework is to protect the general community from the risk of harm associated with this type of work. Queenslanders can be confident that those who carry out mechanical services work have the required skills. QBCC's regulation of this work also provides avenues for dispute resolution and remedies for incomplete or defective work.

HOW DO THESE CHANGES AFFECT HOSPITALS AND HEALTH SERVICES?

Public and private hospitals and health services need to be aware of, and comply with, the changes to the licensing of mechanical services work in Queensland.

Public hospitals and health services do not require a licence to perform mechanical services work.

An exemption from the requirement to hold a mechanical services licence applies for State Government hospitals and health services, and their employees, under the QBCC Regulation 2018; however, this exemption does not include work performed for the State by an independent contractor.

Private hospitals and health services who undertake mechanical services work through their employees will require a contractor's licence. Their relevant employees will require a mechanical services occupational licence. Private hospitals and health services that contract out all mechanical services work will not be required to hold a licence; however, they must ensure that they engage appropriately licensed contractors to carry out this work.

Contractors' licences can be checked using QBCC's Online Licence Search: qbcc.build/licence-search

HOW DO THESE CHANGES AFFECT CONTRACTORS ENGAGED BY HOSPITALS AND HEALTH SERVICES?

Existing contractors engaged by public and private hospitals and health services must hold the applicable QBCC mechanical services licence by 1 July 2020. Learn more about these changes at qbcc.build/mechservices.

TRANSITIONAL ARRANGEMENTS FOR THOSE ALREADY CARRYING OUT MEDICAL GAS WORK IN QUEENSLAND:

Existing contractors and workers may also qualify for an alternative qualification pathway if they have a relevant apprenticeship and 6 months' relevant experience. Mechanical Services – Medical Gas applicants and licensees have an extended period until 31 December 2020, to meet certain aspects of the minimum financial requirements (MFR), given they are entirely new entrants to the QBCC licensing regime. Existing employees may qualify for a Mechanical Services – Medical Gas Occupational licence if they have 2 years' experience prior to 1 January 2020 carrying out medical gas work. Learn more about these changes on the QBCC website at qbcc.build/medigas.

HOW DO THESE CHANGES AFFECT EXISTING QBCC LICENSEES (AND THEIR EMPLOYEES) IN LICENCE CLASSES:

PLUMBING AND DRAINAGE

For contractors and nominee supervisors to conduct mechanical services plumbing work from 1 July 2020, you must hold the Mechanical Services - Plumbing licence. From 1 January 2022, all workers must be licensed to carry out mechanical services work. Learn more about these changes on the QBCC website at qbcc.build/plumbing.

GASFITTING

If you perform mechanical services medical gas work, you will need to apply for the new licence.

For contractors and nominee supervisors to conduct mechanical services medical gas work from 1 July 2020, you must hold the Mechanical Services - Medical Gas licence. From 1 January 2022, all workers must be licensed to carry out mechanical services work. If you are applying for a Contractor, Nominee Supervisor or Site Supervisor's licence, and do not hold the relevant technical qualification, you may be able to use your experience to satisfy the technical qualification requirements for the Mechanical Services – Medical Gas licence, provided you can demonstrate six months experience in performing medical gas work. This is known as an alternative qualification pathway.

To rely on the alternative qualification pathway, for a contractor or nominee supervisor licence you must obtain your licence by 31 December 2020. To allow time to process your application you should apply by 31 October 2020. Learn more about these changes on the QBCC website at qbcc.build/medigas.

AIR-CONDITIONING, REFRIGERATION AND MECHANICAL SERVICES (UNLIMITED AND LIMITED DESIGN)

These licensees do not need to take any action to continue performing air-conditioning and refrigeration work. On 1 January 2020, QBCC automatically transitioned the active licence to the equivalent mechanical services licence under the new framework. The main changes are the title of the licence classes and the threshold value of the mechanical services work dropping to \$0. In addition, there was no occupational licence in Queensland for refrigeration, air-conditioning and mechanical services work prior to 2020; the new licensing framework includes a single occupational licence for this type of work.

