



COLLEGE OF
LICENSED PRACTICAL NURSES
OF ALBERTA

ESAC Operational Guidelines & Procedures

PN Diploma Programs

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.	Introduction	1
1.1	<i>Introduction to Program Approval</i>	<i>1</i>
1.2	<i>Overview of Program Approval Process</i>	<i>1</i>
2.	ESAC Values and Principles.....	3
3.	CLPNA Policies on Approval of Education Programs	4
3.1	<i>Terms of Program Approval for Existing Diploma Programs</i>	<i>4</i>
3.2	<i>Programs Eligible for New Diploma Program Approval.....</i>	<i>5</i>
3.3	<i>Fees for Program Reviews and Approval</i>	<i>5</i>
3.3.1	Programs Fees.....	5
3.3.2	Important Information for Institutions Seeking a New Program Approval.....	6
3.4	<i>Program Approval Process</i>	<i>6</i>
3.4.1	Responsibility for Site Visit Expenses	6
3.4.2	Diploma Program Review Site Visit	6
3.5	<i>Selection and Training of Site Visit Teams</i>	<i>7</i>
3.5.1	Site Visit Team Size and Composition.....	8
4.	Outcomes of Program Reviews.....	9
4.1	<i>Program Review Reports</i>	<i>9</i>
4.2	<i>Approval Actions</i>	<i>9</i>
4.2.1	Categories for CLPNA Approval of an Established PN Diploma Program (CLPNA, 2019)	9
4.2.2	Categories for CLPNA Approval of a New Diploma Program (CLPNA, 2019)	10
4.3	<i>Other Approval Considerations</i>	<i>11</i>
4.4	<i>Reporting of CLPNA Council Actions for Program Approval.....</i>	<i>11</i>
5.	Monitoring of Programs Between Review Cycles	12
5.1	<i>Annual Reporting</i>	<i>12</i>
5.2	<i>Required Notice of Change</i>	<i>12</i>
5.3	<i>ESAC Response to Notice of Change</i>	<i>12</i>
5.3.1	Possible Actions from Notice of Change.....	12
6.	Assessment of Notice of Planned Change.....	14



7.	Circumstances That May Lead To An Unplanned Program Review or Site Visit	15
7.1	<i>Change in Governance or Organizational Structure</i>	15
7.2	<i>Expansion of Existing Sites or Inclusion of a Branch Campus.....</i>	15
7.3	<i>Modification to Program Curriculum or Introduction of New Educational Initiatives..</i>	15
7.4	<i>Increase in Class Size</i>	15
7.5	<i>Program Receiving a Warning.....</i>	16
7.6	<i>Investigation of Complaints about Program Quality or Delivery</i>	16
8.	Other Guidelines and Procedures	17
8.1	<i>Development and Review of Program Approval Standards.....</i>	17
8.2	<i>Conflicts of Interest</i>	17
8.3	<i>Confidentiality of Information and Research.....</i>	17
8.4	<i>Complaints about an Education Program.....</i>	18
8.5	<i>Complaints about a Program Review or Approval Process and/or Appeal of an Approval Decision.....</i>	18



1. INTRODUCTION

NB: These guidelines apply to Diploma Practical Nurse Education, which is herein known as “the Practical Nurse Education Program” or alternatively “the Program”.

1.1 Introduction to Program Approval

The College of Licensed Practical Nurses of Alberta (CLPNA) is mandated by the Health Professions Act to assure that graduates of diploma practical nurse programs, advanced practice and refresher programs have the necessary knowledge, skills, behaviors, attitudes and judgment to competently engage in professional nursing practice in accordance with current legislation, standards of practice, scope of practice and other interpretive documents.

Leadership for the CLPNA is provided by the Council and Chief Executive Officer (CEO). The CEO establishes an Education Standards Advisory Committee (ESAC) as a Standing Committee that reports to the Council of the CLPNA. The Educational Standards Advisory Committee (ESAC) is responsible for establishing and implementing an evaluation process for the diploma practical nurse programs, advanced education and refresher programs.

