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Our practice support tools are developed using current reference material. The source of this material is available upon request.



## Overview

This tool is a resource for nurses in all practice settings to help them understand:

- How medical cannabis is prescribed
- How clients obtain medical cannabis
- Their accountabilities when caring for clients authorized to use medical cannabis
- Their accountabilities when using medical cannabis as part of a treatment plan.

## Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics

The [Standards of Practice for Registered Nurses](#), the [Canadian Nurses Association \(CNA\) Code of Ethics for Registered Nurses](#), the [Nurse Practitioner Standards of Practice](#), the [Standards of Practice for Licensed Practical Nurses in Canada](#), and the [Code of Ethics for Licensed Practical Nurses in Canada](#) are core regulatory documents that guide nursing practice. These statements are the minimum expectation for any [nurse](#) in any setting or role. They serve as a guide to the professional knowledge, skill and judgement needed to practice nursing safely.

The table below highlights the applicable [standards of practice](#) and code of ethics that apply to nurses caring for [clients](#) receiving [medical cannabis](#). As [authorized prescribers](#) of medical cannabis, nurse practitioners (NPs) are accountable to the standards of practice for registered nurses listed below as well as specific NP Standards.

	REGISTERED NURSES	LICENSED PRACTICAL NURSES
APPLICABLE STANDARD	Standard 2: Knowledge-based Practice	Standard 2: Evidence-informed Practice
WHAT IT SAYS	Each RN and NP has the required <a href="#">competencies</a> to practice safely and provide patient centered care; they apply evidenced informed rationale in decision making and integrate research findings into practice (2.1, 2.2).	Attain and maintain evidence-informed knowledge to support <a href="#">critical thinking</a> and professional judgement (2.1).  Integrate knowledge of trends and issues in healthcare and society into evidence-informed practice (2.2)
WHY IT IS RELEVANT	Each nurse is accountable to know the process by which clients are authorized to use medical cannabis, indications for use, routes of administration, adverse effects, dosing and contraindications. Nurses should be aware of any new literature and research relating to medical cannabis and advocate for appropriate policies (Standard 1.3 RNs & NPs).  All nurses should seek out emerging research findings to establish a base of evidence for practice related to medical cannabis. The RN (including the RN manager or educator) is accountable to integrate research into practice. RNs and LPNs are accountable to evolve their practice based on evidence.	

	REGISTERED NURSES	LICENSED PRACTICAL NURSES
APPLICABLE STANDARD & CODE OF ETHICS	<p>Standard 3: Client Relationships</p> <p>CNA Code of Ethics (2017) Part I. Nursing Values and Ethical Responsibilities C. Promoting and Respecting Informed Decision- Making F. Promoting Justice</p>	<p>Standard 3: Protection of the Public Through <a href="#">Self-Regulation</a></p> <p>Code of Ethics for LPNs in Canada Principle 1: Responsibility to the Public Principle 2: Responsibility to Clients</p>
WHAT IT SAYS	<p>Each RN and NP respects and promotes clients rights to informed decision making and <a href="#">informed consent</a>.</p> <p>RN's and NP's have a legal and ethical <a href="#">responsibility</a> to respect a client's informed choice which includes decisions related to <a href="#">health</a> and treatment (1C). Nurses refrain from judging, labelling, demeaning, stigmatizing and humiliating behaviors toward persons receiving care, other health-care professionals and each other (1F).</p>	<p>Lead and contribute to a practice <a href="#">culture</a> that promotes safe, inclusive, and ethical care (3.3).</p> <p>LPNs respect and support client choices (2.1.1). LPNs respect the rights of all individuals regardless of their diverse values, beliefs and cultures (1.4). LPNs provide care to each client recognizing their individuality and their right to choice (2.6).</p>
WHY IT IS RELEVANT	<p>The nurse's role is to ensure clients have the information they require to make informed decisions about their health. Nurses accomplish this by presenting information in an unbiased and factual manner, ensuring all questions are answered and referring client to other appropriate sources as necessary.</p>	

