



CRNA

College of Registered
Nurses of Alberta

Nursing Education Program Approval Framework

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Nursing Education Program Approval Purpose

The purpose of Nursing Education Program Approval (NEPA) is to uphold the CRNA's public protection mandate by validating that a program's curriculum prepares graduates to meet the entry level competencies (ELC's).

This alignment ensures that graduates of approved programs are eligible for registration in Alberta.

All applicants for registration as a regulated member on the registered nurse register or nurse practitioner register must have graduated from an **APPROVED PROGRAM**.

Applicants for RN prescribing authorization must successfully complete an approved RN prescribing program.

Framework Principles

TRUSTED PARTNERSHIPS

Educational partners in Alberta are established as trusted partners and provide expertise in curriculum delivery in support of high quality nursing education.

PUBLIC INTEREST

Prioritize public safety within our regulatory role by ensuring program curriculum meets Nursing Education Program Approval (NEPA) standards.

TRANSPARENT AND ACCOUNTABLE

Maintain trust and integrity with clear, transparent standards, criteria and accountable decisions.

REGULATORY CONTRIBUTION TO THE HEALTH SYSTEM

Ensure program approval requirements are within our regulatory role and proportionate to risks, to contribute positively to the health system in the public interest.

HOLISTIC AND SUSTAINABLE

Conduct targeted, consistent evaluations leveraging quality assurance from system partners.

Overview

APPROVAL OVERVIEW

Post-secondary institutions in Alberta that deliver **ENTRY TO PRACTICE PROGRAMS** are required to obtain the status of Approved Program from the CRNA.

To become an approved nursing program in Alberta, the program must demonstrate that the program of study meets the approved NEPA standards and criteria to ensure that graduates meet the ELCs.

Nursing education programs are approved for a duration of seven (7) years and require ongoing **ANNUAL COMPLIANCE**.

NEW PROGRAM

A nursing education program is considered a new program when a post-secondary degree-granting institute proposes a nursing education program that:

- i. has not yet graduated students; and
- ii. leads to initial entry or re-entry to practice as a registered nurse or initial entry to practice as a nurse practitioner.

The CRNA's Council performs the role of the Nursing Education Program Approval Committee (NEPAC) as per legislation and CRNA bylaw. A proposed new nursing education program must be reviewed and approved by NEPAC prior to admitting students, otherwise the institution cannot assume that the program graduates will be eligible for registration.

REQUIREMENTS TO MAINTAIN APPROVAL

All approved nursing education programs are subject to the requirements of the NEPA reapproval and annual compliance processes.

In addition, program changes must be submitted to the CRNA for review at the time of their occurrence.

REAPPROVAL

Nursing education programs are approved by the CRNA's council for a period of seven (7) years. The reapproval process for full review of a program occurs seven years from the date of approval.

ANNUAL COMPLIANCE

All approved education programs must submit annual reporting requirements confirming ongoing compliance based on the NEPA standards and criteria.

PROGRAM CHANGES

Approved programs must inform the CRNA of changes to their approved program.

RN Prescribing Program (RNPP)

Post-secondary institutes or organizations in Alberta that deliver **RN PRESCRIBING PROGRAMS** are required to obtain the status of Approved Program from the CRNA. All approved RN prescribing education programs are subject to the RN Prescribing reapproval and annual compliance processes. In addition, program changes must be submitted to the CRNA for review prior to change implementation.

NEW PROGRAM APPROVAL

A new RN Prescribing program is a post-entry level education program that

- i. offers a certification that leads to eligibility for authorization in Alberta for RNs to prescribe schedule 1 drugs and ordering diagnostic tests, and,
- ii. has not yet graduated students

All new RN prescribing programs must submit a program implementation proposal one year prior to the proposed implementation date.

REAPPROVAL

RN prescribing programs are approved for a period of two (2) years. The reapproval process for review of a program occurs two years from the date of approval.

ANNUAL COMPLIANCE

RN prescribing programs must submit annual reporting requirements confirming ongoing compliance based on the RN Prescribing Program (RNPP) standards.

