

Effective June 30, 2026, the Nova Scotia Nursing and Midwifery Regulator (NSNMR) was formed as a multi-profession regulator, replacing the former Nova Scotia College of Nursing (NSCN) and the Midwifery Regulatory Council of Nova Scotia (MRCNS). NSNMR will regulate licensed practical nurses (LPNs), registered nurses (RNs), registered psychiatric nurses (RPNs), nurse practitioners (NPs) and registered midwives (RMs) on behalf of the public.

While this document contains current information about this topic, some content references NSCN and previous legislation before June 30, 2026. We appreciate your patience as we continue updating our documents to align with our new name and legislation.



REGISTERED PSYCHIATRIC NURSES STANDARDS OF PRACTICE

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.

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



Psychiatric Nursing

Registered Psychiatric Nurses (RPNs) are autonomous professionals. They work collaboratively with [clients](#) and other health care team members to plan, implement and evaluate mental, psychosocial and physical health care and provide client-centered services to individuals, families, groups and communities. RPNs focus on mental and developmental health, mental illness, and addictions, and take a holistic approach to care that integrates physical, [biopsychosocial](#) and spiritual models of care. Psychiatric nursing is committed to the prevention of illness and to the promotion and maintenance of optimal health, rehabilitation and recovery.

RPNs work within the domains of direct practice, education, administration and research. The core of psychiatric nursing practice is therapeutic communication and the [therapeutic relationship](#). Emotion, behaviour and cognition are a major focus of RPN practice. Many psychotherapeutic interventions are performed through the psychiatric nurse's interaction with the client (Austin & Boyd, 2019).

The Registered Psychiatric Nurses Standards of Practice

The *Registered Psychiatric Nurses Standards of Practice* sets out the minimum acceptable level of performance required of a Registered Psychiatric Nurse. These standards articulate the legal and professional obligations of all RPNs. They apply to all practice settings, domains and roles, regardless of an individual RPN's educational preparation or professional experience. It is the professional responsibility of each Registered Psychiatric Nurse to know, understand and adhere to these standards.

indicators illustrate how to meet each standard. These indicators are representative but not comprehensive. In actual practice, specific indicators may vary according to the situation and context of the psychiatric nurses' role. It is the professional responsibility of the Registered Psychiatric Nurse to articulate how they meet each standard.

Standard 1: Therapeutic Relationships

The Registered Psychiatric Nurse establishes collaborative professional, interpersonal, and [therapeutic relationships](#) with [clients](#).

A Registered Psychiatric Nurse:

- 1.1 Continually applies the [therapeutic use of self](#) within professional practice.
- 1.2 Recognizes and addresses power imbalances in therapeutic relationships.
- 1.3 Ensures client needs remain the focus of the therapeutic relationship.
- 1.4 Does not exploit the vulnerability of persons encountered through their practice.
- 1.5 Uses [professional](#) judgment, effective communication and interpersonal skills, and practices with integrity to establish, maintain and terminate the therapeutic relationship.
- 1.6 Recognizes and addresses [transference](#) and [counter-transference](#) and their impact on the therapeutic relationship.
- 1.7 Applies critical thinking and professional judgment in therapeutic relationships.
- 1.8 Establishes and negotiates [boundaries](#) in therapeutic relationships.
- 1.9 Practices according to the principles of informed consent and confidentiality.
- 1.10 Will make best efforts to find suitable alternatives to treating family or friends.
- 1.11 Develops partnerships using a client-centred, integrated and holistic approach.

Standard 2: Competent, Evidence-Informed Practice

The Registered Psychiatric Nurse continually acquires and integrates [evidence-informed](#) knowledge and builds on psychiatric nursing education and lifelong learning.

