

# Program Approval

## Nursing Education Program Approval Policy

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*Nursing Education Program Approval Policy*

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## 1. Preface

The College of Nurses of Ontario (CNO) reviews entry-level nursing education programs under the authority of the *Nursing Act, 1991*, which states applicants must “*successfully complete a program that was specifically designed to educate and train persons to be practising” nurses and that the “program was approved by Council, or a body approved by Council, for that purpose*” [Subsections 2(1)1i, 3(1)1i, and 4(1)2i of Ontario Regulation 275/94 under the *Nursing Act, 1991*].

The regulation supports CNO’s public protection mandate to ensure that individuals who enter the nursing profession have the knowledge, skills and judgment to practice safely, ethically and competently.

Entry-level nursing programs<sup>1</sup> in Ontario must receive program approval from CNO for graduates to be eligible to proceed with registration. While CNO is responsible for assessing programs against standard criteria, Council has the final authority to grant a program’s approval status.

This document provides a high-level overview of Program Approval and the tasks within the overall process.

## 2. Program approval requirement

- 2.1 Each nursing education program that leads to entry-to-practice is subject to review and approval by CNO Council.
- 2.2 Approval is granted to the school conferring the degree, diploma or certificate for the program.

## 3. Program approval framework

- 3.1 All classes and categories of entry-level nursing education programs are evaluated based on the program approval framework and standards approved by Council in December 2014.<sup>2</sup>
- 3.2 Nursing education programs are reviewed and evaluated against the following standards:
  - a) Structure: The program’s strategy, policies, procedures and resources support the student’s preparation to meet nursing competencies expected for the category and/or class of registration

b) Curriculum: The program’s curriculum prepares students to meet nursing competencies expected for the category and/or class of registration

c) Outcomes: The program consistently demonstrates outcomes of preparing graduates to meet nursing competencies expected for the category and/or class of registration.

### 3.3 Five principles guide the program approval process:

- a) Regulatory-focused: The program approval standards and process are centred on CNO’s public-protection mandate
- b) Transparent: The program approval standards, policies and decisions are available to schools, the public and other stakeholders
- c) Evidence-informed: The program approval framework and process is based on evidence and best-practice
- d) Objective: The evaluation and decision-making is based on standardized criteria
- e) Sustainable: The program approval process can be maintained by all stakeholders.

### 3.4 The processes for program evaluation include:

- a) a comprehensive review of all three standards every seven years (pending the results of the annual review)
- b) an annual monitoring review of the outcome indicators.

Council is accountable for approving new and established entry-level nursing education programs, based on the framework and standards.

## 4. Program Approval Committee

- 4.1 The Program Approval Committee (Committee) is responsible for evaluating program review results and making approval recommendations to Council. The Committee also makes decisions guiding program approval operations.

<sup>1</sup> See Glossary of Terms, Appendix B

<sup>2</sup> See Appendix A

- 4.2 The Committee comprises CNO's Education Program Consultants, the Manager Education Program, and the Director, Practice Quality, and is supported by the Team Lead and Program Approval Administrator.
- 4.3 The Committee is accountable to the Chief Quality Officer.

## 5. Approval status and criteria

For each program, one of the following four approval statuses is determined with a written rationale and summary of the program's approval scores:

- i. Preliminary approval status is given to a new program meeting the criteria for such approval<sup>3</sup>. For full approval, programs receiving preliminary approval must undergo a comprehensive review in the academic year following the first class of graduates. Graduates from programs with this status are considered graduates of an approved nursing program and are eligible for registration in Ontario.
- ii. Approved status is granted when the program meets the cut score of 75% and the mandatory indicators for program approval. Graduates from a program with this status are considered graduates of an approved nursing program and are eligible for registration in Ontario
- iii. Approved with conditions status is granted when the program does not meet the cut score of 75% OR does not meet the mandatory indicators. Graduates from a program with this status are considered graduates of an approved nursing program and are eligible for registration in Ontario
- iv. Not approved means the program fails to meet the cut score of 75% OR does not meet the mandatory indicators over a consecutive number of years<sup>4</sup> and does not demonstrate improvement in meeting the requirements. Graduates from a program with this status are not eligible for registration in Ontario.

