



Health Workforce Scopes of Practice

Interpretive Notes

2021



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About this document

This document provides contextual information to support the use and interpretation of CIHI's data on health workforce scopes of practice in Canada. The current release includes data on legislated scopes of practice for registered nurses (RNs), registered psychiatric nurses (RPNs) and licensed practical nurses (LPNs) as of December 2021. The list of scopes may represent a subset of all activities that they may perform in their respective practices.

Health care professionals included in the data

This release includes data on scopes of practice for the following regulated health care professionals:

Registered nurses (RNs) are health care professionals who work both autonomously and in collaboration with others to enable individuals, families, groups, communities and populations to achieve their optimal levels of health. RNs deliver direct health care services to those at all stages of life and in all situations of health, illness, injury and disability; they also coordinate care and support clients in managing their own health. RNs contribute to the health care system through their leadership across a wide range of settings. RNs are currently regulated in all 13 provinces and territories.¹

Registered psychiatric nurses (RPNs) are health care professionals who work both autonomously and in collaboration with clients and other health care team members to coordinate health care and provide client-centred services to individuals, families, groups and communities. RPNs focus on mental and developmental health, mental illness and addictions, while integrating physical health and utilizing bio-psycho-social and spiritual models for a holistic approach to care. RPNs are currently regulated in the 4 Western provinces (Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia) and Yukon.

Note: RPNs are educated and trained independently of the registered nursing class.²

Licensed practical nurses (LPNs) are health care professionals who work independently or in collaboration with other members of a health care team. LPNs assess clients and work in health promotion and illness prevention. They assess, plan, implement and evaluate care for clients. LPNs are referred to as registered practical nurses in Ontario.

Future releases of this product will include additional types of health care professionals and may integrate data beyond legislated scopes.

Terms used in this document

Scope of practice refers to a range of activities that a regulated health care professional is educated and authorized to perform.^{3,4} The scope of practice is generally established through legislated statements in each province and territory and is set out in their respective profession-specific/health professionals act.

This publication includes the status of *legislated* scopes of practice (unless otherwise stated) for provinces and territories with available information, as of December 2021.

Full scope of practice refers to legislation allowing health care professionals to perform the identified activity without any constraints.

Restricted scope of practice refers to legislation limiting or reducing the ability of health care professionals to perform the identified activity. Limitations include requirements for additional education or training, an order or prescription from another health care professional specifying the work to be done, and other limitations on the performance of the activity.

Out of scope refers to legislation prohibiting health care professionals from performing the identified activity.

Note that data for those provinces and territories where scopes of practice may not be outlined in detail in respective legislations is based on regulatory policy guidelines or competency profiles for the profession as determined by the respective regulatory body or government. There may be policies or practice standards put in place by the regulatory body that help determine restrictions on scopes. When such policies are interpretive rather than prescriptive, the decision to perform a certain activity may be informed by employer policies, the context and the professionals' judgment of whether the activity is within the confines of their knowledge and training.

Interpreting scopes of practice

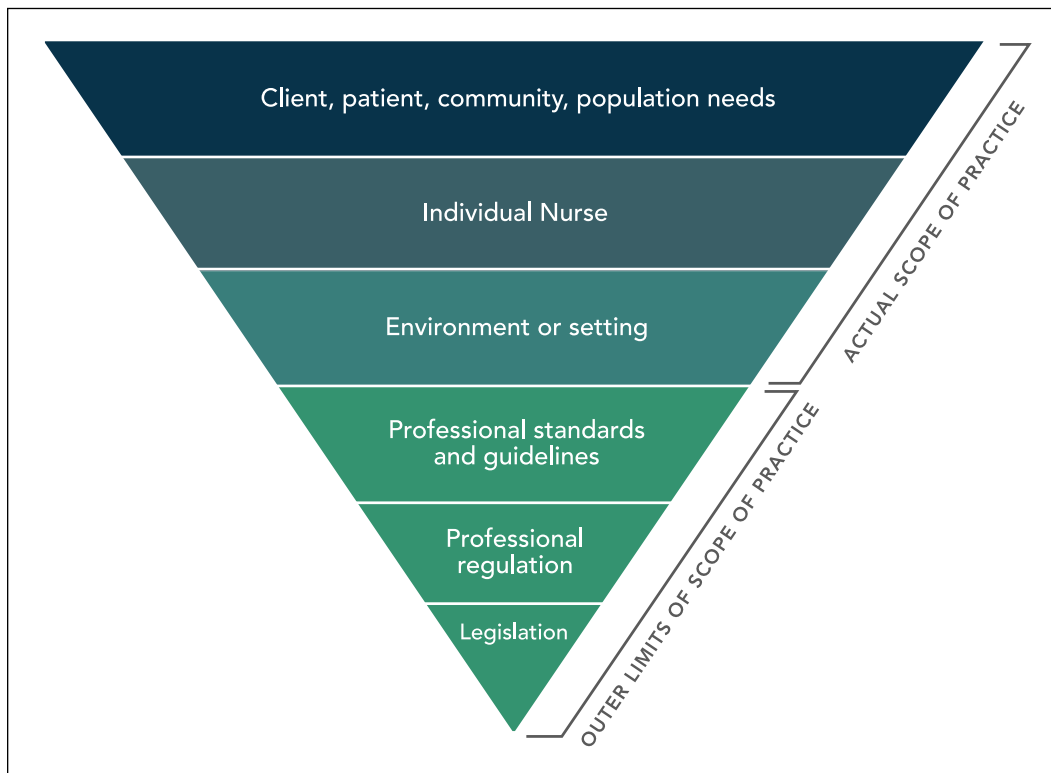
The overall scope of a regulated health care professional sets the outer limits of what they can perform, as stated in provincial and territorial legislation. These legislations may be specific to one health profession, or they can be within a legislation that applies to several different health professions, such as a health professions act.⁵ This is supported by entry-level competencies, standards of practice, guidelines and standards from jurisdictional regulatory bodies.⁶

