

Nursing Professional Development Recognition Programme

Level of Practice Descriptors: Registered Nurse

Version 4.0



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Revision History

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Introduction

Nursing practice is recognized across a continuum of competence, encompassing both Enrolled Nurses and Registered Nurses. Each nurse brings a unique scope of practice, shaped by their education, experience, and regulatory requirements.

All nurses who hold a current Annual Practicing certificate are deemed Competent by Nursing Council NZ. Competence is defined as the standard required for safe and effective nursing practice and the descriptors in this document for Competent level are set by Nursing Council NZ.

Descriptors for Proficient, Expert and Designated Senior Nurse levels have been written by a cross sectorial group of nurses to reflect the diversity of practice areas within the profession.

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How to use this document

Nurses completing PDRP will provide examples from their practice that demonstrate how they meet each of the standards of competence (Pou). At Proficient, Expert and Designated Senior Nurse use the extra descriptors in this document as a guide to write at the level you are applying for. You are not required to provide evidence against each descriptor; however, the

descriptors will provide guidance to the breadth of evidence required for each Pou for each level of practice.

Nursing Council of New Zealand Pou (Standards of Competence)



Nursing Council of New Zealand (2025). *Standards of Competence for Registered Nurses*



PDRP Levels of Practice

This is a guide to support nurses to understand the requirements at each PDRP level and make an informed decision about the level they apply for. It is intended to support Managers to verify practice at each level.

Assessors will use this document to guide assessment. They should be able to see the attributes below within the body of evidence.

Competent RN

- Applies consolidated nursing knowledge and skills to practice
- Develops partnerships with health consumers that honour Te Tiriti o Waitangi, Kawa Whakaruruhau and/ or cultural safety
- Demonstrates confidence in familiar situations
- Manages and prioritises assigned health consumer care/workload, demonstrating increasing efficiency and effectiveness in practice
- Anticipates a likely outcome for the health consumer with predictable health needs
- Identifies unpredictable situations, acts appropriately and makes appropriate referrals
- Participates in quality improvement activities and/ or change initiatives in the practice setting

Proficient RN

- Demonstrates autonomous and collaborative evidence-based practice
- Has a holistic overview of the health consumer and the practice context upholding Te Tiriti o Waitangi, Kawa Whakaruruhau and/ or cultural safety
- Acts as a role model and a resource person for other nurses and health practitioners
- Supports and guides the health care team in day-to-day health care delivery
- Actively contributes to quality improvement activities and/ or change initiatives in the practice setting
- Demonstrates in-depth understanding of the complex factors that contribute to health consumer's health outcomes
- Actively contributes to clinical learning for colleagues

Expert RN

- Advances specialty knowledge, demonstrating clinical expertise and innovative practice
- Leads others to apply the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, Kawa Whakaruruhau and cultural safety
- Mentors and provides clinical learning opportunities for colleagues
- Demonstrates leadership within a nursing team unit/facility
- Drives sustainable quality improvement activities and/ or change initiatives in the practice setting utilising Kawa Whakaruruhau and/ or cultural safety lens where appropriate
- Delivers quality health consumer care in unpredictable challenging and/ or complex situations
- Advocates for the promotion and integrity of nursing within the health care team
- Seeks out ongoing education opportunities, supporting others to participate in professional development

Designated Senior Nurse

- Works in an appointed nursing position that requires specific clinical/ professional expertise
- Ensures that the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, Kawa Whakaruruhau and cultural safety are applied across the team/ service/ organisation/ sector
- Mentors emerging leaders
- Influences the practice of others
- Designs framework/ project/ audit that support evidence based best practice representing the nursing voice
- Facilitates and leads sustainable quality improvement activities and/ or change initiatives utilising Kawa Whakaruruhau and/ or cultural safety lens
- Promotes and represents the integrity of the nursing profession, advocating for nursing within the health care team/ service/ organisation/ sector

Pou One: Māori Health

Reflecting a commitment to Māori health, registered nurses support, respect and protect Māori rights while advocating for equitable and positive health outcomes. Nurses are also required to demonstrate kawa whakaruruhau by addressing power imbalances and working collaboratively with Māori.