## 6. Approval process and notifications

- 6.1 New programs
  - a) New entry-level nursing programs are to receive preliminary approval before admitting students. For the program to

receive approval recognition, the school must provide CNO a written notification of its intent to offer a new program at least one year prior to the commencement date.

- b) The program approval review will minimally include a review of the new program's curriculum.
- 6.2 Established programs
  - a) CNO provides the school written notification one year in advance of their comprehensive review deadline.
  - b) Established programs undergo a review of their outcome indicators annually.
- 6.3 Changes to programs
  - a) The school is responsible for notifying CNO in writing of any proposed substantive changes to the program or the program's curriculum.
  - b) It is the Committee's responsibility to determine if the changes are substantive, whether a program approval review is required and the scope of the review. The Committee may consult with representatives from the program or request additional information to assist in its determination.
  - c) Substantive changes may include but are not limited to:
    - Significant changes to the delivery method of the program
    - Significant changes made to the curriculum including how the curriculum addresses the competencies
    - Changes to the admission requirements or exemption criteria for students entering the entry-level program
    - Changes to the delivery site of the program such as offering a program at a new site
    - New or changes to collaborative partners or other organizational governance changes that impact the delivery of the program

<sup>3</sup> See section 6.1 for additional information on the criteria.

<sup>4</sup> See section 8 for additional information on the terms.

- Significant changes in policies or procedures related to any of the program approval indicators.

#### 6.4 Discontinued programs

The school shall provide written notification to CNO regarding the discontinuation of any approved programs or sites and the expected date of discontinuation.

### 7. Frequency of reviews

- 7.1 Every established recognized nursing education program shall complete a comprehensive review at least once every seven years, unless otherwise directed by Council and subject to the outcomes of the annual monitoring review.
- 7.2 Programs not scheduled to complete a comprehensive review are required to participate in an annual monitoring review.
- 7.3 Program approval status is determined annually based on the results of the comprehensive review or the annual review as applicable.

### 8. Approval terms and conditions

- 8.1 Programs that receive conditional approval status are required to develop an action plan to address the gaps based on the recommendations and schedule provided by CNO.
  - a) Programs receiving conditional approval as a result of not meeting mandatory indicators, have one year to implement their action plan and to meet those indicators. If after one year, the mandatory indicators are not met, CNO meets with program representatives and the Ministry of Colleges and Universities (MCU) to discuss next steps, including suspension of enrolments and transfers. The program then has one additional year to meet the mandatory requirements, after which if still not met, the program status becomes not approved.
  - b) Programs receiving conditional approval for not meeting the cut-score, but have met all mandatory indicators, have up to three years to implement their action plan and meet the requirements. If after three years, the programs do not demonstrate improvement and do not meet the cut-score, CNO meets with program representatives and MCU to discuss next

steps, including suspension of enrolments and transfers. The program has one additional year to meet the cut score, after which if still not met, the status becomes not approved.

- 8.2 Any recommendation by Committee to suspend enrolments and transfers, or to grant a not approved status, places the recognition status of the program in jeopardy and is discussed with Council for decision before any actions are taken on the Council's behalf. Fairness to students enrolled in the program, in terms of any possible action's impacting their ability to complete the program and become eligible for registration, is considered. Council recommends the length of warning to allow time for enrolled students to complete their program that is recognized by CNO.
- 8.3 In the event a program score drops below the program approval cut-score as a result of the annual monitoring process, the program receives a conditional approval subject to the conditions described in section 8.1.
- 8.4 Program approval status is based on performance and scores calculated at the program level per section 4.1. However, CNO reserves the right to require an action plan from a program should the performance of a site not meet the cut-score based on annual monitoring of outcome indicators over an extended period of time, or on the CNO's assessment of other risk or public safety concerns.