The overall scope defined in these legislations is generally broad and flexible to allow for accommodations due to variation in client needs, roles of health care professionals and models of care under which services are provided.⁷ At the practical level, practice setting and employer policies also shape an individual's scope of practice.⁶

The goal of health care professional practice is to achieve the best possible outcomes for patients. The complexity of a client's condition influences the knowledge required to provide the level of care the client needs. A more complex client situation and less stable environment creates an increased need for consultation and/or the need for a professional with adequate education and training to fulfill the care requirements.

In summary, the scope of practice of an individual health care professional is influenced by the needs of clients; the level of the individual's competence to perform the necessary activities; the policies of the practice setting or employer; professional standards; regulations; and the legislation that governs the profession⁶ (see figure).

Figure Health care professional scope of practice boundaries



Source

Almost, J. *Regulated Nursing in Canada: The Landscape in 2021*. Canadian Nurses Association. 2021.
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Comparability

The data on legislated scopes of practice must be interpreted with caution when making comparisons across health professions and provinces/territories. Some considerations are mentioned below:

- Scopes of practice may evolve over time due to changes in legislation, competency levels of the professionals, the health care needs of clients and the practice environment.⁷ For example, during the recent COVID-19 pandemic, when the needs have exceeded system capacity, health care professionals have been called upon to expand their skills to help fill the void in high-priority activities.⁸
- As an outcome of unique and specialized training, individual health care professionals might also have a distinct area of focus that may inform their scopes of practice. For example, RPNs focus on psychosocial, mental or emotional disorders and conditions and associated or comorbid physiological conditions.⁹ When determining whether an activity is fully within scope or is restricted, the focus of health care professionals is not considered to be a restriction.

- Some scope activities may be categorized as controlled, restricted or reserved acts in respective legislations, which may be legally performed only by a specified health care professional or under certain criteria. However, it must be acknowledged that team-based care and collaboration across health care professionals are integral to the carrying out of many of these tasks. For example, only a physician or NP may be the signing authority for involuntary hospital admission in certain provinces and territories, but RNs, RPNs and other professionals make essential contributions to the assessments that might inform such decisions.
- Entry-to-practice requirements for health care professionals define the knowledge and skills required to practise in the profession. While some requirements are unique for each profession, there may be an overlap in knowledge and skills across various professions. Similarly, while each health care profession may have its unique focus of practice, scopes of practice may overlap, so the same activity may be performed by different types of health care professionals under certain conditions and/or depending on environmental factors.

Data use

Standardized pan-Canadian data on health workforce scopes of practice, when taken in the appropriate context, can help inform

- Similarities and variations in scopes of practice for the health workforce across provinces and territories;
- Priority areas including expanding virtual care delivery across provincial and territorial boundaries to address shortages;
- Decisions on optimal practice configurations and the development of team-based, collaborative and patient-focused care models;
- The evolution of health care professional program curricula, competencies and practice standards; and
- The general public on the services that professionals are authorized to perform.

The COVID-19 pandemic has further highlighted the need for such data and information in the face of staffing shortages and redeployments in response to an emergency.

Data collection

Data and information for this product was provided by respective regulatory bodies for health care professionals in each province and territory, unless otherwise stated. Data reflects the status of scopes of practice as of December 2021.