1.2 Overview of Program Approval Process

Any new Practical Nurse Diploma Programs, including but not limited to; a program offered by an institution that has previously brokered an CLPNA approved practical nurse program, a new program offered by an institution not previously offering a Practical Nurse program in Alberta, a new brokering arrangement or a new partnership arrangement must be approved by the Council prior to program implementation.

Existing Practical Nurse programs must undergo a complete evaluation at least every four years. The approval process is guided by the Standards and Indicators for Program Approval outlined in the *Standards for Diploma Program Approval of Practical Nurse Education (2019)*¹, and includes an in-depth review of the curriculum and program delivery models, all relevant legislation, College policies and procedures, a site visit to the College and selected clinical placement sites as well as meetings with students, faculty, clinical placement partners and College and program administrators.

Program reviews enable ESAC to determine if the educational programs are complying with the Program Approval Standards and Indicators and to determine if their graduates have achieved entry-level competencies. Also, through the review process ESAC is able to recognize and applaud the exceptional

¹ College of Licensed Practical Nurses of Alberta. (2019). *Standards for Diploma Program Approval of Practical Nurse Education*. Edmonton, AB: Author.



work being done by the faculty members in the programs. Further, they encourage and support innovative instructional methods and creative approaches to curriculum design.

An ESAC review team consisting of the ESAC Chair or designate and up to two committee members conduct the review and site visit. Within 20 business days of the site visit, a written draft report with recommendations is presented to the Educational Standards Advisory Committee. ESAC reviews and finalizes the report and forwards to Council for the approval decision.



2. ESAC VALUES AND PRINCIPLES

In presenting the Standards and Indicators for Approval of Diploma Practical Nurse Education Programs in Alberta, ESAC affirms its commitment to the following values and principles:

- ESAC takes seriously its obligation to accept responsibility for recommending approval of Diploma Practical Nurse programs as legislated by the Health Professions Act (2000). Further, this sense of accountability extends to openly communicating the actions and decisions of ESAC. The Approval Process will be transparent, easy to follow and the requirements for compliance clear to all our stakeholders.
- ESAC ensures that the Approval Process is based on integrity and fairness and all programs are treated in a consistent manner.
- ESAC ensures that the focus of the Approval process is that Practical Nurse programs are preparing graduates who have attained all the required competencies, both provincial and national. These competent graduates will commit to provide Albertans with quality care.
- ESAC completes regular review of program approval standards and makes evidence informed decisions when updating the Standards and Indicators for Program Approval of Diploma Practical Nurse Programs, Advanced Education, and Refresher Programs. This involves identification, evaluation and application of current research as applied to standards for program approval.
- ESAC provides leadership through encouraging innovative practices and progressive trends in nursing education.



3. CLPNA POLICIES ON APPROVAL OF EDUCATION PROGRAMS

3.1 Terms of Program Approval for Existing Diploma Programs

The desired outcome of Practical Nurse education in Alberta is a graduate who meets the entry-level competencies as defined by CLPNA's current Competency Profile for Licensed Practical Nurses.

The purpose for the use of the Standards in Diploma Program Approval process is to:

1. Provide a framework for program review process
2. Determine the approval status of practical nurse education programs
3. Guide educational institutions in self-evaluation of practical nurse education programs
4. Guide the development of new practical nurse education programs

There are 10 standards with multiple indicators in each standard. These Standards for Approval apply to Diploma Practical Nurse Education Programs in Alberta. The credential for the diploma program is a Diploma in Practical Nursing. Of all the indicators, those indicators marked with a (C) are Critical Elements of program performance.