### 9. Communication of decisions

- 9.1 It is the responsibility of the CNO Education Program to communicate program approval results and decisions to schools. Schools receive a written report of their program results and their scorecard.
- 9.2 CNO advises the school to post their program approval results on their website. In cases where a conditional approval is given, CNO advises the school to communicate information to its current and prospective students about their approval status including the terms and conditions on their website.
- 9.3 All program approval decisions are made public by CNO and are posted to the CNO website within two business days of Council decisions.

- 9.4 In advance of Council meetings, the MCU is notified of any recommendations for programs to receive a conditional approval status or not approved status.

## 10. Confidentiality

- 10.1 All information, documents and correspondence about program reviews are kept confidential and not disclosed to persons outside CNO other than official representatives of the education program or agents conducting the program approval assessment on behalf of CNO. Only a list of the recognized programs and corresponding approval status is made public by CNO.
- 10.2 A list of the recognized programs and corresponding approval status is made public by CNO. All other details of the review and decision remain confidential, subject to the obligations of CNO under the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act*.

## 11. Conflict of interest

- 11.1 The Committee Chair examines any perceived potential or actual conflict of interest before initiating each program review and assigns program review accordingly.
- 11.2 Representatives of programs being reviewed have the opportunity to bring to the attention of the Committee, before deliberations begin, any perceived conflicts of interests of committee members or assessors to be involved in the program review.

## 12. Costs

- 12.1 Schools are charged the direct costs of completing the approval process for their programs.
- 12.2 Costs for program approval are determined by CNO.

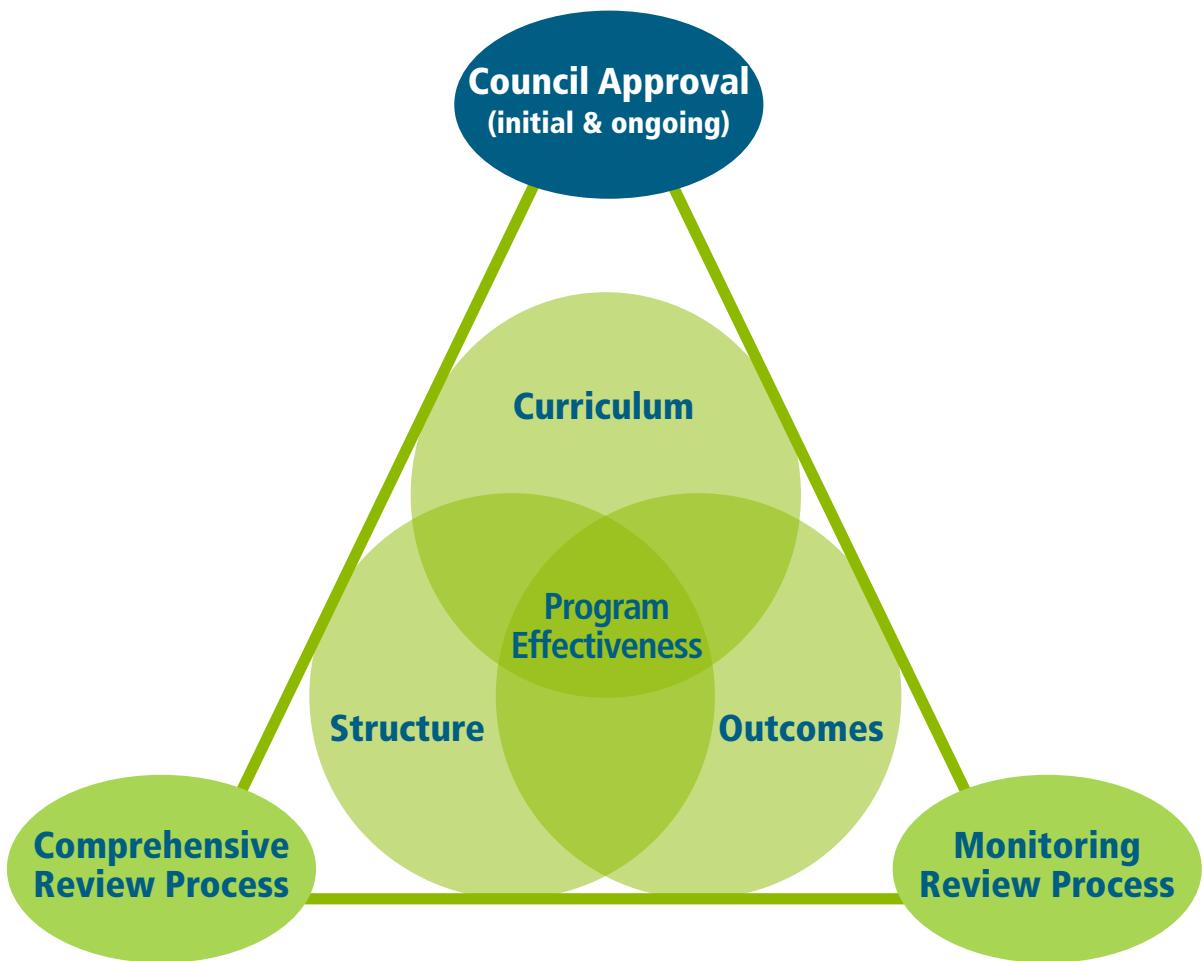
## 13. Administration of the review process

