

# Determining Licensed Practical Nurse Scope of Practice

## INTRODUCTION

The College of Licensed Practical Nurses of Alberta (CLPNA) has the authority under the *Health Professions Act* (HPA) to carry out its activities and govern registrants\* in a manner that protects and serves the public interest.

Scope of practice is different for every registrant. Regulatory, employer, and individual scope of practice is measured in combination with the three-factor framework which includes nurse, client, and environmental factors. This practice guideline will assist registrants with making decisions about their individual scope of practice by supporting their professional judgment while also permitting flexibility in practice.

### Legislation and Regulation

There are a number of regulatory documents that shape Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN) practice. The HPA provides an overarching framework for regulation. The *Health Professions Restricted Activities Regulation* authorizes LPNs to perform certain restricted activities. The *Standards of Practice for Licensed Practical Nurses in Canada* provides a national framework for LPN practice and the *Code of Ethics for Licensed Practical Nurses in Canada* articulates the values of the profession and the responsibilities that LPNs uphold and promote. LPNs should be aware of any other legislation that is applicable to their practice.

## PURPOSE

This guideline has been developed by the CLPNA to help registrants and stakeholders interpret LPN scope of practice.

Previously, the CLPNA provided a competency profile to support understanding of LPN scope. The competency profile contained examples of tasks and competencies that LPNs may perform in their role. However, nursing scope of practice is complex, and this guideline is designed to promote critical thinking and support LPNs in working to their optimal scope of practice.

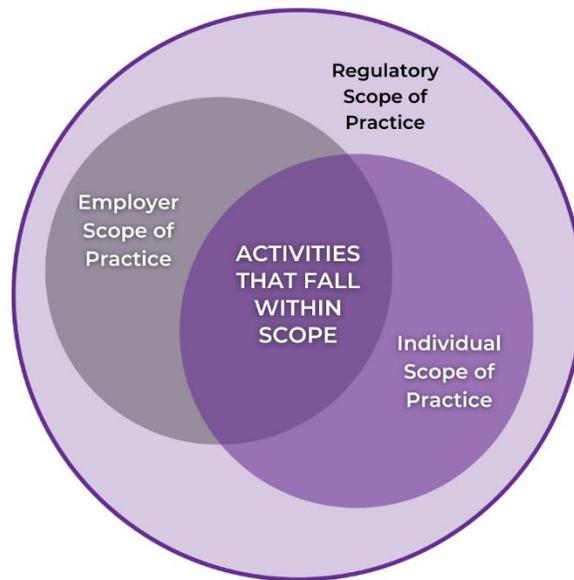
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\* In this document, “registrant(s)” has the same meaning as “regulated member(s)” in the *Health Professions Act*.

## DISCUSSION OF EVIDENCE

### Defining Scope of Practice

To determine an individual LPN's scope of practice, it is necessary to consider three areas. These areas include the professional scope of practice, the employer's scope of practice, and the LPN's individual scope of practice.



### ***Regulatory Scope of Practice***

An LPN's scope of practice is defined in the HPA as follows:

- applying nursing knowledge, skills, and judgment to assess patients' needs;
- providing nursing care for patients and families;
- teaching, managing, and conducting research in the science, techniques, and practice of nursing; and
- providing restricted activities authorized by regulation.

Restricted activities are high-risk health services that can only be performed by authorized health care professionals such as LPNs. The restricted activities that LPNs are authorized to perform are outlined in the *Health Professions Restricted Activities Regulation*. Further guidance related to restricted activities, and supervision requirements, is found in the CLPNA's *Standards of Practice on Restricted Activities, Advanced Practice, and Supervision*.

### ***Employer Scope of Practice***

Employers outline an LPN's scope of practice in their individual care settings through policies, guidelines, and job descriptions. The LPN scope of practice within an employer setting can change and is supported through additional training offered to LPNs.

The LPN scope of practice can vary between employers and settings. An activity that is authorized at one setting might not be authorized at another. LPNs are responsible for knowing and understanding the requirements of their current role. They are expected to seek out knowledge, guidance, and opportunities to practice safely and work to their full scope of practice within a particular environment. LPNs are accountable for engaging in education and practice to build their competence. Education and training can be provided by the employer to support the LPN.

### ***Individual Scope of Practice***

An LPN's individual scope of practice is defined by their knowledge, skills, and abilities. The individual scope of practice represents an LPN's entry-to-practice education, practice experience, and any additional education and training taken over the course of their career. As LPNs become more experienced in particular areas, their individual scope increases.

## **INFORMED PRACTICE**

### **Decision Making: What Activities Can LPNs Perform?**

The healthcare environment is complex, and LPNs are expected to exercise critical thinking and work to their optimal scope of practice. LPNs collaborate with their employers and healthcare teams to ensure that clients receive care from the professional best suited to perform an activity.

