



Te Kaunihera Tapuhi o Aotearoa  
Nursing Council of New Zealand

# Guideline: Expanded practice for Registered Nurses

*Ki te whakarite i nga ahuatanga o nga  
Tapuhi e pa ana mo nga iwi katoa*

*Regulating nursing  
practice to protect public safety*

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# Introduction

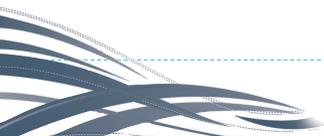
The Nursing Council of New Zealand is responsible under the Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act 2003 (the Act) for regulating the practice of nursing. The Council's role is to ensure nurses are safe and competent to practise. One of the ways the Council does this is by setting scopes of practice for nursing.

In a rapidly changing health care environment the scope of practice for registered nurses is constantly evolving. It is not easily described by tasks or procedures and is influenced by the health care context. Nursing roles may overlap and share competencies, accountabilities and responsibilities with other health professionals. Collaborative professional relationships must include clarification of functions and accountabilities.

Sometimes scope of practice decisions can be reactive and unplanned. In these situations the individual nurse and health consumer can be at risk. The Council has therefore developed this guideline to assist registered nurses and their employers to understand the scope of practice and to help them to make decisions about expanding the scope of practice in different and evolving health contexts.

Please note: Prescribing abilities are limited to designated nurse prescribers, e.g. nurse practitioners under the Medicines Act. A separate framework for nurse prescribers will be developed if the legislation changes.

The Nursing Council acknowledges the work of the Queensland Nursing Council, the Nurses Boards of Western Australia, South Australia and Victoria, and the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Council on scope of practice decision-making frameworks that has informed and contributed to this guideline.



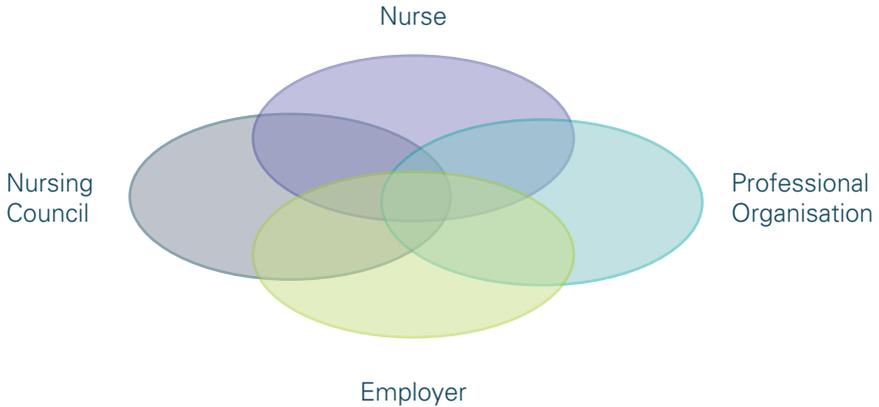
## Scope of practice for registered nurses

*Registered nurses utilise nursing knowledge and complex nursing judgment to assess health needs and provide care, and to advise and support people to manage their health. They practise independently and in collaboration with other health professionals, perform general nursing functions and delegate to and direct enrolled nurses, health care assistants and others. They provide comprehensive assessments to develop, implement and evaluate an integrated plan of health care, and provide interventions that require substantial scientific and professional knowledge, skills and decision making. This occurs in a range of settings in partnership with individuals, families, whanau and communities. Registered nurses may practise in a variety of clinical contexts depending on their educational preparation and practice experience. Registered nurses may also use this expertise to manage, teach, evaluate and research nursing practice. Registered nurses are accountable for ensuring all health services they provide are consistent with their education and assessed competence, meet legislative requirements and are supported by appropriate standards. There will be conditions placed in the scope of practice of some registered nurses according to their qualifications or experience limiting them to a specific area of practice.*

*The Nursing Council competencies for Registered Nurses describe the skills and activities of registered nurses.*



## Regulation of nursing practice for public safety relies on shared accountability



**Nursing Council (the regulator):** sets and communicates standards for professional nursing practice, maintains the register and issues practising certificates, and monitors fitness for practice.

**Individual nurse:** responsible for regulating his or her own practice and competence, engages in ongoing professional development and is aware of the professional context of her/his own practice, i.e. understands the professional standards and employer policies that guide practice.

**Employer:** responsible for having policies and procedures in place that allow nurses to operate safely, to provide a safe environment and the appropriate skills mix.

**Professional organisations:** provide specialty standards and frameworks, opportunities for professional development, and advice and guidance to nurses on professional issues.