The administration of the program approval process and the assessment of the programs are conducted by CNO staff.

## 14. School requests for review of approval results

- 14.1 Throughout the program approval process, the school is provided opportunities to clarify information and documentation they submit for program approval, or to clarify information documented in their program approval report.
- 14.2 If the school is not satisfied with the information in the program approval report, or their approval status recommendation, an authorized representative from the school may request a meeting with the Manager of Education Programs. CNO may ask the Chief Quality Officer to attend any such meeting to assist resolution. In the event a resolution is not reached, the Chief Quality Officer makes a resolution recommendation.
- 14.3 All information regarding the dispute, including the resolution recommendation, is provided to Council for their deliberation and decision.

## Appendix A: Program Approval Framework



## **Appendix B: Glossary**

**Annual monitoring review:** One component of the program approval framework used to approve entry-level nursing education programs. A subset of the program approval indicators (the outcome indicators) are examined yearly for each program and the program's approval score is calculated. Programs are approved annually based on the annual monitoring review results or the comprehensive review as required.

**Approval:** This term designates an education program has met the prescribed standards set out in the College of Nurses of Ontario's (CNO) program approval process. Program approval is a mandatory process based on the entry-to-practice competencies for a class or category of a nurse (RN, PN, or NP).

**Collaborative program:** A baccalaureate nursing education program offered in partnership between a College and a University. The students may take all or part of their nursing curriculum at the College or the University. The program degree is granted by the University.

**Consortium:** For the purposes of program approval, a consortium refers to the Primary Health Care Nurse Practitioner (PHC NP) Program established by the Council of Ontario University Programs in Nursing (COUPN) in 1995. Nine Ontario universities offer the program through this consortium: Lakehead, York, McMaster, Ottawa, Laurentian, Western, Windsor, Queens and Ryerson.

**Comprehensive review:** One component of the program approval framework used to approve entry-level nursing education programs. For the comprehensive review, all program approval indicators are reviewed every seven years, unless annual review results are unsatisfactory, and the program's approval score is calculated.

**Curriculum:** The planned process for achieving a nursing education program's intended outcomes. For purposes of program approval, nursing curricula includes theoretical foundations, learning activities to foster theory application by students and evaluation of student learning.

**Curriculum mapping:** A process for collecting and documenting curriculum related information against specific criteria or standards. This process ensures an alignment between the standards of nursing practice, entry-to-practice competencies

and the educational content being taught. It also identifies and addresses academic gaps, redundancies and misalignments between courses and entry-to-practice competencies.

