



## CNA Network Advisory Committee's Definition of Specialty Nursing Practice

Revised March 21, 2018

*Specialty nursing practice* is a branch of nursing that concentrates on a specific area of clinical nursing in which the focus of practice may be related to age (such as gerontology), an issue (such as infection prevention and control), a disease (such as cancer) or a practice setting (such as community health).

**Note:** Nurses working in specialty practice areas must continue to adhere to the overall licensure, education and practice requirements of their respective provincial or territorial registered nursing regulatory body.

The following criteria must be met to be defined as a specialty nursing practice area:

1. **HEALTH-CARE SYSTEM NEED & DEMAND** – There is a significant and evidence-based Canadian population need and demand for the specialty practice, requiring nurses with specific knowledge and skills.
2. **SPECIALIZED FUNCTION** – The specialization represents an identifiable field of nursing practice that requires specific additional knowledge, skills and judgment that is distinct from other clinical nurse practice areas.
3. **SPECIALTY ASSOCIATION** – The specialty practice is organized and represented by a national specialty association (who are members of CNA's network or eligible to become members).
4. **NATIONAL REPRESENTATION** – Nurses from four or more provinces or territories are members of the specialty association.
5. **STANDARDS OF PRACTICE** – Standards define the specialty nursing practice and aim to foster continuing competence in the specialty as a prerequisite for the delivery of safe, ethical care. The standards aim to inspire excellence in practice and commitment to the ongoing development of that specialty. The standards are reviewed at a minimum of every five years to reflect current practice and revised as needed.

6. **SPECIALTY CORE COMPETENCIES** – The specialty association has defined specialty nursing competencies, within a Canadian context, associated with the practice standards that are beyond the expectations of general nursing practice.
7. **CORE KNOWLEDGE** – The specialty has a well derived nursing knowledge base, specific to the practice of the specialty, beyond what is learned in general nursing education and training.
8. **EDUCATION** – Advanced knowledge and skills in the specialty nursing practice are gained through a Canadian-accredited educational program (where available). This program is based on specialty core competencies and knowledge and provides education beyond what is obtained through general nursing education. Likewise, specialized nurses in a practice area are expected to engage in specific continuous learning to maintain their specialty practice competence.<sup>1</sup>
9. **ADVANCEMENT OF THE NURSING SPECIALTY** – Specialty practice associations strive to advance nursing practice and promote nursing excellence through leadership, advocacy, research and knowledge translation in their respective field. There are formal mechanisms in place to support, review and disseminate research.
10. **CERTIFICATION** – A credential objectively and reliably affirms that a nurse has demonstrated the specialized skills, knowledge and ability to meet the designated Canadian standards and competencies of a given nursing specialty.

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<sup>1</sup> Please note: there is an important distinction between nurses working in specialty practice versus a clinical nurse specialist. A clinical nurse specialist is an advanced practice nurse, with a master's or doctoral degree in nursing and has expertise in a clinical specialty. Please see CNA's [Clinical Nurse Specialist position statement](#) for more details.