	REGISTERED NURSES	LICENSED PRACTICAL NURSES
APPLICABLE STANDARD & CODE OF ETHICS	<p>Standard 5: Individual Self- Regulation</p>	<p>Standard 1: Professional <a href="#">Accountability</a> and Responsibility</p> <p>Principle 2: Responsibility to Clients</p>
WHAT IT SAYS	<p>Each RN and NP practices in accordance with relevant acts and legislation and recognizes and addresses violations of practice, legal and ethical obligations by self or others.</p>	<p>LPNs practice within applicable legislation, regulations, by-laws, and employer policies (1.1).</p> <p>LPNs report to appropriate authorities and take other action(s) in a timely manner to ensure a client's safety and quality of care when unethical or incompetent care is suspected (2.5).</p>
WHY IT IS RELEVANT	<p>The nurse is obligated to report if they become aware a client has obtained medical cannabis using channels other than the legislation, a prescriber has not followed appropriate <a href="#">policy</a>, or any other unlawful activity. The duty to report may be a simple discussion with the client or prescriber to seek clarity or it could mean reporting the issues to the manager/employer or <a href="#">regulatory body</a>.</p>	

NURSE PRACTITIONERS	
APPLICABLE STANDARD	Standard 3: Assessment and Diagnosis
WHAT IT SAYS	Using a holistic <a href="#">client-centered</a> approach, nurse practitioners assess and diagnose clients, including those with acute and/or chronic health conditions and potential life-threatening/emergent situations. Assessment and diagnosis are guided by the best available evidence and the determinants of health.
WHY IT IS RELEVANT	Nurse practitioners complete a comprehensive client assessment prior to <a href="#">prescribing</a> medical cannabis, including all client health conditions when developing a diagnosis and considering prescribed medical cannabis as one of the available treatment options.
APPLICABLE STANDARD	Standard 4: Client Care Management
WHAT IT SAYS	Client care management is guided by the best available evidence and the determinants of health.
WHY IT IS RELEVANT	Before prescribing medical cannabis, nurse practitioners must ensure that they possess the knowledge, skill and ability to do so. They limit their prescribing of medical cannabis to clients with whom they have an established <a href="#">nurse-client relationship</a> . As authorized prescribers, nurse practitioners are accountable to base all client management decisions on client needs within the context of the client's diagnoses and existing treatments.

## Nurse Practitioners Accountabilities When Prescribing Medical Cannabis

Under the [Cannabis Regulations](#), NPs are defined as health care practitioners authorized to prescribe medical cannabis for clients requiring this controlled substance as part of their treatment plan. For NPs, the activity of providing a medical document to authorize medical cannabis is referred to as prescribing (New Classes of Practitioners Regulations - s.3(2)(a)).

NPs who [prescribe](#) medical cannabis are accountable to:

- Have the necessary [competence](#) to do so safely;
- Educate clients on the risks, side effects, safe transportation and storage of cannabis, as well as the importance of obtaining their cannabis from an authorized supplier;
- Follow employer policy related to educational requirements and prescribing of medical cannabis in their practice setting.
- Only provide medical documents for cannabis to clients under their direct care.

Cannabis is prescribed by completing a Health Canada Medical Document or similar form, which contains the client and health care practitioner information required for the client to obtain medical cannabis.

## How Do Clients Obtain Medical Cannabis in Nova Scotia?

Once prescribed under the Cannabis Regulations, clients can access medical cannabis by:

- Purchasing directly from a federally licensed seller;
- Registering with Health Canada to produce a limited amount of cannabis for their own medical purposes;
- Designating someone to produce it for them; or
- If clients are over the age of 19 they can purchase directly at the Nova Scotia Liquor Commission, including through their online sales platforms.

# Nurses Accountabilities When Caring for a Client Prescribed Medical Cannabis

## ADMINISTRATION OF MEDICAL CANNABIS

The Cannabis Regulations authorize all nurses, including those working in home care settings, to possess and directly administer medical cannabis to clients who have the authorization to use it. Employer policy should indicate practice settings where nurses are permitted to engage in activities relating to the administration of medical cannabis.

Nurses are accountable to have the necessary knowledge, skill and judgment (competence) to be able to administer medical cannabis safely. This includes but is not limited to:

- Ensuring a client-specific order authorizing the nurse to administer
- Ensuring the medical cannabis is appropriately labeled
- Competently administering or assisting with the administration of the medical cannabis
- Evaluating the effectiveness of the medical cannabis
- Identifying and managing adverse reactions
- Accurately documenting outcomes
- Supporting clients to manage their own health
- Storing, transporting and disposing of medical cannabis properly
- Educating clients on how to safely store as appropriate (example homecare or self-administration)

## ADMINISTRATION OF MEDICAL CANNABIS PRODUCED BY THE CLIENT OR DESIGNATE

The nurse may be asked to administer or assist with the administration of cannabis produced by the client or a designate. They must consider the risks to the client associated with the administration of any client supplied medication, including medical cannabis. Reasonable steps should be taken by the nurse to ensure the integrity and safety of these types of medications. Employer policies relating to the administration or assistance with the administration of medical cannabis, which is produced by the client or designate, should guide the nurse in their practice. If no employer policy exists, nurses should advocate for and collaborate in its development.

