Who can you sponsor through Canada's family sponsorship program?

Canada's family sponsorship program lets a permanent resident or citizen bring certain relatives to the country as permanent residents. The most common pathway is spousal sponsorship Canada, which covers a married spouse or a common-law partner. But the program also extends to parents, grandparents, and dependent children, and in some cases to other relatives like an orphaned sibling or a grandchild. The key requirement is that the person you want to sponsor must fit into one of the eligible relationship categories defined by Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada (IRCC).

Who can be a sponsor?

Before looking at who can come, it helps to understand who can apply to bring someone. The sponsor must be a Canadian citizen or a permanent resident, at least 18 years old, and living in Canada (or planning to return when the sponsored person arrives). They cannot be in prison, bankrupt, under a removal order, or convicted of a serious violent or sexual offence. They also need to show they are not receiving social assistance except for a disability. The sponsor signs an undertaking, which is a legal promise to support the sponsored person financially for a set period. That period is three years for a spouse or partner, ten years for a child under 22, and twenty years for a parent or grandparent. During that time, the sponsored person cannot apply for social assistance from the government; the sponsor is responsible for their basic needs.

Spouses and common-law partners

This is the most common type of family sponsorship. You can sponsor your husband or wife if the marriage is legal in both the country where it took place and in Canada. A same-sex marriage is treated exactly the same as a different-sex marriage. You can also sponsor a common-law partner: someone you have lived with in a marriage-like relationship for at least twelve consecutive months. There is no requirement to get married first. A common-law partnership ends if one of the partners marries someone else or if they stop living together for more than 90 days. A conjugal partner sponsorship exists for people who cannot live together because of immigration barriers or legal restrictions in their home country, but this is a much harder case to prove and the bar is high. Most people apply through the spousal sponsorship Canada stream, which has a faster processing time than the parent or grandparent program.



Who can you sponsor through Canada's family sponsorship program?

Proof of relationship is a major part of the application. You need to show that the relationship is genuine and not entered into mainly to get permanent resident status. Couples submit photos, messages, joint bank accounts, shared leases, travel itineraries, and letters from friends and family. A couple who have been living apart for a long time need to show they have maintained the relationship through visits, calls, and financial support. The immigration officer looks for evidence of an ongoing emotional and financial connection.

Dependent children

A dependent child is someone who is financially dependent on their parents because of age, disability, or full-time study. The definition changed a few years ago. Today, a dependent child is under 22 years old and does not have a spouse or common-law partner. If the child is 22 or older, they can still be sponsored if they have been continuously enrolled in full-time study (and are financially dependent on the parent) or if they have a physical or mental condition that prevents them from supporting themselves. The child must have been financially dependent on the parent before the parent became a permanent resident or before the sponsorship application was filed. If you are sponsoring a spouse, the spouse's dependent children can also be included in the same application if they meet the definition.

Parents and grandparents

Sponsoring a parent or grandparent is possible but much more limited. IRCC runs a lottery system called the Parents and Grandparents Program (PGP). Every year, a limited number of applications are accepted. Interested sponsors submit an interest to sponsor form during a short window, and IRCC randomly draws a set number of applicants. Those who are selected then have a few months to submit a full application. The requirements for the sponsor are stricter: they must have a higher minimum income than for spousal sponsorship, and they must maintain that income level for three consecutive tax years before applying. The undertaking period is twenty years, meaning the sponsor is financially responsible for the parent or grandparent for two decades. Because of the lottery, many families try the super visa option instead, which allows a parent or grandparent to visit Canada for up to two years at a time without becoming a permanent resident.

Other relatives: orphaned siblings, grandchildren, and extended family

Canada's family sponsorship rules also allow a Canadian citizen or permanent resident to sponsor an orphaned sibling, niece, nephew, or grandchild under 18, but only if the sponsor has no living parent or grandparent who could sponsor them instead. The relative must be under 18, not have a spouse or common-law partner, and be an orphan (both parents deceased). This is a narrow category and not commonly used. Another special case is the "accompanying

family member" rule: if you are sponsoring a spouse, their dependent children come along. But a person cannot sponsor an aunt, uncle, cousin, or adult sibling through the family class unless those relatives fall into the orphaned minor category. For adult siblings, there is no direct sponsorship route. The only way to bring an adult sibling to Canada permanently is through the economic class, where the sibling would need their own work or study permit and eventually apply for permanent residence on their own merits.



Who can you sponsor through Canada's family sponsorship program?

What about a visitor visa or an invitation letter?

Sometimes a person who does not qualify for permanent residence sponsorship can still come to Canada temporarily. A visitor visa allows a relative to visit for up to six months. The visitor must show they have ties to their home country (job, family, property) and enough money to support the visit. An invitation letter from the Canadian relative can help, but it is not a guarantee. The letter states that the Canadian host will cover accommodation and some expenses, and it includes the host's contact information and proof of funds. The immigration officer still decides based on the visitor's overall situation. A visitor visa is not a path to permanent residence, but it can allow a family to be together while the permanent residence application is in process. Some people apply for a visitor visa while waiting for their spousal sponsorship Canada application to be approved, and if they are from a visa-exempt country, they may also be eligible for an eTA.

How the process works

Applying for family sponsorship starts with the sponsor filing a sponsorship application along with the permanent residence application for the person they want to sponsor. The sponsor must prove they meet the income requirements (for parents and grandparents) or simply prove they are not on social assistance (for spouses and dependent children). The principal applicant is the person being sponsored. They need to submit a full application with proof of relationship, medical exams, police certificates, and background checks. The process can take from several months to over a year, depending on the country of origin, the volume of applications, and whether the case is straightforward or complicated. For spousal sponsorship Canada, the current processing time is around twelve months for most applications, but it can be shorter or longer.

One common mistake is not providing enough evidence that the relationship is genuine. Another is failing to submit complete police certificates or medical exams on time. A third is the sponsor not meeting the residency requirement: a Canadian citizen living abroad can still sponsor a spouse if they show they plan to return to Canada when the spouse arrives, but a

permanent resident must be living in Canada at the time of application. If the sponsor is a permanent resident living outside Canada, they cannot sponsor anyone until they move back.

For those looking for reliable guidance, the website swiftarh.ca provides information on Canadian immigration pathways including family sponsorship. The rules change from year to year, so it is wise to confirm the current requirements before starting an application. Many people find the process manageable on their own, but others prefer to consult with a regulated immigration consultant to avoid delays or refusals. The key is to understand which category fits your situation and to prepare a complete, honest application with strong evidence. The family sponsorship program is one of the most compassionate parts of Canada's immigration system, but it is also one of the most strictly verified. Getting it right the first time saves months of waiting.



Who can you sponsor through Canada's family sponsorship program?

Swiftarh.ca also offers information on study permits, work permits, and permanent residence pathways for those who may not qualify for family sponsorship but still want to come to Canada through other means. Whether you are sponsoring a spouse, a child, or a parent, the process starts with knowing the eligibility rules and gathering the right documents. The undertaking you sign is a serious legal commitment, so it pays to understand exactly what you are promising before you apply.