

Helicopter Pilot

Fly the machine that can land anywhere. Most of the work is in the bush, not the city.

TYPICAL PAY

\$108,000

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$50k to \$220k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

2 to 4 years

after high school

DEMAND

Moderate

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

Yes

regulated job

WHERE YOU WORK

Bush camps, mines, hospitals, fire lines, offshore platforms

How you get there

- 1 Finish high school and pass a medical** Grade 12
Get a Transport Canada Category 1 medical exam before spending money on training. Math, physics and English all help.
- 2 Private helicopter licence** 3 to 6 months
Minimum age 17. Ground school plus dual and solo flying at a helicopter flight school.
- 3 Commercial helicopter licence** 6 to 12 months
Minimum age 18. About 100 hours of flight time, far fewer than the 200 an aeroplane commercial licence needs, but each hour costs much more.
- 4 First job, usually on the ground** 1 to 2 years
Most new pilots are hired as ground crew or junior pilots at a bush operator and fly the trips nobody else wants.
- 5 Build hours and specialize** 3 to 5 years
At 1,000 to 2,000 hours you can move to fire work, longline, survey, air ambulance or offshore.

Pros and cons

- + Hands-on flying that is never routine
- + Small crews and very little corporate structure
- + Work in places roads do not reach
- Expensive training with no guaranteed job at the end
- The first years are low paid and mostly ground work
- Weeks away from home in camps

Good to know

Helicopters fight fires by the bucket

Provincial fire agencies hire helicopter operators every summer to drop water from buckets slung under the aircraft. It is one of the main reasons Canada has so many helicopter jobs outside big cities.

Fewer hours, not less money

A commercial helicopter licence takes roughly half the flight hours of an aeroplane one, but helicopter time costs several times as much an hour, so the total bill ends up in the same place.

Optional boosts

Mountain flying course. Longline and sling work. Night and instrument rating. Aircraft maintenance training.

Where these numbers come from

Job Bank: Helicopter Pilot in Canada, wages (updated Nov 2025)

Job Bank: Helicopter Pilot, job requirements

Transport Canada: General information on pilot licences and permits

Transport Canada: Licensing of pilots and personnel

Numbers checked September 2026. Pay figures are typical full-time annual amounts in Canadian dollars, based on Government of Canada Job Bank wage data and published salary grids. They vary by province, employer and experience. Tuition is for domestic students. Sources, links and the click-through version: <https://career.help/ca/careers/helicopter-pilot>



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