## Standards that guide practice

Nurses must practise in accordance with:

- Standards established through legislation and common law
- Nursing Council standards including;
  - *The code of conduct*
  - *The competencies for the registered nurse scope of practice*
  - *Guideline: Direction and delegation*
- Relevant specialty or professional standards that have been developed by, or endorsed by, professional organisations or expert nursing or multidisciplinary groups.
- Standards developed by health care organisations to enable the safe delivery of health services within a particular context.



### Competencies for expanded practice

The following competencies have been developed to describe the skills and knowledge of nurses working in expanded practice roles. These competencies are additional to those that already describe the registered nurse scope of practice<sup>1</sup>. A nurse working in an expanded practice role would need to meet both.

- *Demonstrates initial and ongoing knowledge and skills for specific expanded practice role/activities through postgraduate education, clinical training and competence assessment.*
- *Participates in the evaluation of the outcomes of expanded practice, e.g. case review, clinical audit, multidisciplinary peer review.*
- *Integrates and evaluates knowledge and resources from different disciplines and health-care teams to effectively meet the health care needs of individuals and groups.*

Nurses who are practising in an expanded scope are expected to declare this when they apply for the Annual Practising Certificate and to demonstrate and document how they meet these competencies. They will be assessed as part of a professional development and recognition programmes (PDRP) or employer's credentialing programme and as part of the Council's recertification audit.

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<sup>1</sup> Nursing Council of New Zealand (2007) *Competencies for registered nurses*.

## Continuum of practice

Registered nurses begin their nursing practice with a comprehensive professional education. They develop their practice through continuing education, experience and ongoing competence development.

Some registered nurses further develop their level of expertise through postgraduate education and experience. Their practice is characterised by greater knowledge and skill, greater complexity, more effective integration of theory practice and experience, and increasing degrees of autonomy in clinical judgments and interventions. One way of recognising the further development of nursing practice is through levels of PDRPs. This does not mean that nurses who do not have access to PDRPs are not able to achieve or demonstrate greater levels of expertise.

Registered nurses who have developed their expertise may expand their practice beyond the established contemporary or 'traditional' scope of practice to include new technology, increasingly autonomous roles—management of health consumers with chronic conditions and through activities previously considered within the scope of other health professionals, e.g. colposcopy.



### Framework for expanded practice

#### Definition of expanded practice

*Expanding the boundaries of nursing practice occurs as a professional strategy in response to a changing health care need with increased range of autonomy, accountability and responsibility. There is a formal pathway to role expansion that entails further education and credentialing<sup>2</sup>.*

Expansion of the registered nurse scope of practice occurs when a nurse with demonstrated nursing expertise assumes responsibility for a health care activity or role which is currently outside their scope of practice. Expanded practice may include areas of practice that have not previously been in the nursing realm or have been the responsibility of other health professionals.

Consideration must be made as to whether a new role, activity or health service describes the role of a nurse practitioner, i.e. is it a package of care that includes diagnosis, referral, testing and treatment, and advanced nursing knowledge and skills? The difference between an expanded registered nurse role and that of a nurse practitioner may be the level of independence and confidence in decision making in determining care<sup>3</sup>.

The flowchart overleaf outlines the decision-making process to be used when considering whether expanded practice activities can be safely included in the registered nurse scope of practice. The purpose of the flowchart is to provide guidance to the nurse, the profession and the health service provider on expanding the registered nurse scope of practice in a way that is planned and ensures safe, competent practice.

#### Recognising expansion of practice

The activity is not usually carried out in this setting by a registered nurse and/or

The activity has historically been undertaken by another profession and/or

This activity involves new technology or procedure and/or

This activity requires a greater degree of autonomous judgment or intervention.

<sup>2</sup> New Zealand National Nursing Organisations (2011) *Glossary of Terms*.

<sup>3</sup> Please refer to Nursing Council of New Zealand (2009) *Nurse practitioner scope of practice: Guidelines for applicants*.

## Principles to guide scope of practice decisions

The primary motivation for any decision about a health activity is to meet the consumer's health needs or to enhance health outcomes. This may be an identified gap in health services which results in the public not having access to a service or a strategic initiative.

Ensuring patient safety is the primary consideration when determining if expansion of practice is appropriate.

Expansion of the scope of practice is based on appropriate consultation and planning, educational preparation and a formal assessment of the nurse's competence to undertake an expanded scope of practice.

All nurses are accountable for their decisions about whether an activity is beyond their own capacity or scope of practice and for consulting with or referring to other health professionals.



### Decision-making process for expanding scope of registered nursing practice

Before considering an expansion of practice the following issues and questions should be considered in a collaborative manner by both the nurse and the employer:

Is there evidence that the expansion of scope of nursing practice will improve the health outcome of the health consumer? Is there an appropriate rationale for a registered nurse to undertake this activity?

YES

Is the role or activity supported by any legislation or professional standards?\*

YES

- Has the nurse considered any potential risk(s) and developed strategies to avoid them?
- Are there policies and procedures as part of an organisational risk management framework that support this practice?
- Will the organisation culture and interdisciplinary team accept the change?