Health care professionals undertake a wide range of activities and provide essential services that promote health, prevent diseases and deliver health care services to individuals, families and communities.¹⁰ The list of scopes included in this release may represent a subset of all the activities that they may perform in their respective practices. For example, in addition to the scopes mentioned in this product, RPNs may conduct complex psychiatric nursing activities such as providing crisis intervention for clients experiencing acute emotional, physical, behavioural and mental distress.

The activities for which data is marked not applicable or not available may include those not identified in the legislation or that may not be distinctly mapped to the data values *full, restricted or out of scope*.

Data mapping

The list of scopes included in this release have been mapped to the SNOMED CT (Systematized Nomenclature of Medicine — Clinical Terms) Canadian Edition (version 2022-03-31), a systematically organized computer-processable collection of medical terms.¹¹ SNOMED CT is widely used in clinical documentation and reporting, specifically in electronic health record (EHR) and electronic medical record (EMR) systems in Canada and internationally, providing opportunities to compare data across local, national and international jurisdictions.

SNOMED CT introduces a common, structured approach for collecting data on scopes of practice for health care professionals while also enhancing the interoperability of this data across Canada's clinical documentation and reporting system. The benefits range from increased opportunities for health policy decision-makers to use this data along with clinical data for decision support on configurations for models of care, to retrospective reporting on optimum health workforce utilization in order to support client care needs.

See [Appendix A](#) for the list of activities mapped to SNOMED CT.

Appendices

Appendix A: List of activities, descriptions and SNOMED CT mappings

Table A1 Assessment and therapeutic management

Activity	Activity description	SNOMED CT ID
Conduct health assessment	Assess the client to establish state of health wellness.	225885004
Identify nursing diagnosis	Make a clinical judgment based on human response to health conditions or life processes that affect an individual, family, group or community. The nursing diagnosis provides the basis for choosing nursing interventions that address client care goals, for which the nurse has accountability.	86644006
Develop nursing care plan	Determine a plan of care for a variety of conditions that can be improved, resolved or prevented with nursing activities.	399684003
Implement nursing care interventions	Implement and assess a plan of care for a variety of conditions that can be improved, resolved or prevented with nursing activities.	225304007
Consult with other health professionals	Initiate consultations with other health care professionals to inform a care plan.	11429006
Refer to other health professionals	Make referrals to other health care professionals.	183917008
Coordinate health services	As part of the care plan, coordinate services for the patient that may be provided by other health professionals.	711069006
Order X-rays	Order X-rays.	183830008
Interpret X-rays	Interpret X-rays to initiate care.	25163005
Order lab tests	Order specific laboratory tests.	165332000
Interpret lab test results	Interpret basic laboratory results in order to initiate care.	386344002
Communicate diagnoses and test results to patients	Communicate to the individual or their personal representative a diagnosis identifying a disease or disorder as the cause of the individual's symptoms.	310866003
Monitor and evaluate client outcomes	Monitor client health status and assess outcomes of care.	67407003
Conduct follow-up visits	Provide nursing follow-up.	185389009

Source

SNOMED CT Canadian Edition version 2022-03-31.

Table A2 Treatments and interventions

Activity	Activity description	SNOMED CT ID
Provide wound care (above dermis)	Provide care and treatment for wounds and alterations of the skin and teguments, according to a prescription or a nursing plan.	385942004
Perform procedures below the dermis	Perform a procedure on tissue below the dermis or below the surface of a mucous membrane.	Not available
Establish an intravenous line	Perform venipuncture for the purposes of establishing intravenous access, maintaining patency or managing hypovolemia.	22778000
Perform procedures which require putting an instrument or finger into body openings	Perform procedures that require putting an instrument, hand or finger <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beyond the external ear canal; • Beyond the point in the nasal passages where they normally narrow; • Beyond the larynx; • Beyond the opening of the urethra; • Beyond the labia majora; • Beyond the anal verge; or • Into an artificial opening in the body. 	Not available
Order a form of energy	Order the application of a form of energy prescribed by the regulation.	Not available
Apply a form of energy	Apply a form of energy prescribed by the regulation.	Not available
Perform an electrocardiogram	Perform an electrocardiogram.	29303009
Interpret an electrocardiogram	Interpret an electrocardiogram.	258181008
Order blood and blood products	Order blood or blood products.	Not available
Order any form of radiation	Order any form of ionizing and/or non-ionizing radiation.	Not available
Apply any form of radiation	Apply any form of ionizing and/or non-ionizing radiation.	Not available
Order cosmetic treatments like Botox	Order cosmetic treatments like Botox.	Not available
Apply cosmetic treatments like Botox	Administer cosmetic treatments like Botox as prescribed by an authorized provider.	5326009
Set fractures	Set a fracture of a bone.	122859005
Reduce dislocation	Reduce dislocation of a joint.	122944000
Apply cast	Apply cast to a bone fracture.	118480003
Apply restraints	Apply a restraint to maintain patient safety and well-being.	68894007
Manage restraints	Manage applied restraints.	35497000
Conduct sexually transmitted infection (STI) assessment	Conduct screening and assessment of individuals for STIs.	Not available