1. The education institution ensures that the PN Education Program meets and maintains the standards requirements of the ESAC for Diploma PN Education Programs. ESAC takes seriously its obligation to recommend approval of Diploma Practical Nurse Education Programs as legislated by the Health Professions Act (2000)².
2. The PN Education Program notifies ESAC of significant changes to fiscal, human, infrastructure, and educational resources that alter the program. The program will submit to ESAC a completed notice of change form prior to implementation.
3. The curriculum is structured to provide the required learning opportunities for students to meet the designated program outcomes and CLPNA entry-level competencies.
4. There is a method of tracking and scheduling clinical hours and placements for each student to ensure that all students have clinical practice with clients across the lifespan, in a variety of clinical settings, and meet the Entry Level Competencies.
5. Students are partners in the teaching and learning process and provide formal feedback on the quality of the teaching and learning experience.
6. Records regarding student enrollment, attrition, returning students and program completion are recorded and accessible.
7. Processes are in place to map student progress and to verify that the student has completed the curriculum and achieved the Entry Level Competencies and all other outcomes for graduation.

² Government of Alberta. (2011). *Health Professions Act, RSA 2000, c.H-7*. Edmonton, AB: Alberta Queen's Printer.



8. Program success rates for first time writers' of the Canadian Practical Nurse Registration Examination (CPNRE) are monitored in comparison to the Provincial and National averages.
9. Annual feedback from new graduates indicates they are prepared to meet requirements for practice as outlined in the *Licensed Practical Nurses Profession Regulation (AR 81/2003)*, all CLPNA Council approved and adopted standards of practice for Licensed Practical Nurses and the current Council approved Competency Profile for Licensed Practical Nurses of Alberta.
10. Annual feedback from employers indicates new graduates meet service sector needs and possess the knowledge, skills, behaviors, attitudes and judgments addressed in the *Licensed Practical Nurses Profession Regulation* all CLPNA Council approved and adopted standards of practice for Licensed Practical Nurses and the current Council approved Competency Profile for Licensed Practical Nurses of Alberta.

3.2 Programs Eligible for New Diploma Program Approval

Only complete Practical Nurse Education Programs supported by a registered post-secondary educational institution in the province of Alberta are eligible for program review and approval. The required credential for all Practical Nurse Programs is a Diploma in Practical Nursing.

3.3 Fees for Program Reviews and Approval

The College of Licensed Practical Nurses (CLPNA) sets the fee structure for program review, approval and ongoing approval (annual fees). The *Fee Schedule for Practical Nurse Education Program Review and Approval* is reviewed on a regular basis. Stakeholders will be notified of changes to the approved fee schedule.

3.3.1 Programs Fees

Program fees include, but are not limited to, the following:

- Application for new or brokered education program
- Annual fees for approved programs
- Costs associated with scheduled reviews for approved program
- Costs associated with an unplanned program review or site visit (see Section 7: Circumstances That May Lead to an Unplanned Program Review or Site Visit).

NB: Payment of application fees or other costs does not guarantee program approval



Please refer to the CLPNA “Fee Schedule for Practical Nurse Education Program Review and Approval” for a detailed fee structure. This document may be obtained by contacting the CLPNA Executive Assistant.

3.3.2 Important Information for Institutions Seeking a New Program Approval

- All institutions seeking a new Practical Nurse Program approval are required to pay an application fee
- If the application is not successful following an Education Standards Advisory Committee (ESAC) review process, the institution may reapply for approval after a period of one year and must pay another application fee and repeat the review process.

3.4 Program Approval Process

Practical Nurse Education Programs are reviewed to ensure that they are in compliance with the most current Standards for Diploma Program approval.

3.4.1 Responsibility for Site Visit Expenses

All new programs applying or reapplying are responsible for all incurred expenses related to each of the ESAC Team Site Visits. During the site visit, the program is responsible for the Site Visit Team’s hotel, provision of meals during the day, and for transportation to branch campuses and affiliated clinical placement locations. Note: The ESAC Team members are prohibited from accepting gifts from any programs.