Competent RN

- **Engages** in ongoing professional development related to Māori health and the relevance of Te Tiriti o Waitangi articles and principles.
- **Advocates** for health equity for Māori in all situations and contexts.
- **Understands** the impact of social determinants, such as colonisation, on health and wellbeing.
- Uses te reo and **incorporates tikanga Māori** into practice where appropriate.

Proficient RN

- **Guides others** in care that is aligned with Te Tiriti o Waitangi principles.
- **Initiates** programmes/ processes that provide equitable health outcomes for Māori.
- **Influences and supports** colleagues to improve responsiveness to Māori.
- **Embeds learning** from Professional development into practice.
- **Preceptors, mentors and influences** colleague's practice.
- **Reflects** with colleagues the impact of social determinants, such as colonisation, on Māori health and wellbeing.
- Examines own bias or assumptions and **reflects** how they might affect Māori Health outcomes.

Expert RN

- Applies understanding of system inequities for Māori health in Aotearoa, by **actively leading** and **supporting** colleagues, the team and or organisational systems to address these inequities.
- **Applies understanding** of racism as a complex system and social phenomenon which produces inequities and disadvantage for some and privilege for others.
- **Leads** and **supports** colleagues, the team and or organisational systems to address these inequities.
- **Develops** or **contributes** to Māori Health development opportunities/activities for others.
- **Leads** and **motivates** others to engage in professional development activity related to Māori Health.
- **Initiates Quality improvement** that positively impacts Māori Health outcomes and **follows up** on quality outcomes.
- **Drives** system-level responsiveness to Māori.
- **Leads** and **role models** kawa whakaruruhau in practice, delivery of care.
- **Initiates** Te Tiriti principles and articles for nursing practice, systems and process.

Senior RN (Designated Senior Nurse)

- Uses data and evidence to understand and **influence** system change, addressing inequities for Māori health in Aotearoa.
- **Provides informed, expert** advice to the sector on the impacts of racism, inequities and disadvantage.
- **Creates/ influences** environments that support better health outcomes for Māori.
- **Influences** the practice of other nurses by **role modelling** commitment to improving Māori Health outcomes within their service.
- **Develops** and **evaluates** programmes that improve Māori health outcomes at organisational or regional levels.
- **Champions** equity by influencing policy and service decisions to address systemic barriers for Māori.
- **Advocates** for system level changes that uphold Te Titiri o Waitangi principles.

Pou Two: Cultural Safety

Cultural safety in nursing practice ensures that registered nurses provide culturally safe care that is inclusive, responsive and equitable. This requires nurses to reflect on their practice, understand their cultural identity and the power imbalances between the nurse and the recipient of care.

Competent RN

- Practises **culturally safe** care which is determined by the recipient.
- **Challenges** racism and discrimination in the delivery of nursing and health care.
- Engages in partnership with individuals, whānau and communities for the provision of health care.
- **Advocates** for individuals and whānau by including their cultural, spiritual, physical and mental health when providing care.
- **Contributes** to a collaborative team culture which respects diversity, including intersectional identities, and protects cultural identity by acknowledging differing worldviews, values and practices

Proficient RN

- **Models** culturally safe care, to identify and address unsafe or biased practice.
- **Supports** and **guides** others in inclusive practices across the team.
- Adapts their practice to better meet the cultural needs of their patients and their whānau.
- **Preceptors, mentors** and **influences** colleagues practice to better meet the cultural needs of their patients and their whānau.

Expert RN

- **Leads and creates change** in cultural safety initiatives that define the problem using evidenced-based improvement methods and identifies patient / population needs, complexity and voice.
- **Initiates quality improvements** that positively impacts cultural safety outcomes, providing evidence of quality outcomes.
- **Creates change opportunities** and **champions** culturally safe practice across the team.
- **Leads** others to recognise and address cultural risks or bias.
- **Leads** cultural development within the service.
- **Develops** or **contributes** to cultural safety professional development opportunities/activities for others.