A Registered Psychiatric Nurse:

- 2.1 Applies evidence-informed knowledge, skill, critical thinking and professional judgment to assess, plan, implement, and evaluate in the practice of psychiatric nursing.
- 2.2 Incorporates evidence-informed knowledge to promote safety and quality in psychiatric nursing practice.
- 2.3 Uses communication skills effectively.
- 2.4 Integrates [cultural competence](#) and [cultural safety](#) into their practice with diverse clients.
- 2.5 Recognizes potential risks and hazards and implements interventions to promote a safe environment.
- 2.6 Integrates infection prevention and control principles into practice.
- 2.7 Documents the application of the clinical decision-making process in a responsible, accountable and ethical manner.
- 2.8 Applies documentation principles to ensure effective written/electronic communication.
- 2.9 Remains current in knowledge relevant to their practice.
- 2.10 Incorporates knowledge of therapeutic modalities and conceptual models of psychiatric nursing.
- 2.11 Coordinates client care and/or health services throughout the [continuum of care](#).
- 2.12 Establishes, maintains and coordinates a plan of care based on a comprehensive psychiatric nursing assessment.

Standard 3: Professional Responsibility and Accountability

The Registered Psychiatric Nurse is accountable and responsible for safe, competent and ethical psychiatric nursing practice that meets the standards of the profession and legislated requirements.

A Registered Psychiatric Nurse:

- 3.1 Is accountable and responsible for their actions, inactions, decisions and the evaluation of their practice.
- 3.2 Maintains current registration/licensure.
- 3.3 Practices in accordance with all relevant legislation and regulation including the Standards of Psychiatric Nursing Practice.
- 3.4 Exercises professional judgment when agency policies and procedures are unclear or absent.
- 3.5 Assumes responsibility and accountability for [continuing competence](#), and for meeting continuing competence requirements.
- 3.6 Seeks out the necessary resources using skill and professional judgment to address personal and professional limitations.
- 3.7 Recognizes the [competencies](#) and limitations of colleagues and/or students when assigning responsibilities.
- 3.8 Responds to and/or reports unsafe practice, professional incompetence, professional misconduct, and incapacity or fitness-to-practice issues to the appropriate authority.
- 3.9 Complies with any legal duty to report, including abuse or potential harm to the public.
- 3.10 Self-reports to the regulatory body if their fitness to practice is compromised.
- 3.11 Uses technology, electronic communication and social media responsibly and professionally.

Standard 4: Leadership & Collaboration in Quality Psychiatric Nursing Practice

A Registered Psychiatric Nurse:

The Registered Psychiatric nurse enhances the safety, [quality](#) and effectiveness of psychiatric nursing practice through leadership and collaboration.

- 4.1 Engages in practices that promote physical, environmental and psychological safety.
- 4.2 Evaluates the effectiveness of interventions
- 4.3 Participates in quality improvement activities to initiate changes in psychiatric nursing practice and in the health care system.
- 4.4 Collaborates with clients, team members, families and other stakeholders to develop comprehensive psychiatric nursing care to achieve the client's health goals.
- 4.5 Mentors colleagues, system partners and others
- 4.6 Promotes collaborative practice among health care professionals through respectful working relationships and appropriate documentation practices.
- 4.7 Acts as a leader, teacher and role model to students, beginner practitioners and colleagues, supporting, instructing and/or mentoring them in their professional development.
- 4.8 Takes action to resolve professional practice issues.
- 4.9 Collaborates with and advocates for clients.
- 4.10 Demonstrates [professional](#) leadership through:
 - 4.10i Building trusting relationships
 - 4.10ii Creating [empowering](#) environments
 - 4.10iii Supporting knowledge development and integration within the health care team
 - 4.10iv Advancing psychiatric nursing practice and quality health care
 - 4.10v Leading and sustaining change and balancing competing values and priorities

Standard 5: Professional Ethical Practice

The Registered Psychiatric Nurse understands, upholds and incorporates the profession's Code of Ethics into their professional practice.

A Registered Psychiatric Nurse:

- 5.1 Practices with honesty, integrity and respect, demonstrating the ethics, standards, principles, guidelines and values of the profession.
- 5.2 Applies to the Code of Ethics in all areas of their practice.
- 5.3 Identifies the effect of their own values, beliefs and experiences in relationships with clients, recognizes potential conflicts, and takes action to prevent or resolve them.
- 5.4 Applies ethical and legal considerations in maintaining confidentiality in all forms of communication.
- 5.5 Supports the human, legal and moral rights of clients, including the right to make informed decisions and the right to live at risk.