LPNs are responsible for evaluating their own skills and abilities in order to decide whether an activity or area of practice falls within their scope. Evaluating scope of practice requires an LPN to consider not only their professional, employer, and individual scope of practice but also the specific circumstances under which they would be practicing. Considerations related to individual circumstances include three different factors.

### **The Three-Factor Framework: Nurse, Client, and Environment**

Once an LPN understands their professional, employer, and individual scopes of practice, they need to consider the three-factor framework. When considered in combination, the three factors in this framework will help determine whether it is appropriate for an individual LPN to perform an activity. The more each of the three factors align, the more likely it is that an LPN can perform an activity.

### ***Nurse Competence Factors***

Nurse competence includes an individual LPN's knowledge, skill, experience, education, and training. Included in the nurse competence factor is the LPN's currency of practice (i.e., whether they have performed an activity recently).

The LPN needs to have the individual capacity to provide safe and competent care for the specific client in the specific setting.

### ***Client Factors***

LPNs provide professional services to individuals of all ages in a variety of care settings, making independent nursing decisions for clients.

LPNs assess their individual competence in relation to a client's needs and determine if they have the knowledge, skill, experience, and training to provide a specific service safely. They are expected to seek consultation or guidance as needed and work in collaboration with the healthcare team to manage client needs. Collaboration is an ongoing process that requires effective communication, is based on trust and respect, and is between all members of the healthcare team.

### ***Environmental Factors***

Environmental factors describe policies and resources to support LPN practice. LPNs should have access to the resources they need to perform their role. This includes the availability of training, proper equipment, and in-person or remote collaboration and consultation. LPNs should check, and comply with, the supervision requirements listed in the *Standards of Practice on Restricted Activities, Advanced Practice, and Supervision*.

Please see Appendix A: Critically Thinking About Your Scope of Practice to work through individual scenarios or use the Decision-Making Tool on the CLPNA website.

## **CONCLUSION**

Understanding the regulatory, employer, and individual scope of practice in combination with the tri-factor framework are key elements of LPN scope of practice.

Documents are updated frequently. For the most current version and access to related documents and resources, please visit the Knowledge Hub on [clpna.com](http://clpna.com). If after reading this document you have questions about the content of this guideline, please contact the Professional Practice Team at the CLPNA via [Ask CLPNA](#), or by phone at 780- 484- 8886 or 1-800-661-5877 (toll free in Alberta).

## Appendix A

### CRITICALLY THINKING ABOUT YOUR SCOPE OF PRACTICE

To determine whether something is in your scope of practice, you will need to think critically about your own skills, knowledge, and experience and how those factors fit into LPN scope of practice defined by legislation, regulation, and your employer policies and requirements. You will need to consider your practice environment and the needs of the individual client.

The questions below should be used to guide your thinking. The final determination of whether an activity falls within your scope of practice has to be made by the individual LPN. Only you have a full understanding of all of the different factors that go into the decision.

Is this activity within your professional scope of practice?

- Does the activity align with the practice statement in the *Health Professions Act*?
- Does the activity fall within the *Standards of Practice for LPNs in Canada* or the *Code of Ethics for LPNs in Canada*?
- Is the activity an authorized restricted activity? If so, is any additional supervision or education required?
- Does my regulatory body (CLPNA) have any policies or guidelines to support my decision?
- Is a complete medical order needed and in place?

Is this activity within your employer's scope of practice?

- Does your employer have policies, procedures, or requirements related to the activity?
- Is the activity within your job description?
- Does your employer support you performing this skill?

Is this activity within your individual scope of practice?

- Did you learn this in your practical nurse program? Is it an entry level competency?
- Do you have the knowledge, skill, experience, and individual competence to perform the skill safely?
- Have you received or do you require any additional training or education?

#### Three-Factor Framework

What is your competence level?

- Do you have the knowledge, skill, education, and training to perform this activity safely?
- Are you the healthcare provider best suited to perform this activity?
- Do you understand the client's overall condition, co-morbidities, and medical needs?

- Do you understand the indications and contraindications?
- What are the risks and benefits of the intervention?
- Would you be able to manage any adverse events that may occur?
- If you have not performed this activity before or it has been some time since you have, do you need to enhance or refresh your knowledge before performing this activity?

What are the client's needs?

- Does the patient have any co-morbidities?
- Is there a high risk of negative outcomes?
- Is the expected patient outcome something that you can manage with proper supports in place?

What environmental support is available?

- Are there policies and procedures available?
- Are any required supplies or equipment available, in good repair, and (if applicable) not expired?
- Is there an authorized practitioner available to assist, supervise, or consult with, if required?