

*The Nova Scotia College of Nursing (NSCN) is the regulatory body for licensed practical nurses (LPNs), registered nurses (RNs), registered psychiatric nurses (RPNs) and nurse practitioners (NPs) in Nova Scotia. Our mandate is to protect the public by promoting the provision of safe, competent, ethical and compassionate nursing services by our registrants. The term nurse in this document refers to LPNs, RNs, RPNs and NPs unless otherwise stated.*

Contents

Terms..... 2

Nurses have an accountability to respect a client’s individual culture and consider how their culture may impact their health and the effective delivery of nursing services. .... 2

Nurses are responsible for maintaining and continually enhancing their cultural humility. .... 3

Nurses should collaborate with government, organizations, employers, union and other stakeholders to develop and maintain a culturally safe care environment. .... 3

NSCN believes cultural safety is not achieved until the client says it is. .... 3

Nurses play a vital role in ensuring clients receive culturally competent care. .... 4

Key Points ..... 4


Suggested Readings..... 4

Revised September 2025, March 2022, first published as Promoting Culturally Competent Care Position Statement, 2016

Copyright © Nova Scotia College of Nursing, Bedford Nova Scotia. Commercial or for-profit redistribution of this document in part or in whole is prohibited except with the written consent of NSCN. This document may be reproduced in part or in whole for personal or educational use without permission, provided that:

- Due diligence is exercised in ensuring the accuracy of the materials reproduced;
- NSCN is identified as the source; and
- The reproduction is not represented as an official version of the materials reproduced, nor as having been made in affiliation with, or with the endorsement of, NSCN

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



This tool examines the NSCN viewpoint on the role of the nurse in relation to cultural humility leading to a culturally safe nursing environment. This tool is intended to increase nurses' understanding of their accountabilities in cultural safety and humility related to:

- Client's individual culture
- Maintaining and enhancing cultural humility
- Collaboration with stakeholders to develop a culturally safe environment
- Providing culturally safe and competent care

Like all regulatory tools, use this document in conjunction with employer policy, applicable legislation and the standards of practice, and code of ethics for nurses.

## Terms

**Cultural humility** - [Cultural humility](#) is a lifelong process of self-reflection to understand personal and systemic biases and to develop and maintain respectful processes and relationships based on mutual trust. Cultural humility involves humbly acknowledging oneself as a learner when it comes to understanding another's experience. (First Nations Health Authority, 2018)

**Cultural safety** - [Cultural safety](#) is an outcome based on respectful engagement that recognizes and strives to address power imbalances inherent in the health care system. It results in an environment free of racism and discrimination, where people feel safe when receiving health care. (First Nations Health Authority, 2018)

Nurses are required to adhere to the expectations defined in their respective [Standards of Practice](#) and [Code of Ethics](#). Cultural competence and inclusive practice are integral to the professional expectations of nurses, regardless of their practice setting. Nurses must recognize that cultural differences exist while respecting diversity and promoting cultural competence that allows the creation of a safe space for clients and colleagues. All nurses are responsible for maintaining and continually enhancing their knowledge and competence in cultural care.

**Nurses have an accountability to respect a client's individual culture and consider how their culture may impact their health and the effective delivery of nursing services.**

[Culture](#) is defined as shared patterns of learned behaviours and values that are integrated within a group over time and that distinguish that group from others. Culture includes; customs, habits, traditions, ethnicity, language, religion and spiritual beliefs, health and illness beliefs, gender, social-economic class, age, [sexual orientation](#), geographic origin, education, music, clothing, interaction/ communication patterns and life experiences.

Nurses provide care to clients recognizing their individuality and their right to choice, this includes health care decision-making, treatment and care that takes into account the clients values, customs and spiritual beliefs, as well as their social and economic circumstances without judgement or bias.

Nurses provide care to a wide range of clients and do not discriminate based on a person's race, ethnicity, culture, political and spiritual beliefs, social or marital status, gender, gender identity, gender expression, sexual orientation, age, health status, place of origin, lifestyle, mental or physical ability, socio-economic status, or any other attribute. Nurses respect the special history and interests of Indigenous Peoples as articulated in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's (TRC) *Calls to Action* (2012).