3.4.2 Diploma Program Review Site Visit

The Diploma Program approval process for existing programs involves a Self-Study Data Collection Guidelines and Templates report completed by members of the Practical Nurse Education Program, an on-site visit by the ESAC Site Visit Team, and a final review of the Self-Study and Site Visit reports before a decision on approval status is rendered.

For programs that are already approved, the ESAC Chair will contact the Practical Nurse Education Program Lead at least 9 months before the anticipated date of the site visit evaluation review. For new programs, the review process will begin upon completion and acceptance of an application for program approval and payment of the fees.

The ESAC Chair will distribute the ESAC Operational Guidelines and Procedures, Self-Study Collection Guidelines and Templates to the Lead of the program. The Lead is responsible for determining how they



intend to manage the Site Visit preparation and coordination and will provide information to the Executive Assistant at CLPNA. The schedule is developed in collaboration with the ESAC Chair or designate.

The Lead of the Practical Nurse Education Program ensures the Self-Study Data Collection Guidelines and Templates are completed and is encouraged to ask the ESAC Chair to answer any questions about the expectations for the completion and submission of the Self-Study Report or Site Visit.

Within three months prior to the scheduled site visit date, the ESAC Chair will provide information to the Lead of the program being reviewed, regarding the composition of the ESAC Site Visit Team and background materials about the Site Visit process. The Lead will be expected to confirm receipt of this information and confirm that no conflict of interests exist with any members of the ESAC Site Visit Team. Final team membership decisions are made by the ESAC Chair.

The site visit is typically 3 days, however, if a program has a branch campus an additional day may be required by the Site Visit Team.

The final day of the site visit will be used by the ESAC team, to consolidate information, to expedite preparation of the draft report and provide a debriefing with the program.

The Council of CLPNA submits an approval status decision at the next regularly scheduled Council meeting, or within 40 business days, holds a special meeting to finalize this important decision.

The Lead of the PN Education Program and President of the Institution are sent the finalized Complete Site Visit Report and, in writing, the approval status and subsequent follow-up requirements.

An internal review of the Diploma Program approval and ESAC Site Visit processes will be conducted on a regular basis through direct feedback (written and oral) from stakeholder members to evaluate the effectiveness of the approval process.

3.5 Selection and Training of Site Visit Teams

Site Visit Teams will be selected from the ESAC Committee and may include representation from education, the LPN profession and employers. Annual training will be provided to ESAC committee members on the roles and responsibilities of Site Visit Teams on how to assess programs for compliance or noncompliance using the Standards and Indicators and how to seek information on program performance from stakeholders.

For orientation purposes, an additional team member may participate in the research and review of program documentation without additional costs to the program.



3.5.1 Site Visit Team Size and Composition

The Site Visit Team will typically consist of the ESAC Chair or designate and up to two additional Site Visit Team members. All members will need to be in compliance with the conflict of interest policy (see Item 6.2) and may be excluded from a site visit team at the discretion of the CLPNA CEO. The ESAC Site Visit Chair or designate is the main representative and speaks on behalf of the team, and oversees the data and information collection procedures and preparation of the Site Visit Report.



4. OUTCOMES OF PROGRAM REVIEWS

4.1 Program Review Reports

The Draft Program Review Report reflects a formal assessment of the education program setting and its findings are essential to informing the CLPNA Council in the program approval decision-making process. The report from the site visit team provides a comprehensive description about the Practical Nurse Education Program's adherence to the Standard's indicators. In addition, the report includes any information that may have been missing from the Self-Study Report and the progress made on noncompliance standard indicators. All reports are prepared using the current approved ESAC Report template.

1. Template Definitions:

Met and met with follow-up are considered in compliance with an indicator, as follows:

- **Met:** The required policy, process, resource or system is in place and if required by the standard, there is evidence to indicate that it is effective.
- **Met with follow-up:**
 - 1) The practical nurse program has the required policy, process, resource, or system in place, but there is INSUFFICIENT evidence to indicate that it is effective. Therefore, a need for further follow-up is required to ensure that the desired outcome has been achieved.
 - 2) The practical nurse program is currently in compliance with the standard, but known circumstances exist that could lead to future noncompliance.