Senior RN (Designated Senior Nurse)

- **Designs and leads** the development of cultural safety frameworks and training across teams or services.
- **Evaluates** cultural safety outcomes and drives continuous improvement using evidence-based methods.

- **Advocates at governance levels** for culturally safe practices and policies.
- **Develops or leads** Cultural Safety professional development opportunities/activities for others.

Pou Three: Whanaungatanga and Communication

A commitment to whanaungatanga and communication requires registered nurses to establish relationships through the use of effective communication strategies which are culturally appropriate and reflect concepts such as whānau-centred care and cultural safety. An understanding of different forms of communication enables the nurse to engage with the interprofessional healthcare team, advocate for innovative change where appropriate and influence the direction of the profession.

Competent RN

- **Understands and complies** with professional, ethical, legal and organisational policies for obtaining, recording, sharing and retaining information acquired in practice.
- **Determines** the language and communication needs (verbal and non-verbal) of people, whānau and communities.
- Incorporates professional, therapeutic and culturally appropriate communication in all interactions.
- **Communicates professionally to build shared understanding** with people, their whānau and communities.
- **Assesses** health-related knowledge, provides information and **evaluates** understanding to promote health literacy.
- Ensures documentation is legible, relevant, accurate, professional and timely.
- Uses **appropriate** digital and online communication.
- Provides, receives and **responds appropriately** to constructive feedback.

Proficient RN

- Communicates and guides others in **complex or sensitive situations**.
- **Enhances** positive relationships across disciplines, **influencing** colleagues constructively.
- **Preceptors or mentors'** colleagues and students in professional communication techniques and strategies.
- Communicates with members of the interprofessional team.
- **Reflects** on and **adapts** own communication style to ensure effective communication with others.
- **Provides others** with constructive feedback to enhance their practice.
- **Preceptors, mentors and influences** the practice of their colleagues.

Expert RN

- **Leads** the team in building a strong team focusing on culturally appropriate patient relationships
- **Coaches colleagues** in therapeutic communication and de-escalation.
- **Manages complex** interpersonal dynamics with professionalism.
- **Leads** Whanaungatanga to foster relationships, build trust for patients/ Whānau and the wider team.

- **Understands and teaches** the dynamics of whanaungatanga and practical concepts and values e.g. enhance tapu (wellbeing, mana).
- **Develops or contributes** to **quality initiatives** or professional development opportunities/activities that support whanaungatanga.

Senior RN (Designated Senior Nurse)

- **Leads initiatives** that centre and elevate the patient and whānau voice.
- **Demonstrates** effective working relationships across disciplines and services.
- **Resolves complex** interpersonal and interprofessional challenges with **diplomacy and cultural sensitivity**.
- **Facilitates** the development of colleagues to use therapeutic communication and de-escalation tools.
- **Leads quality initiatives** or professional development opportunities/activities that support whanaungatanga.

Pou Four: Pūkengatanga & Evidence-informed Nursing Practice

Pūkengatanga and evidence-informed nursing practice requires registered nurses to use clinical skills, coupled with critical thinking and informed by high quality and current evidence, to provide quality, safe nursing care. Evidence-informed practice prepares the nurse to differentially diagnose, plan care, identify appropriate interventions, lead the implementation and evaluate care provision and outcomes