## SELF-ADMINISTRATION OF MEDICAL CANNABIS

When a client wishes to self-administer medical cannabis, the nurse must assess the client's [capacity](#) (e.g., judgment, memory, understanding, and functional ability) and collaborate with the client and family, if appropriate, to establish and document a plan for self-administration. This plan should include but is not limited to:

- dose, frequency and route
- expected outcomes
- potential adverse effects
- assessing the expected and unexpected effects of the medical cannabis

Clients should be assessed regularly for their capacity to self-administer medical cannabis and their other medications. As with all assessments, these must be documented appropriately according to employer policy. If the client cannot participate in the administration, the responsibility may be assumed by a family member. A nurse may be required to assist the family member. For example, the nurse may prepare the medical cannabis and pass it to the family member for administration.

Nurses should be familiar with employer policies related to self-administration of any medication, including medical cannabis.

For further information related to medication administration see:

- [Medication Guidelines for Nurses](#)

# Nurses Accountabilities if Using Medical Cannabis as Part of Their Own Treatment Plan

Fitness to practice means the nurse has the necessary physical, mental, and emotional health to provide care that meets the Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics.

Nurses are accountable to meet their standards of practice, regardless of their medical condition and treatment plan. Every nurse is accountable to assess their [fitness to practice](#). If the nurse decides that the use of the medical cannabis is preventing them from making appropriate care decisions or meeting their standards of practice, the nurse should refrain from practice and discuss the situation with their immediate manager and/or their occupational health nurse.

Nurses who assess their fitness to practice and decide this is not impacted by their use of medical cannabis may be able to continue to work while being treated with medical cannabis. Medical cannabis is no different than another prescribed medication, for example an opioid for chronic pain, which could impact their ability to provide safe, [competent](#), [compassionate](#) and ethical [nursing care](#) while meeting their standards of practice.

Nurses should discuss their fitness to practice with the health care provider who authorized the use of the medical cannabis to ensure there is a safe plan for working while being treated with medical cannabis.

There may be circumstances when the nurse is not able to self-assess and may require an assessment by others who can determine if the nurse is able to provide safe, compassionate, competent and ethical care. Resources which may be useful in a situation like this may include:

- Primary care provider
- Employee assistance program
- NSCN Practice Consultants
- Employer policy

## Incapacity

If a nurse suspects a [colleague](#) is impaired, they are obligated to address this situation according to the standards of practice. In order for nurses to respond appropriately when they suspect impairment in a co-worker, they need to be able to recognize possible signs and symptoms.

If a nurse suspects a colleague is impaired, ensuring client safety is the first priority. Supervisor/manager should be notified right away and all actions documented. The nurse, supervisor, or manager may be required to remove the nurse from the practice environment and client care based on their assessment. Remember, the ultimate responsibility is to ensure the safety of the clients.

For more information on [incapacity](#) and/or [problematic substance use](#) see the following resources:

- [Fitness to Practice and Incapacity Guidelines](#)

## Key Points

- The Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics describe the accountabilities of nurses as it related to medical cannabis.
- Health Canada requirements must be met in order to prescribe medical cannabis.
- NPs in Nova Scotia are authorized to prescribe medical cannabis as long as they have the necessary knowledge, skills, and judgement (competencies) to do so.
- Nurses providing care to clients using medical cannabis must have knowledge of the treatment, respect client [diversity](#) and their right to informed decision-making, and ensure there is appropriate employer policy to support practice.
- Nurses' prescribed medical cannabis as a part of their treatment plan must maintain their standards of practice and self-assess their fitness to practice.

## Suggested Reading

- [Medication Guidelines for Nurses](#)
- [Fitness to Practice and Incapacity Guidelines](#)

For further information on anything contained within this resource, please contact a NSCN Practice Consultant at [practice@nscn.ca](mailto:practice@nscn.ca).