All unmet indicators are considered non-compliance.

- **Unmet:** The practical nurse program has not met one or more of the requirements of the standard. The required policy, process, resource, or system either is not in place or is in place, but has been found to be ineffective.

4.2 Approval Actions

4.2.1 Categories for CLPNA Approval of an Established PN Diploma Program (CLPNA, 2019)

Full Approval – the Diploma Practical Nurse program approval process is generally on a four year cycle. If the Program has met the minimum standard of 8 of 10 critical indicators and 80% of the remaining indicators, ESAC will recommend to Council a full approval. The program is expected to continue to work towards meeting all indicators.

Full approval may be impacted if non-attainment of any indicator may have detrimental effects on students or compromises delivery of the Practical Nurse Education Program. Full approval may not be granted despite percentages of compliance.



Approval with Conditions – this rating indicates that the program met less than 8 of the 10 critical indicators and/or less than 80% of the remaining indicators. An Approval with Conditions will specify the length of approval and timelines for compliance. A program may reverse their Approval with Conditions status to Full approval provided that they meet all conditions stipulated in their Program Review with supporting evidence within the timeline specified after the site visit. Note: The program is expected to alert current and future students of their change in Approval status.

Approval Withdrawn –When approval is withdrawn, a program that was operating with Approval with Conditions was unable to take corrective action within the specified timeline or to achieve compliance.

When the CLPNA Council withdraws program approval status, the date on which the approval ceases is stipulated in the letter sent to the Lead of the Practical Nurse Education Program and the President of the institution. The school must make alternate arrangements to enable the students to complete the program.

4.2.2 Categories for CLPNA Approval of a New Diploma Program (CLPNA, 2019)

Approved to Implement Program: This rating authorizes the implementation of a new program. The program has complied with those Program Approval Indicators, which ESAC considers are critical for successful implementation of a Practical Nurse program. A review by ESAC will be carried out during the implementation of the first year of the program. This review is intended to allow for interaction with the first learner group and to provide additional evaluative data to support the ongoing approval of the program.

Interim Approval: This rating recognizes that new programs evolve and require time to stabilize. The ESAC team will return to review the program after the first cohorts of students have completed the program. Approval will be for a maximum of two years. At the end of the Interim Approval term ESAC will conduct a full program review and at this time, the program rating may change to Full Approval or Approval with Conditions in accordance with program performance requirements for established practical nurse programs.

Approval to Implement Program Denied: This rating indicates that the submission for a new program approval did not meet the critical Program Approval Indicators.

Failure to Implement an Approved Program: (approved May 2011): When a new program is approved by the CLPNA, the practical nursing program must be implemented within 12 months of the approved start date. Approval to implement a new practical nursing program will be considered null and void if the institution fails to meet this requirement.



Should the institution wish to proceed with a practical nursing program at a later date, a totally new submission, including a letter of intent, Step 1 and Step 2 submissions as outlined in the new program approval process, and corresponding fees will be required.

4.3 Other Approval Considerations

Warning: A “Warning” action may be designated to specific Standard indicators where noncompliance may have detrimental effects on the ability to deliver the Practical Nurse Education Program (e.g., legal contracts, insufficient qualified faculty, safety concerns). The program will be expected to be in compliance within the term specified. Although the program is not required to notify the student or public about a warning action, the ESAC Chair must inform the President of the Institution of the pending warning.

Failure of the institution to comply to the “Warning” to the satisfaction of the CLPNA Council could result in the decision by the Council to put the program on interim approval or conditional approval or approval-withdrawn status.

4.4 Reporting of CLPNA Council Actions for Program Approval

The Lead of the Practical Nurse Education Program and President of the supporting institution are sent a finalized Program Approval Report and a letter that stipulates the program’s approval status decision. In addition, there will be listed Standards/indicators/sub-indicators where compliance or noncompliance performances were identified and the need for any remediation actions required.