**Direct-Entry Full Program (DEF):** An educational program with established admission criteria granting direct entry to graduates from an Ontario Secondary School, or to mature students. Students adhere to a structured curriculum designed to support them in meeting the educational requirements for CNO's entry-to-practice competencies for either the RPN or RN General Class category. The curriculum is set by the educational provider. The duration of study is typically two years for the Practical Nursing program and four years for a baccalaureate degree. Upon completion of the program, the successful student is granted either a Colleges of Applied Arts and Technology diploma or a Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree (BScN).

**Entry-level nursing program (program):** Nursing education programs that prepare individuals entering the nursing profession with the competencies expected upon initial registration with the CNO.

**Established program:** A nursing education program that has graduated students and has received an approved or conditional approval status from CNO.

**Entry-to-practice competencies:** The entry-to-practice competencies outline the proficiencies required for entry-level (newly registered) nurses to provide safe, competent, compassionate and ethical nursing care in a variety of practice settings, upon initial and ongoing registration with CNO. The competencies also serve as a guide for curriculum development for schools, and for public and employer awareness of practice expectations for entry-level nurses. Each class and category of nursing has its own entry-to-practice competencies supported by CNO's practice documents.

**Indicator:** For the purposes of program approval, an indicator is an objective measure used to assess whether an entry-level nursing education program has achieved the program approval standards. An indicator is specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and time-limited.

**Mandatory indicator:** An indicator that must be fully met to receive an approved status.

**New program:** An entry-level nursing education plan intended for admitting students and requiring preliminary approval status from CNO prior to enrolling students.

**Pre-Health Education Entry Specified Program (PHEES):** An educational program with admission criteria for graduates from a health-related discipline (for example, RPN, RN, IEN). Students adhere to a structured program designed to support them meeting the educational requirements that satisfy CNO's entry-to-practice competencies for a specified nursing class or category (for example, RPN, RN or NP Specialty). The duration of study for the PHEES depends on the type of program. Upon program completion, the successful student is granted one of the following: a practical nursing diploma (PN), a nursing baccalaureate degree (BScN/BN) or a nurse practitioner Master's in Nursing (NP).

**Preliminary approval status:** The standing given to a new program that meets preset criteria but requires a comprehensive review in the academic year following the first class of graduates before receiving full approval. Graduate(s) from programs with preliminary approval are considered graduates of an approved nursing program and are eligible for registration in Ontario.

**Program:** A set of courses constituting the entire entry-level nursing education process at a college or university.

**Program approval status:** Refers to the four approval categories conferred by Council to an entry-level nursing education program. The categories are based on the program's results and score following their program approval review. The four categories are preliminary approval, approved, approved with conditions and not approved.

**Regulated Health Professions Act, 1991 (RHPA):** A legislative document outlining the scope of practice and controlled acts for each regulated health profession.

**Safety:** The reduction and mitigation of unsafe acts within the health care system. This refers to staff, student and client safety. Staff or student safety includes, but is not limited to, prevention of musculoskeletal injury, prevention and management of aggressive behaviour and infection control. Client safety is the state of continuously working toward the avoidance, management and treatment of unsafe acts. Client, staff or student safety can only occur

within a supportive and non-blaming environment that looks at systems issues rather than blames individuals. The health and well-being of all clients, staff and student is a priority in a culture of safety environment.

**School:** A college or university that educates nurses (RN, PN or NP) in Ontario. For the purposes of CNO's program approval process, approval of an entry-level nursing education program will be conferred at the school or degree-granting institution level.

**Second-Level Entry Compressed Program (SLEC):** An educational program with established admission criteria granting second-level entry to individuals who satisfy pre-determined university prerequisites. Students adhere to a structured but condensed program designed to support them in meeting the educational requirements that satisfy CNO's ETP competencies for the RN General Class category. The curriculum is set by the educational provider. The duration of study is shorter compared with the typical two years for DEF. Upon completion of the SLEC, the successful student is granted a Bachelor of Science in Nursing degree (BScN).

**Site:** The physical location where the entry-level nursing education program is delivered.

**Standard:** There are three program approval standards based on a logic model: structure, curriculum and outcomes. The standards are the bases for measuring and approving the performance of an entry-level nursing education program.



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