Nurses standards of practice provide guidance as they practice in a culturally competent manner which is defined as a set of congruent behaviors, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system, agency, or among professionals and enables that system, agency, or those professionals to work effectively in cross-cultural situations. This extends to nurses' practice by respecting diversity and promoting cultural competence and a culturally safe environment for clients and members of the health care team.

## Nurses are responsible for maintaining and continually enhancing their cultural humility.

The emphasis on cultural humility is attentive listening and openness to other cultures while simultaneously being aware of one's own thoughts and feelings. It is an active engagement and lifelong process with clients, colleagues and with oneself. Additionally, nurses must be aware of and sensitive to historical realities, such as violence and oppression against certain groups of people. It is seeking to understand how Nova Scotia's colonial history, systemic racism and inequities have impacted clients' health outcomes, including inequities in social determinants of health.

Practicing cultural humility will help nurses to recognize potential differences in the meaning of health and wellness among their clients, and to begin to understand the many challenges clients face in accessing quality care.

Nurses should engage in self-reflection to interact from a place of cultural humility and create culturally safe environments where clients perceive respect for their unique health care practices, preferences and decisions.

## Nurses should collaborate with government, organizations, employers, union and other stakeholders to develop and maintain a culturally safe care environment.

A culturally safe environment is safe physically, spiritually, socially and emotionally for people, where there is no assault, challenge or denial of their identity of who they are and what they need. It is about shared respect, shared meaning, shared knowledge and experience, learning together with dignity and truly listening.

Cultural safety means health care professionals adopt a humble, self-reflective practice that positions them as respectful and curious partners when providing care, rather than as a figure of higher knowledge and authority. (First Nations Health Authority, 2018)

Culturally safe environments are developed and maintained when individual nurses and organizations as a whole engage in cultural humility. Nurses should seek out the opportunity to participate in the development of supports, programs, policies and processes that assist in the creation of a culturally safe environment.

## NSCN believes cultural safety is not achieved until the client says it is.

Cultural safety is an outcome based on respectful engagement that recognizes and strives to address power imbalances inherent in the health care system. It results in an environment free of racism and discrimination, where people feel safe when receiving health care. (First Nations Health Authority 2018) Cultural safety extends beyond cultural awareness, cultural sensitivity and cultural competence.

Cultural safety is not achieved until the client says it is and it is the client who determines if the care is culturally appropriate or not. Cultural safety is not the endpoint of a destination, rather it may be an ever-changing goal for individual clients that is based on their current context and past experiences. Through the development of the care plan together with the client at the center nurses assess and continuously evaluate if the client is expressing feelings of cultural safety. If the client does not express feelings that they are in a culturally safe environment, the nurse should:

- Seek knowledge about the client's past experiences, culture, values, and beliefs;
- Self-reflect on their own past experiences, culture and values;
- Work with the client and organizational leaders to ensure this goal is met.

Nurses should practice in a way that is respectful, curious and open to learning about clients' past experiences, culture, values and beliefs.

## Nurses play a vital role in ensuring clients receive culturally competent care.

Cultural competence and safety are based on understanding power differentials inherent in health care delivery. At the core of nursing is the therapeutic nurse-client relationship. The therapeutic nurse-client relationship is developed based on trust, respect, recognizing inherent power differentials and protecting the client's dignity, autonomy and privacy irrespective of the context or duration of the relationship.

Nurses are required to ensure they have the competence through self-assessment and reflection. Recognizing knowledge gaps and working to fill in those voids can be undertaken by the nurse on their own or with the help of their employer, mentors or those with the applicable knowledge and expertise. Nurses must self-reflect on their personal and professional experience and education to provide client-centered culturally competent care.

### Key Points

- Nurses have an accountability to respect client's individual culture and consider how their culture may impact their health and the effective delivery of nursing service.
- Nurses are responsible for maintaining and continually enhancing their cultural humility.
- Nurses should collaborate with government, organizations, employers, union and other stakeholders to develop and maintain a culturally safe care environment.
- Cultural safety is not achieved until the client says it is.
- Nurses play a vital role in ensuring clients receive culturally competent care.

### Suggested Readings

- [Nursing Care Plan Guidelines for Nurses](#)
- [Professional Boundaries and the Nurse-Client Relationship](#)