The Lead of the Practical Nurse Education Program is required to inform the faculty, staff and student body of the program’s approval status within 20 business days of receiving the letter from the CLPNA. At this time, the Practical Nurse Education Program approval status will be made available to the public on the CLPNA website.



5. MONITORING OF PROGRAMS BETWEEN REVIEW CYCLES

5.1 Annual Reporting

The Education Standards Advisory Committee (ESAC) holds the programs accountable for addressing their review requirements as outlined in the specific terms and conditions or recommendations in the Program Review Report. Therefore, Programs are required to submit and present an Annual Report which documents their actions and progress toward completing the requirements of the Review report. The CLPNA expects the Diploma programs to commit to continuous improvement principles and to make every effort to work towards meeting the expectations of the Diploma Standards and Indicators in the timelines specified in the most current Program Review Report.

ESAC provides the programs with a Template for completion of the Annual Report. Annually each program receives an invitation to attend an ESAC meeting and make their presentation to the ESAC members. This makes it possible for there to be a meaningful dialogue between the Program leaders and the ESAC members. Programs scheduled for a Program Review are exempt from the Annual Report requirement in that year.

5.2 Required Notice of Change

Approved Programs are required to notify ESAC of planned changes to their program as outlined in the Education Standards for PN Diploma Programs.

5.3 ESAC Response to Notice of Change

ESAC will review the Notice of Change Form submitted by the diploma education program to ensure timelines have been met and that all required information has been submitted.

5.3.1 Possible Actions from Notice of Change

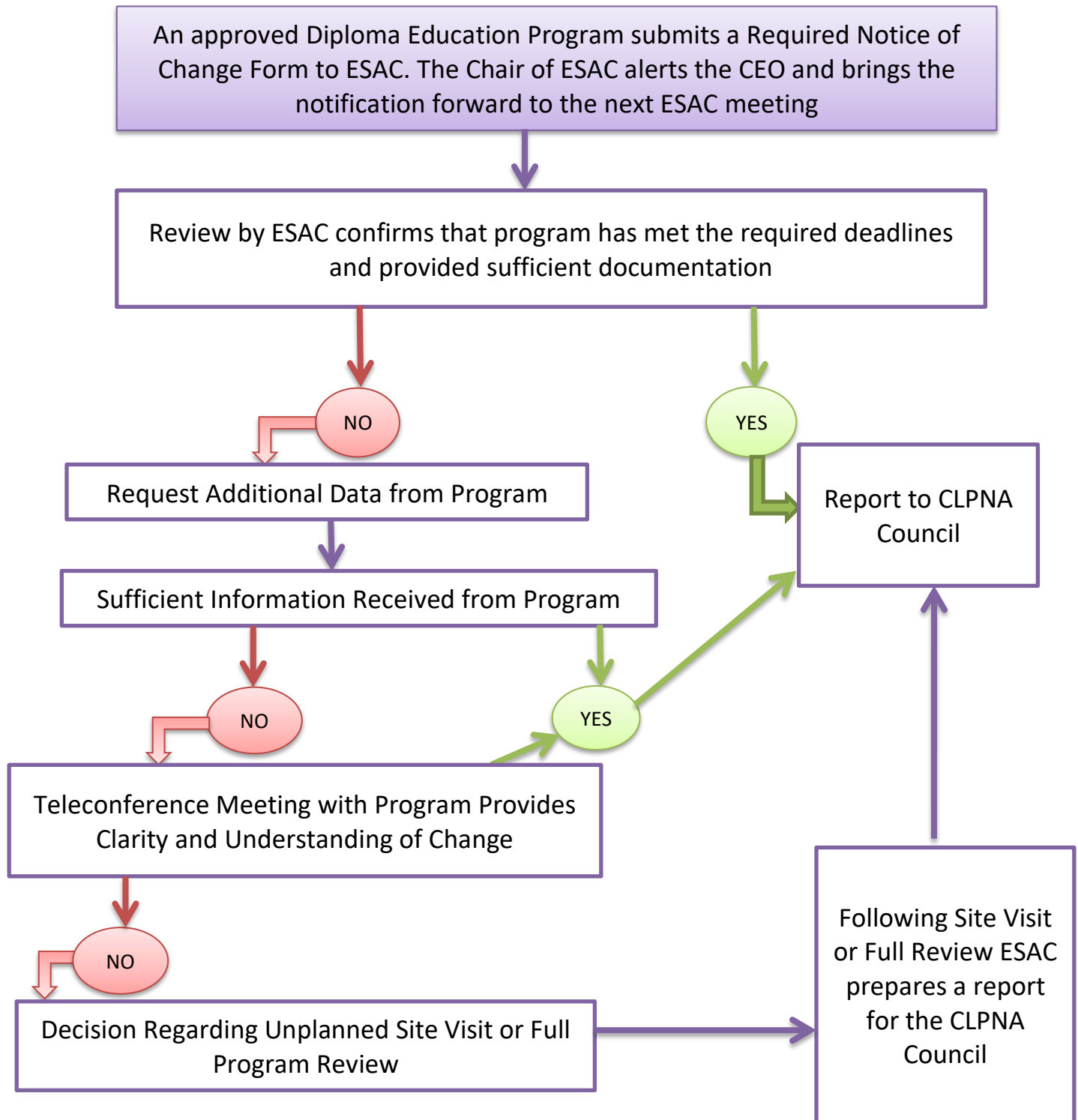
- ESAC may request additional information from the program regarding the planned change actions, outcomes and potential impact
- If more information is required, ESAC may schedule a meeting by distance (e.g. teleconference) with the program for further clarification
- An unplanned site visit may be conducted
- The program may be required to undergo a full program review