Glossary

The following glossary aims to clarify the meaning of specialized working terms found in the Standards of Practice. This glossary is not intended to contain a comprehensive definition of those terms.

Acceptability: Care is respectful and responsive to user preferences, needs and values

Accessibility: Care and services are reached with ease

Appropriateness: Care is evidence-informed and specific to individual clinical needs

Biopsychosocial: Consists of separate but interdependent domains: biologic, psychological and social. Each domain has independent knowledge and treatment focus but can interact and be mutually interdependent with the other domains (Austin & Boyd, 2010).

Boundaries: Limits that protect the space between the professional's power and the client's vulnerability. Boundaries define and separate professional roles from other roles. Boundaries are the limits that allow a safe connection between a professional and a client and are always based on the client's needs (Peterson, M. 1992).

Client: Individual, groups, families, and communities (Registered Psychiatric Nurses Entry-Level Competencies, Registered Psychiatric Nurses Canada, 2014).

Collaborative Health Care: Care that is provided from different specialties, disciplines, or sectors that work together to offer complementary services and mutual support (Austin et al., 2018).

Competencies: The integrated knowledge, skills, professional judgment and attitudes required by a Registered Psychiatric Nurse to practice competently, ethically and safely (Verma, Paterson & Medves, 2006).

Continuing Competence: The ongoing ability of a Registered Psychiatric Nurse to integrate and apply knowledge, skills, professional judgment, attitudes, values and interpersonal attributes required to practice safely and ethically in their current role and setting (CRPNA, September 2013).

Continuum of Care: A comprehensive system of services and programs, ranging from mental health promotion and illness prevention to specialized services, and designed to match the needs of individuals and populations with appropriate care and treatment, and which vary according to levels of service, structure, and intensity of care. (Austin et al. 2019).

Counter-Transference: The nurse's reactions to a client are based on the nurse's unconscious needs, conflicts, problems, and views of the world. See also Transference (Austin & Boyd, 2010).

Cultural Competence: The ability of nurses to apply knowledge and skill appropriately in cross-cultural situations, and to adapt care delivery to meet the patient's cultural needs and preferences (Pollard, Ray & Haase, 2014).

Cultural Safety: Both a process and an outcome whose goal is to promote greater equity. It focuses on root causes of power imbalances and inequitable social relationships in health care, and includes cultural awareness, cultural sensitivity and cultural competence (Canadian Nurses Association, 2013).

Effectiveness: Care that is known to achieve intended outcomes (BC Patient Safety and Quality Council, 2017).

Empower: To make others stronger and more confident, especially in controlling their life and claiming their rights (Oxford Dictionary, 2019).

Evidence-Informed: Care based on the collection, interpretation and integration of valid, important, and applicable patient-reported, clinician-observed, and research-derived evidence. (Halter, 2014).

Leadership: The efforts by leaders who may, but do not necessarily, hold formal positions of authority to engage followers in the joint pursuit of mutually agreed-upon goals (Kellerman, 1999).

Professional Judgment: The evaluation of evidence to make a clinical decision. It is the ability to make critical distinctions and achieve a balanced viewpoint, including the reaction of the Registered Psychiatric Nurse to the client. (RPNRC Entry Level Competencies, November 2014).

Quality: Quality of health care is comprised of multiple dimensions, including five that focus on the patient/client experience:

Safety: Care avoids resulting in harm

Therapeutic Use of Self: A complex process of self-awareness through one's own growth and development, as well as one's interactions with others, that guides the process of developing, maintaining and terminating the therapeutic relationship.

Therapeutic Relationship: An interpersonal process that is purposeful, goal directed and focused on achieving outcomes in the best interest of the client, in which the nurse maximizes their communication skills, understanding of human behaviour, and personal strengths to advance the client's interests and personal growth, and to promote health and well-being.

Transference: The client's experience of feelings toward the nurse, that were originally held toward significant others in his or her life. See also [Counter-Transference](#) (Halter, 2014).

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