YES

- Have the following been determined:
  - acceptable level of educational preparation required?
  - acceptable level of theory and supervised clinical practice?
- Has a process been established:
  - to assess competencies for expanded practice?
  - for ongoing education to maintain competence for the expanded scope of practice?
  - to access other health professionals to support the activity?

YES

Is the nurse educationally prepared and competent to perform the activity?  
Is the nurse confident of their ability to perform the activity safely?  
Does the nurse understand their level of accountability?

YES

Is there on going monitoring and evaluation of the expanded activity?

YES

Proceed with activity.

\* Standards may be developed by national professional associations or by an expert group convened by national groups. Legislation can be a barrier to nurses performing some roles, e.g. signing death certificates.

NO

If no to any, further planning and consultation are needed and referral may be necessary in the meantime.

NO

Refer to appropriate health practitioner or health care provider and collaborate for ongoing care.

NO

NO

If no to any, further planning and consultation are needed to consider what needs to occur for these to be developed.

NO

NO

(Adapted from Nurses Board of Victoria, 2008)

If 'Yes' to all, then it is appropriate to proceed with the expansion to practice but if the context changes the issues and questions must be reapplied.

If 'No' to any, the situation requires review, further planning and consultation. Referral may be necessary in the meantime.



Expansion of scope of practice must be lawful, appropriate for context, and consistent with standards acceptable to the profession and with the health service provider policies.

Nurses expanding their practice must have the necessary educational preparation and experience to do so safely. Their competence must be assessed by a qualified, competent health practitioner<sup>4</sup> and documented.

The outcomes of expanded practice activities are monitored and evaluated.

### Responsibilities of employers

Employers need to ensure they have the appropriate systems in place to support the safe expansion of registered nurse activities or role.

Non-nurse employers are expected to seek professional advice on expanded practice activities and roles, from their director of nursing, senior nurse or professional organisation.

The employer is responsible for ensuring the appropriate skill mix of staff so that additional activities completed by the registered nurse/s do not compromise the standard of care provided to health consumers.

The employer must ensure there are clear role descriptions for nurses and others based on their expanded scope of practice, policies and quality and risk systems to support the registered nurse in this role.

The employer is responsible for recruiting or nominating registered nurses who have demonstrated an appropriate level of practice beyond the 'competent' level to perform expanded activities or roles and to provide adequate education and clinical training for the provision of safe and competent care.

The employer is responsible for ensuring registered nurses are supported and have been appropriately assessed as competent to undertake the expanded activity or role. Assessments should be documented as part of an organisation's PDRP or credentialing programme.

The employer is expected to pilot the expanded scope of practice for a specific time and evaluate before full introduction of the change.

The employer should have processes in place for monitoring the outcomes of expanded practice and for staff to document and report client-related concerns.

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<sup>4</sup> A person who is registered under the Act, e.g. midwife, medical practitioner, occupational therapist

## Glossary of terms

<b>Accountability</b>	Being answerable for your decisions and actions.
<b>Appropriate</b>	Matching the circumstances of a situation or meeting the needs of the individual or group.
<b>Assessment</b>	A systematic procedure for collecting qualitative and quantitative data to describe progress and ascertain deviations from expected outcomes and achievements.
<b>Competence</b>	The combination of skills, knowledge, attitudes, values and abilities that underpin effective performance as a nurse.
<b>Competency</b>	A defined area of skilled performance.
<b>Competent</b>	The person has competence across all domains of competencies applicable to the nurse at a standard that is judged to be appropriate for the level of nurse being assessed.
<b>Expanded practice</b>	Expanding the boundaries of nursing practice occurs as a professional strategy in response to a changing health care need with increased range of autonomy, accountability and responsibility. There is a formal pathway to role expansion that entails further education and credentialing.
<b>Nursing Council of New Zealand</b>	<p>The responsible authority for nurses in New Zealand with legislated functions under the Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act (2003).</p> <p>The Nursing Council governs the practice of nurses by setting and monitoring standards of registration, which ensures safe and competent care for the public of New Zealand.</p> <p>As the statutory authority, the Council is committed to enhancing professional excellence in nursing.</p>
<b>Professional development and recognition programme (PDRP)</b>	Competence-based programme that assesses nursing practice against competencies, recognises levels of practice and supports ongoing professional development
<b>Registered nurse</b>	A nurse registered under the registered nurse scope of practice.



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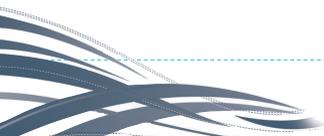
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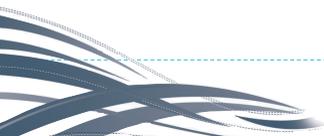
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