Competent RN

- Understands the wide range of assessment frameworks and uses the appropriate framework to undertake **comprehensive assessments** in the practice setting.
- Develops **differential diagnoses** based on a **comprehensive assessment, clinical expertise** and current evidence to inform the plan of care.
- **Implements and evaluates** effectiveness of interventions and determines changes to the plan of care.
- **Coordinates** and assigns care, **delegates** activities and **provides support** and direction to others.
- **Safely manages** medicines based on pharmacotherapeutic knowledge, including administration in accordance with policies and best practice guidelines.
- Supports individual and whānau choices of complementary therapies by ensuring they have sufficient information to make informed decisions about treatment options.
- **Understands** cultural preferences for complementary treatment, such as the use of rongoā, and supports integration into care.
- Demonstrates digital capability and online health literacy to support individuals, whānau and communities to use technology for managing health concerns and promoting wellbeing.
- Applies infection prevention and control principles in accordance with policies and best practice guidelines.
- **Identifies, assesses and responds** to emerging risks and challenging situations by adjusting priorities and escalating to the appropriate person.
- Understands and works within the limits of expertise and seeks guidance to ensure safe practice.
- Maintains awareness of trends in national and global nursing to inform change in practice and delivery of care

Proficient RN

- Demonstrates **in-depth knowledge** of assessment frameworks and skills in the practice setting.
- Demonstrates **clinical reasoning** and the use of **differential diagnosis** that guides care decisions in specialty area.
- **Guides** colleagues to provide evidence informed practice.
- **Supports** colleagues with **complex decision making**.
- Integrates clinical practice, experience and emerging evidence to guide nursing interventions.

- **Guides** care planning, delivery and **adjusts** interventions based on patient response and outcomes.
- **Guides others** to understand, and incorporate into practice, complementary treatments such as Rongoā Māori.
- **Supports** the development of safe practice in others.
- **Preceptors, mentors and influences** colleagues' practice.

Expert RN

- Utilises **advanced** assessment skillset in the service and teaches others
- Applies **complex** clinical reasoning, decision making and differential diagnoses development to provide **innovative** and individualized patient care
- **Leads** evidence-based practice development at team/ service level.
- **Leads** team / service in evidence-based practice research or policy development, using Kaupapa Māori evidence base.
- **Drives** improvements in clinical standards, care pathways, and patient outcomes through scholarly and reflective practice
- Utilises **advanced knowledge** of specialty medications and administration methods. This may include cultural complementary treatments such as Rongoā Māori.
- **Leads** digital capability, advancing knowledge and **integration** of technology into practice
- **Leads** the management of adverse events, establishing priorities, anticipating deterioration, delegations and escalation of the event

Senior RN (Designated Senior Nurse)

- **Leads (or promotes)** the performance development of nurses.
- Provides subject matter **expert** advice on nursing related learning and development.
- **Develops** audits and quality initiatives that support evidence -based best-informed practice.
- **Facilitates/ leads** and articulates change processes that support the implementation of programmes or new ways of working.
- **Leads** the application of evidence-based learning into practice.
- Identifies gaps in practice and **develops educational resources /opportunities** for staff to address these gaps.
- Articulates the latest NZ nursing demographic information published by Nursing Council and implications for nursing practice in their clinical area and across the motu.
- **Leads** the required work for the potential establishment of senior/ advanced nursing roles in their clinical area/ across the service e.g. nurse prescribing, nurse practitioners.

Pou Five: Manaakitanga & People-centred Care

Manaakitanga and people-centred care requires nurses to demonstrate compassion, collaboration and partnership to build trust and shared understanding between the nurse and people, whānau or communities. Compassion, trust and partnership underpin effective decision-making in the provision of care to support the integration of beliefs and preferences of people and their whānau.

Competent RN

- Ensures integrated relational and **whakapapa-centred care** to meet the needs of people and whānau.
- **Upholds** the mana of individuals, whānau and the nursing profession by demonstrating respect, kindness, honesty and transparency of decision-making in practice.
- **Facilitates** opportunities for people and whānau to share their views and actively contribute to care planning, decision-making and the choice of interventions.
- Establishes, maintains and concludes safe therapeutic relationships.

Proficient RN

- Builds strong partnerships with people and whānau to co-design care that reflects their values and preferences.
- **Guides** others to provide care that reflects the holistic needs of individuals, incorporating cultural, emotional, and spiritual aspects.
- **Supports** collaborative efforts across disciplines to ensure integrated, patient and whakapapa-centred care.
- **Advocates** for equitable access and culturally responsive care for all individuals and communities.
- **Preceptors, mentors and influences** colleagues' practice.

