

# Code of Ethics for Licensed Practical Nurses in Canada

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## Foreword

The Canadian Council for Practical Nurse Regulators (CCPNR) is a federation of provincial and territorial members who are identified in legislation, and responsible for the safety of the public through the regulation of Licensed Practical Nurses (LPNs).

The Council of the CCPNR recognized the need for a single code of ethics across member jurisdictions to articulate the ethical values and responsibilities that LPNs uphold and promote, and to which they are accountable. The code of ethics guides LPNs ethical reflections and decision-making across all areas of LPN practice, and informs the public about the ethical values and responsibilities of the LPN profession and conveys the profession's commitment to society. This document also serves as a guide for curriculum development and for public and employer awareness of the practice expectations of the licensed practical nurse.

A steering committee from the representatives of all jurisdictions who license and/or regulate LPNs across Canada (with the exception of Quebec) was identified to guide and advise the project. One World Inc. was commissioned to research and develop the code of ethics in collaboration with the steering committee. This document was validated by the LPN community and key stakeholder groups across Canada and was approved by the Boards of the respective regulatory authorities of the CCPNR's Board members. The CCPNR thanks all participants who contributed to the creation of this document.

The CCPNR approves and adopts the code of ethics for LPNs outlined in this document.

The opinions and interpretations in this publication are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the Government of Canada.

Available in French under the title:

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## Preamble

The Code of Ethics articulates the ethical values and responsibilities that Licensed Practical Nurses (LPNs)<sup>1</sup> uphold and promote, and to which they are accountable. The Code serves to:

- guide LPNs’ ethical reflections and decision-making across all areas of licensed practical nurse practice; and,
- inform the public about the ethical values and responsibilities of the LPN profession and convey the profession’s commitment to society.

LPNs’ primary responsibility is to the client within the context of an inter-professional collaborative environment. “Client” refers to an individual (or their designated representative(s), families, and groups).

Respect for the inherent dignity and rights of clients, colleagues and LPNs underpins the five ethical principles encompassed in the Code. These principles although distinct are inter-related and include:

1. *Responsibility to the Public*
2. *Responsibility to Clients*
3. *Responsibility to the Profession*
4. *Responsibility to Colleagues*
5. *Responsibility to Oneself*

LPNs use the Code of Ethics in conjunction with professional standards and competencies, workplace policies, and legal requirements that guide their practice and behaviour. In achieving these requirements, they fulfill their contract with society for ethical practice.

The *Principles* and *Ethical Responsibilities* are described on the following pages. The *Principles* are statements of the five ethical principles to which LPNs are held accountable. The *Ethical Responsibilities* that accompany each Principle are inter-related and are statements of expected professional conduct in LPN practice situations. The *Principles* and *Ethical Responsibilities* are not in any order of priority – collectively they reflect the LPNs’ overall commitment to society. Appendix A provides Guidelines for Ethical Decision-making.

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<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this document, the term “licensed practical nurse” also refers to “registered practical nurse.”

# PRINCIPLE 1: Responsibility to the Public

Licensed Practical Nurses, as self-regulating professionals, commit to provide safe, effective, compassionate and ethical care to members of the public.

## Ethical Responsibilities:

LPNs:

- 1.1 Maintain standards of practice, professional competence and conduct.
- 1.2 Provide only those functions for which they are qualified by education or experience.
- 1.3 Demonstrate an understanding that community, society and the environment are important factors in the health of individual clients.
- 1.4 Respect the rights of all individuals regardless of their diverse values, beliefs and cultures.
- 1.5 Provide care directed toward the health and well-being of the person, family, and community.
- 1.6 Collaborate<sup>2</sup> with clients, their families (to the extent appropriate to the client's right to confidentiality), and health care colleagues to promote the health and well-being of individuals, families and the public.

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<sup>2</sup> Collaborate is defined as "to work in partnership with members of the interdisciplinary health care team while maintaining autonomy, within one's own scope of practice".

## PRINCIPLE 2: Responsibility to Clients

Licensed Practical Nurses provide safe and competent care for their clients.