- If all required information has been submitted, and after consultation with ESAC members, the ESAC Chair may determine the change can proceed
- Following assessment of the planned change form, ESAC will submit a report to the CLPNA Council
- Programs are expected to provide updates on the planned change during the annual report process
- All planned changes will be further assessed at the next full program review



6. ASSESSMENT OF NOTICE OF PLANNED CHANGE





7. CIRCUMSTANCES THAT MAY LEAD TO AN UNPLANNED PROGRAM REVIEW OR SITE VISIT

NB: Programs who require an unplanned program review or additional site visit related to a program change will be responsible for associated costs.

7.1 Change in Governance or Organizational Structure

The Lead of the Practical Nurse Education program must notify the CLPNA in writing if there are substantial changes that involve a separation of the program from its current supporting educational institution, or transfer to the governance of another institution, or merger with another institution. After a review of the changes in governance or organizational structure, the CLPNA Council will decide if a change in the program's approval status or need for additional information are warranted.

7.2 Expansion of Existing Sites or Inclusion of a Branch Campus

At least 12 months before the expansion of an existing campus site or inclusion of a new branch campus is expected, the Lead must notify the CLPNA in writing of the program's ability to meet the needs for increase infrastructure and services. After a review of the expansion plans, the CLPNA Council will decide if additional data or information is needed or a review or site visit is warranted.

7.3 Modification to Program Curriculum or Introduction of New Educational Initiatives

When major curriculum or educational initiatives to one or more years of the Practical Nurse Education Program are planned for a subsequent academic year, the Lead must inform the CLPNA in writing of the supporting evidence for the curriculum changes or educational initiatives and program's plan to implement the changes successfully. After a review of the evidence and plans for implementation of the curriculum changes or educational initiative, the CLPNA Council will decide if additional data or information is needed or a review or site visit is warranted. Notification is not required for a curriculum change or new educational initiative at the individual course level.