Expert RN

- **Champions** a culture of manaakitanga across teams, services, and systems.
- **Contributes** to the development of frameworks or models that embed patient and whānau-centred principles in care delivery.
- **Mentors** others in compassionate, culturally grounded practice and influences education and policy.
- **Drives** transformational care approaches that promote equity, dignity, and shared decision-making at all levels.

Senior RN (Designated Senior Nurse)

- **Leads or creates** a culture of manaakitanga across teams, services, and systems.
- **Leads** the development of frameworks or models that embed patient and whānau-centred principles in care delivery.
- **Leads** others to provide care that reflects the holistic needs of individuals, incorporating cultural, emotional, and spiritual aspects.

- Takes a **lead role** when dealing with patient/ whānau/staff complaints and meetings.
- Takes a **lead role** when dealing with staff who may have stepped across professional boundaries.
- Takes a **lead role** when dealing with staff who may be using social media inappropriately.

Pou Six: Rangatiratanga and Leadership

Rangatiratanga and leadership in nursing practice are demonstrated when nurses proactively provide solutions and lead innovation to improve the provision of care. Leadership requires all nurses to act as change agents and lead change when appropriate. Fundamental to the integration of leadership is the need for nurses to intervene, speak out, and advocate to escalate concerns on behalf of colleagues or recipients of care.

Competent RN

- Actively **contributes** to a collaborative team culture of respect, support and trust.
- Demonstrates professional and ethical accountabilities in practice and adheres to the Nursing Council of New Zealand Code of Conduct, relevant legislation and organisational policies and procedures.
- Understands continuous learning and proactively **seeks opportunities** for professional development.
- **Engages** in quality improvement activities.
- Identifies and responds appropriately to risk impacting the health, safety and wellbeing of self and others to practise safely.
- Understands the impact of healthcare provision on global and local resources, demonstrates and supports the constant assessment and improvement of sustainability practices

Proficient RN

- **Initiates and supports** quality improvement activity and practice improvements based on clinical needs and evidence.
- **Provides opportunities** for the development of less experienced nurses through **teaching, guiding** and **support**.
- **Supports** the integration of professional and ethical accountabilities in practice and adheres to the Nursing Council of New Zealand Code of Conduct, relevant legislation and organisational policies and procedures into the practice of others.
- **Guides others** to identify and respond appropriately to risk impacting the health, safety and wellbeing of self and others.
- **Preceptors, mentors and influences** colleagues' practice.
- Undertakes **formal leadership** roles in the team, eg nurse in charge, coordinator, shift lead.

Expert RN

- **Champions** quality improvement initiatives and change based on clinical needs and evidence.
- **Mentors, and develops** others in rangatiratanga and leadership strategies.
- **Provides expert advice** to others on specialty area knowledge and expertise.
- **Provides formal** written and oral feedback to students or colleagues, completes competence assessments.
- Undertakes **formal leadership roles** within service.
- Undertakes post graduate education, providing evidence of transition of learning to practice.

Senior RN (Designated Senior Nurse)

- **Influences** organisational culture through advocacy, innovation, and transformational leadership.
- **Mentors** emerging nurse leaders and **contributes** to succession planning.
- **Mentors** others to translate learning into practice.
- **Formally leads** service development, workforce planning, or strategic direction.
- Provides professional, clinical or cultural **supervision or mentorship** to other nurses.
- Utilises formal education to **promote and influence change**.
- Is **accountable** for service delivery.
- **Represents** nursing at local, national/ international forums.
- **Mentors** staff to provide formal written and oral feedback to students or colleagues, completes competence assessments.
- Articulate and **models** values and principles reflected in Te Mauri o Rongo (NZ Health Charter).
- Demonstrates a commitment to life-long learning through post graduate study.
- **Leads** performance management of nurses and other direct reports as required.
- **Leads and/ or contributes** to reviews of health and safety events in the work setting and identifies trends, educational opportunities and mitigation strategies