To carry out mechanical services plumbing work after 1 July 2020, you must hold the Mechanical Services – Plumbing licence. Learn more about these changes on the QBCC website at qbcc.build/aircon.

EMPLOYEES

Employees must obtain their mechanical services licence before 1 January 2022. Until this time, they are able to continue performing work under their employer's mechanical services licence. For contractors and nominee supervisors to conduct mechanical services plumbing work from 1 July 2020, you must hold the Mechanical Services - Plumbing licence. From 1 January 2022, all workers must be licensed to carry out mechanical services work.

WHO DOESN'T NEED A MECHANICAL SERVICES LICENCE?

Exemptions from holding a QBCC mechanical services licence include, but are not limited to:

- Electricians carrying out electrical work that they are allowed to perform under the *Electrical Safety Act 2020* do not need a QBCC licence unless they carry out building work (e.g. multi-head air-conditioning systems in a healthcare facility).
- Apprentices, trainees and other students who carry out mechanical services work as part of their vocational studies must be supervised, but do not need to be licensed.
- Workers performing mechanical services work and who are employed by a public hospital do not require a licence to perform mechanical services work.

- Employees carrying out building work do not need a QBCC licence unless they also perform mechanical services work.
- Existing workers who install air-conditioning systems in houses and townhouses and single head split systems are exempt from mechanical services licensing requirements, and are also exempt from QBCC Act licensing requirements, if the work is of a value of \$3,300 or less.

WHAT TYPES OF LICENCES ARE THERE?

Applicants must decide what type of licence they will need. This is generally determined by their roles and responsibilities in the building industry:

- **Contractor** [can be held as an individual or a company] – allows licence holder to supervise work, be a nominee for a company and also enter into contracts with clients, as well as undertake their own work on their own premises.
- **Nominee Supervisor** – allows licence holder to supervise work and be the nominee for a company. The nominee must be an officer or employee of the company.
- **Site Supervisor** – allows an employee or officer of a licensed contractor to supervise work under the contractor's licence.
- **Occupational** – is essential to personally perform or supervise mechanical services work as an employee.

WHAT LICENCE CLASSES ARE AVAILABLE?

Applicants should apply for the mechanical services licence class that covers the work they will perform. There are seven (7) different mechanical services licence classes available.

For *Contractor*, *Nominee Supervisor* and *Site Supervisor* licence types:

1. Mechanical Services – Air-Conditioning and Refrigeration (Unlimited Design) licence;
2. Mechanical Services – Air-Conditioning and Refrigeration (Limited Design) licence;
3. Mechanical Services – Plumbing licence;
4. Mechanical Services – Medical Gas licence.

For an *Occupational* licence type:

5. Mechanical Services – Air-Conditioning and Refrigeration licence;
6. Mechanical Services – Plumbing licence;
7. Mechanical Services – Medical Gas licence.

A licence applicant needs to meet all current legislative requirements, including technical qualifications. For applicants seeking an Mechanical Services - Medical Gas or Mechanical Services - Plumbing licence, the Alternative Qualification Framework may assist existing industry participants to meet licensing requirements. Learn more about these changes on the QBCC website at qbcc.build/techpathways.

For more information on the specific requirements for each class of mechanical services licence and how to make an application, see the following pages on our website:

- Mechanical Services – Air-Conditioning and Refrigeration licence – see qbcc.build/aircon
- Mechanical Services – Plumbing licence – see qbcc.build/plumbing
- Mechanical Services – Medical Gas licence – see qbcc.build/medigas

WHERE TO GO TO SUBMIT A MECHANICAL SERVICES APPLICATION?

Simply visit the QBCC website and lodge an online form via myQBCC or download a paper form.

The QBCC is committed to engaging with industry stakeholders to promote an understanding of these new licensing obligations and support a smooth transition for those who perform this work. Members of industry bodies can seek assistance from those organisations to understand the new licensing framework.

QUESTIONS?



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qbcc.build/mechservices



Visit a QBCC Service Centre



Workers who are members of industry bodies can seek assistance from those organisations to understand the new licensing framework.