7.4 Increase in Class Size

At least 6 months before an increase in the number of student enrolled in an education program, the Lead must notify the CLPNA in writing of the program's anticipated growth in class size if: 1) an increase in the entry class will be 10% or 10 students (whichever is less) in any one academic year or 20% over



three years. After a review of the expansion plans, the CLPNA Council will decide if additional data or information is needed or a review or site visit is warranted.

7.5 Program Receiving a Warning

Programs who receive a warning as outlined in section 4.3 may be subject to an unscheduled site visit.

7.6 Investigation of Complaints about Program Quality or Delivery

In the event of a substantiated complaint about the education program quality or delivery of services, the CLPNA will review if the program is in compliance with the standards through a written request for additional data and information or conduct an on-site review. If the CLPNA subsequently determines that a complaint has implications for the quality of the program, remediation actions will be put forward and the program's approval status may be revised.



8. OTHER GUIDELINES AND PROCEDURES

8.1 Development and Review of Program Approval Standards

The CLPNA and ESAC Committee are dedicated to ensuring that the Practical Nurse Education Programs in Alberta meet the highest standards for program quality and delivery. Nevertheless, the CLPNA recognizes that the standards and guidelines used for the review of Diploma Program approval are always open for improvement and regularly scheduled reviews. The suggestions for changes or additions to the standards typically come from the faculty, staff and student body of the education programs; however, any stakeholder can make a recommendation to the ESAC Committee about adding or revising a standard indicator or procedure used in the evaluation and approval process. Broad stakeholder consultation will be included as part of any formal review of approval standards.

8.2 Conflicts of Interest

To ensure that ESAC Site Visit Team members adhere to any perceived or actual conflicts of interest, all persons must disclose in writing and withdraw their name for participation in a site visit or decision about a program approval if:

- There is any direct connection between the individual (or a family member) and the Practical Nurse Education Program as a student, graduate, faculty member, administrator, employee/contractor within the past three years.
- The individual has an appointment or work related affiliation with the education program's supporting institution.
- Any other interest (i.e., financial, political, professional) may conflict with the education program or person's involvement with the CLPNA.

8.3 Confidentiality of Information and Research

All ESAC members sign a confidentiality of information agreement when appointed to the Committee and yearly thereafter. Site Review Team members are reminded of the need for strict confidentiality prior to each site visit. The data and information provided by the education program is held in strict confidence and will be stored securely throughout the review and until all aspects of the approval process are completed. Submissions to ESAC will be shredded within 6 months of process completion. Electronic data will be deleted using the same timeframe guidelines.

To ensure public safety and enhance the quality of education program delivery, the CLPNA CEO may authorize research studies on the non-identifiable data and information collected through self-study and



site visit documents to improve on the process of program approval within the jurisdiction. The information and results obtained from this research would be held confidentially with the CLPNA and under strict nondisclosure agreements may be shared or made available to other individuals or organizations for analysis and interpretation.

8.4 *Complaints about an Education Program*

The CLPNA CEO and Council will seriously consider all substantiated complaints. The concern or request must be made in writing and acknowledge that the individual may be identified as the complainant. The CEO will conduct an initial review of the complaint about the education program's ability to meet compliance based on the Standards. If evidence can be found to support the complaint, the Lead of the education program will be informed in writing and given an opportunity to respond in writing within one month.

A subsequent site visit would be used to follow-up on compliance with the concerns raised in the original complaint. The complainant will not be informed of the Lead's response or result of any special or regularly scheduled site visit review conclusions.

8.5 *Complaints about a Program Review or Approval Process and/or Appeal of an Approval Decision*

Complaints by the institutions about the approval standards and indicators, or procedures and policies used in the site visit approval process will be reviewed by the CLPNA CEO. All complaints must be made in writing and acknowledge that the individual may be identified as the complainant. The CEO or designate will conduct an initial review of the complaint to substantiate the complaint. The CLPNA will review the findings and, if necessary, present recommendations to address the complaint.