Activity	Activity description	SNOMED CT ID
Conduct contraceptive management assessment	Conduct screening and assessment of individuals for contraceptive use and management.	408968008
Insert intrauterine devices	Insert intrauterine contraceptive device.	176837007
Conduct pelvic exam	Perform pelvic exam.	35025007
Conduct cervical screening	Perform cervical cancer screening.	171149006
Conduct mental health screening	Perform screening for health and wellness with a focus on psychosocial, mental or emotional disorders, conditions and associated or comorbid physiological conditions.	385892002
Conduct substance use screening	Perform screening to identify individuals who have or are at risk for developing alcohol- or drug-related disorders.	370854007
Perform allergy testing	Conduct allergy challenge test.	252512005
Provide rehabilitative care	Provide care that helps to restore and maintain function, and to prevent complications.	52052004
Provide psychotherapy for mental health	Treat, by means of psychotherapy technique, delivered through a therapeutic relationship, an individual's serious disorder of thought, cognition, mood, emotional regulation, perception or memory that may seriously impair the individual's judgment, insight, behaviour, communication or social functioning.	75516001
Support medical assistance in dying with supervision	Aid in the provision of medical assistance in dying under the supervision of an authorized health professional.	Not available

Source

SNOMED CT Canadian Edition version 2022-03-31.

Table A3 Pharmacotherapy

Activity	Activity description	SNOMED CT ID
Prescribe pharmacotherapy	Prescribe or reorder drugs (listed on Health Canada prescription drug list) that require a prescription for sale.	33633005
Prepare prescribed medications	Prepare the drug for administration, according to a prescription.	385796006
Administer prescribed medications	Administer medications as prescribed by an authorized provider.	370773004
Prescribe controlled substances	Prescribe drugs that are deemed a controlled substance, as defined by the <i>Controlled Drugs and Substances Act</i> (CDSA) (e.g., fentanyl, morphine, lorazepam).	Not available

Activity	Activity description	SNOMED CT ID
Administer controlled substances	Administer controlled substances, as defined by the <i>Controlled Drugs and Substances Act</i> (CDSA) (e.g., fentanyl, morphine, lorazepam).	Not available
Prescribe vaccines	Prescribe vaccines authorized by Health Canada.	372047005
Administer vaccines	Administer vaccines per Health Canada guidelines.	33879002

Source

SNOMED CT Canadian Edition version 2022-03-31.

Table A4 Other

Activity	Activity description	SNOMED CT ID
Independently manage labour and delivery	Manage labour and delivery of a baby independently.	Not available
Pronounce death	Pronounce that life has ceased based on a physical assessment of the patient.	428413005
Admit to and discharge from hospital	Admit and discharge patients to and from a hospital.	Not available
Certify death (i.e., complete death certificate)	Complete and sign medical certificate of death.	Not available
Conduct driver's medical examination	Conduct fitness to drive medical examination.	Not available
Complete federal disability forms	Complete federal disability forms such as certificate for disability tax credit.	Not available
Complete provincial/territorial medical forms	Complete provincial/territorial medical forms such as those for disability designation and/or support and use of assistive devices.	Not available
Sign disabled person placard forms	Sign the application for accessible parking placard/ permit.	Not available
Admit to long-term care facilities	Admit a patient to a long-term care facility.	Not available
Complete Form 1 for involuntary admission to hospital	Complete Form 1 for involuntary admission to a hospital.	Not available
Hold disease management clinics (foot care, diabetes)	Manage structured treatment plans that aim to help people better manage their chronic disease and to maintain and improve quality of life.	401173007

Note

The list of scopes may represent a subset of all activities that health professionals may perform in their respective practices.

Source

SNOMED CT Canadian Edition version 2022-03-31.

Appendix B: Text alternative for figures

Text alternative for figure

A health professional's scope of practice can be viewed in 2 parts: the outer limits of scope of practice and the actual scope of practice.

The outer limits of scope of practice include

- Legislation;
- Professional regulation; and
- Professional guidelines and standards.

The actual scope of practice includes

- Environment or setting;
- Individual nurse;
- Client, patient, community and population needs.

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