PROGRAM CHANGES

RN prescribing programs must inform the CRNA of changes to their approved program as soon as they are aware of the upcoming change.

All RN prescribing program approval and reapproval processes include:

EVIDENCE

A proposed new program, or reapproval, must submit evidence in the form of a written self-report to demonstrate compliance with the nursing education program standards and criteria.

GOVERNMENT REVIEW

Before a new program is approved, or a program reapproved, NEPAC must consult with the Minister of Primary and Preventative Health Services and the Minister of Advanced Education and must consider the comments received from those Ministers.

Post-secondary institutions or organizations that have questions about the specific processes pertaining to RN prescribing programs, or are proposing to implement an RN prescribing program, should contact the CRNA at programapproval@nurses.ab.ca to initiate the RNPP approval process

Program Approval Categories

Council performs the role of the Nursing Education Program Approval Committee (NEPAC) as per legislation and CRNA bylaw, and may:

- i. **Grant Program Approval:** The program will be considered an approved program for a length of seven (7) years. Educational partner representatives may begin implementing the proposed new nursing education program.
- ii. **Refuse Program Approval:** There are one or more unmet nursing education program approval standards that present a risk to public safety. Educational partner representatives may not implement the proposed new nursing education program and cannot assume that program graduates will be eligible for registration with the CRNA.

Through delegation of authority from NEPAC, CRNA staff are responsible to:

- i. administer the program approval process, on behalf of NEPAC.
- ii. develop education approval policies and processes that incorporate and align with the NEPA Standards and Framework.
- iii. evaluate program submissions and make recommendations to NEPAC.
- iv. escalate to NEPAC:
 - any program review for approved nursing program status.
 - any program that is deemed to be non-compliant for decision regarding approved nursing program status.
- v. monitor the nursing education programs' compliance with Nursing Education Program Approval Standards.
- vi. review proposed program changes to evaluate compliance.
- vii. provide approval, reapproval and removal of approval for RN prescribing programs.
- viii. consult with education program approval partners, Minister of Advanced Education and Minister of Primary and Preventative Health Services, as legislatively required.

New Program Approval

A post-secondary institution proposing a new entry-to-practice nursing education program must notify the CRNA in writing of the intent to offer the new program by submitting a **PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION PROPOSAL (PIP)**, at least one (1) year before the intended implementation date.

Institutions proposing a new nursing education program must contact the CRNA at programapproval@nurses.ab.ca to initiate the new program approval process and access detailed process steps information.

In addition to the PIP, the program approval process also includes:

Evidence: A proposed new program must submit evidence in the form of a written self-report to demonstrate compliance with the nursing education program standards and criteria.

Government Review: Before a new program is approved, NEPAC must consult with the Minister of Primary and Preventative Health Services and the Minister of Advanced Education and must consider the comments received from those Ministers.

Annual Compliance

All approved nursing education programs must submit annual reporting requirements confirming ongoing compliance based on the nursing education standards and criteria. This serves as the main accountability mechanism for monitoring nursing education programs. Annual compliance submissions are reviewed to identify program changes. The annual compliance process also includes:

- i. Programs that do not satisfy the requirements of annual compliance will be requested to provide supplementary evidence up to a revised self-report.
- ii. Additional submission requirements are based on any deficiencies identified in the program's ability to meet the NEPA Standards.
- iii. Approved Nursing Education programs that have not yet graduated students may be required to submit additional reporting requirements up to one (1) year post-graduation of a first cohort.

Program Changes

An approved nursing program with changes identified through annual compliance will be required to submit additional evidence for review.

If a program has proposed changes, the CRNA should be notified of the upcoming changes by contacting the CRNA at programapproval@nurses.ab.ca to initiate the change process and access detailed process information.

A program change includes, but is not limited to:

- i. The movement or inclusion of additional campus locations
- ii. The development of a collaborative partnership with another educational institution
- iii. A new offering of a first-degree program at a new level (e.g., BN to BScN)
- iv. Program name change
- v. Program pathway changes (additions, removals, revisions)
- vi. New curriculum initiatives affecting learning opportunities and altering how a program addresses the NEPA Standards (for example, new entry level competencies)
- vii. An increase or decrease in the number of students beyond ten (10) percent of previous program approval

Program Reapproval

Established nursing education programs must be reapproved by NEPAC in accordance with the timeline of their individual approval status.

