

The Nova Scotia College of Nursing (NSCN) is the regulatory body for licensed practical nurses (LPNs), registered nurses (RNs) 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 and NPs unless otherwise stated.

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



Position Statement

This tool examines Nova Scotia College of Nursing's (NSCN) position on the role of the [nurse](#) when:

1. Providing nursing services in more than one nursing designation at the same time (e.g. both a licensed practical nurse [LPN] and registered nurse [RN]), or
2. Working as a licensed nurse (e.g., LPN or RN) and an [unregulated health worker](#) (e.g. CCA) at the same time.

This tool is intended to provide nurses with information that will assist in their decision to hold dual licensure.

Please note: nurses cannot be employed and hold a position in a nursing designation for which they do not hold registration and licensure, for example, an RN cannot be employed and hold a position as an LPN unless they also hold registration and licensure as an LPN.

As self-regulating professionals, nurses are responsible and [accountable](#) for their own practice and actions at all times. However, their accountabilities can become blurred when they provide nursing services concurrently as more than one regulated or unregulated health professional. For example, providing nursing services as both an LPN and an RN or as a nurse and a CCA.

Although dual licensure is permitted under the Nursing Act, NSCN does not recommend that nurses practise concurrently as LPNs and RNs or as a nurse and CCA. NSCN's position is that nurses choosing to provide nursing services while holding dual licensure can result in role confusion, give rise to potential liability concerns for nurses and their employers, and could impact the quality of care provided to [clients](#) and their families.

Risks for Nurses Holding Dual Licensure

There are several risks that could impact the quality of care provided to clients when nurses hold dual licensure or work as a nurse and unregulated health worker:

1. **Role Confusion:** both for clients and the interdisciplinary team. For example, a nurse is working as an RN on one shift creates an initial [plan of care](#) for a new client admitted to their unit. On the following day, while working as an LPN, colleagues might expect the nurse to do the same thing for a new client admitted to the unit.
2. **Scope of Practice:** Nurses may find it difficult to provide nursing services within the applicable scope of practice when they change their nursing designations from one day to another or within one shift. For example, a nurse working as an RN in an emergency department for one shift, who then extends their shift by four hours to work as an LPN, may forget that, as an LPN, they cannot independently assume accountability for a trauma client with complex care needs. Similarly, other team members may be unclear about whether the nurses is an LPN or RN on the shift and, therefore, uncertain about the nurse's accountabilities and responsibilities.
3. **Accountability:** In emergency situations, nurses working as an LPN who also holding an RN licence may be expected to practice to the RN level of accountability and scope of practice in certain circumstances. For example, when a nurse with dual licensure is working as an LPN and caring for a client whose condition deteriorates unexpectedly, they may be required to provide nursing services at their highest level of accountability and scope of practice until they are able to collaborate with an RN or other appropriate team member.

If a complaint or lawsuit is filed against a nurse who holds dual licensure, when their conduct is reviewed, it will be compared against their highest level of accountability and education, regardless of the role they were working in at the time the nursing care was provided.

Currency of Practice

Each nursing designation (LPN and RN) has their own unique professional scope of practice. Hours accumulated while working within the scope of practice of one nursing category may not be used to satisfy the minimum practice hour requirement for another category of nurse. For example, hours worked as an LPN cannot be included in the currency of practice hour requirement for RN licensure.

Scope of Practice & Scope of Employment Considerations

Nurses choosing to hold dual licensure, as well as their employers, must be aware of and understand the distinct scope of practice associated with each of their nursing licences. Nurses holding dual licensure must also balance their job responsibilities (i.e., scope of employment) with their individual knowledge, skills and judgment (competencies) in order to provide safe, ethical, compassionate, and competent care.

Recommendations

- NSCN recommends that nurses holding dual licensure choose one licence and voluntarily rescind/relinquish the other licence to the relevant [regulatory body](#).
- NSCN also advises nurses who choose to maintain dual licensure against using both designations on a unit (care area). For example, they should not practice as both an LPN and RN during any one employment shift.
- In the event that a nurse choosing to hold dual licensure decides to practise concurrently as both designations on one unit or during one shift, they are advised to inform their clients and the interdisciplinary team which designation they are practising with. The same would apply to those employed by external or contract agencies.
- NSCN recommends employers optimize the scope of practice of nurses by employing them in nursing positions that match their highest level of accountability.
- NSCN also recommends that employers not permit nurses holding dual licensure to practise concurrently on the same unit or same shift.

Suggested Reading

- [Nursing Scope of Practice Guideline for Nurses](#)
- [Standards of Practice](#)
- [Protected Titles and Designations Position Statement](#)

For further information on anything contained within this position statement, please contact an NSCN Practice Consultant at practice@nscn.ca.