The term of expiry of an approved program status may be revised if there is evidence to inform the following:

- i. Proposed changes impacting a program's ability to meet the current nursing education standards and criteria.
- ii. Noncompliance in reporting, including programs that do not satisfy the annual reporting requirements or submit an incomplete or inaccurate report.
- iii. Noncompliance with the education standards and criteria, including unmet terms or conditions, that present a risk to public safety and the ability of the educational partner to deliver the education program.
- iv. Verified investigation of complaints about program quality or delivery that demonstrate noncompliance with the NEPA Standards.
- v. Additional factors that may give the CRNA reason to believe that the program may not be meeting the NEPA standards.
- vi. Approved nursing education programs that have not yet graduated students may be required to submit additional reporting requirements up to one (1) year post-graduation of a first cohort.

The program reapproval process includes:

EVIDENCE

A program in reapproval status must submit evidence in the form of a written self-report to demonstrate compliance with the nursing education program standards and criteria and include changes to the program since the last approval date.

GOVERNMENT REVIEW

Before a program is reapproved, NEPAC must consult with the Minister of Primary and Preventative Health Services and the Minister of Advanced Education and must consider the comments received from those Ministers.

Withdrawal of Approval

When a nursing education program or RN prescribing program decides to no longer accept or graduate students from their program, the CRNA must be made aware of the decision as soon as reasonably possible. The CRNA will require the completion of a withdrawal of approval form to begin the process.

The process for withdrawal of program approval includes:

EVIDENCE

A program seeking to have approval status withdrawn must submit evidence in the form of completing the program withdrawal form that provides details and evidence required for the withdrawal process.

GOVERNMENT REVIEW

Before approval is withdrawn from a program, NEPAC must consult with the Minister of Primary and Preventative Health Services and the Minister of Advanced Education and must consider the comments received from those Ministers.

If the CRNA determines that a program is no longer meeting the NEPA or RNPPA Standards, a process will be followed to withdraw approval from the program.

Any post-secondary institution or organization considering discontinuing an approved program must contact the CRNA at programapproval@nurses.ab.ca to initiate the process for withdrawal of approval.

Definitions

ANNUAL COMPLIANCE: All approved nursing education and RN prescribing programs must submit an annual compliance report that demonstrates compliance with the NEPA Standards or RNPP Standards.

APPROVED PROGRAM: a program that meets the NEPA standards as an entry-level nursing program in Alberta leading to registration as a registered nurse under section 3(1)(a) of the *Registered Nurses Profession Regulation*, OR an entry-level nurse practitioner program in Alberta leading to registration as a nurse practitioner under section 4(1)(a) of the *Registered Nurses Profession Regulation*.

ENTRY TO PRACTICE PROGRAM: A post- secondary degree-granting institute offering a nursing education program that leads to initial entry or re-entry to practice as a registered nurse or initial entry to practice as a nurse practitioner

NOT APPROVED: A program that has one or more unmet NEPA Standards that present a risk to public safety and is not a recognized approved nursing education program by the CRNA. Program graduates will NOT be eligible for registration with the CRNA.

PROGRAM CHANGE FORM: Any program proposing changes must initiate the program change process by completing the program change form that captures the proposed change and provides specific information for determining if additional evidence may be required.

PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION PROPOSAL: All new nursing education or RN prescribing programs must initiate the new program approval process through the completion of a program implementation proposal (PIP). A form that captures information on the new program and determines if additional information is required prior to self-report evidence submission.

PROGRAM RE-APPROVAL: An evaluation of an approved nursing education program conducted to assess if a program still meets NEPA Standards to maintain approved program status.

RN PRESCRIBING PROGRAM: An educational course that prepares registered nurses (RNs) for authorized prescribing within their legislated scope of practice. Program content is aligned with applicable regulatory standards and entry-level prescribing competencies.