### Ethical Responsibilities:

LPNs:

- 2.1 Respect the right and responsibility of clients to be informed and make decisions about their health care.
  - 2.1.1 Respect and support client choices.
  - 2.1.2 Assist and support client participation in making decisions about their health and well-being when factors reduce their capacity for making decisions, in accordance with applicable legislation and regulation.
  - 2.1.3 Respect and adhere to the jurisdictional legislation on capacity assessment and substitute decision-making when the client is incapable of consent.
  - 2.1.4 Consider with other health care professionals and substitute decision-makers the best interests of the client and any previously known wishes or advanced directives that apply in situations where the client is incapable of consent.
- 2.2 Advocate for the client to receive fair and equitable access to needed and reasonably available health services and resources.
- 2.3 Respect and protect client privacy and hold in confidence information disclosed except in certain narrowly defined exceptions.
  - 2.3.1 Safeguard health and personal information by collecting, storing, using and disclosing it in compliance with relevant legislation and employer policies.
  - 2.3.2 Report any situation where private or confidential information is accessed or disclosed without appropriate consent or legal authority, whether deliberately or through error.
  - 2.3.3 Ensure that any discussion/communication (verbal, written or electronic) is respectful and does not identify the client unless appropriate.
  - 2.3.4 Maintain professional boundaries in the use of electronic media.
- 2.4 Act promptly and appropriately in response to harmful conditions and situations, including disclosing safety issues to appropriate authorities.
- 2.5 Report to appropriate authorities and take other action in a timely manner to ensure a client's safety and quality of care when unethical or incompetent care is suspected.<sup>3</sup>
- 2.6 Provide care to each client recognizing their individuality and their right to choice.
- 2.7 Develop trusting, therapeutic relationships, while maintaining professional boundaries.
- 2.8 Use evidence and judgement to guide nursing decisions.
- 2.9 Identify and minimize risks to clients.
- 2.10 Apply new knowledge, technology and scientific advances to promote safety, client satisfaction and well-being.

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<sup>3</sup> Applicable legislation and employer policies should also be consulted to determine in what circumstances reporting is required.

## PRINCIPLE 3: Responsibility to the Profession

Licensed Practical Nurses have a commitment to their profession and foster the respect and trust of their clients, health care colleagues and the public.

### Ethical Responsibilities:

LPNs:

- 3.1 Maintain the standards of the profession and conduct themselves in a manner that upholds the integrity of the profession.
- 3.2 Participate in activities allowing the profession to evolve to meet emerging healthcare needs.
- 3.3 Practise in a manner that is consistent with the privilege and responsibility of self-regulation.
- 3.4 Promote workplace practices and policies that facilitate professional practice in accordance with the principles, standards, laws and regulations under which they are accountable.

## PRINCIPLE 4: Responsibility to Colleagues

Licensed Practical Nurses develop and maintain positive, collaborative relationships with nursing colleagues and other health professionals.

### Ethical Responsibilities:

LPNs:

- 4.1 Take appropriate action to address the unprofessional conduct of other members of the inter-professional team.
- 4.2 Collaborate with colleagues in a cooperative, constructive and respectful manner with the primary goal of providing safe, competent, ethical, and appropriate care to individuals, families and communities.
- 4.3 Engage in opportunities to inform colleagues and other health professionals about the LPN role and capabilities.
- 4.4 Acknowledge colleagues' roles and their unique contribution to the inter-professional team.
- 4.5 Respect the expertise of colleagues and share own expertise and knowledge.

## PRINCIPLE 5: Responsibility to Self

Licensed Practical Nurses recognize and function within their personal and professional competence and value systems.

### Ethical Responsibilities:

LPNs:

- 5.1 Demonstrate honesty, integrity and trustworthiness in all interactions.
- 5.2 Recognize their capabilities and limitations and perform only the nursing functions that fall within their scope of practice and for which they possess the required knowledge, skills and judgement.
- 5.3 Accept responsibility for knowing and acting consistently with the principles, practice standards, laws and regulations under which they are accountable.
- 5.4 Disclose to the supervisor/employer any potential or existing personal or legal conflict that makes it difficult to participate in an intervention.
- 5.5 Inform the appropriate authority in the event of becoming unable to practise safely, competently and/or ethically.
- 5.6 Engage in opportunities for career-long learning to continuously develop the competencies required to meet the ethical and regulatory requirements of the profession.
- 5.7 Prevent or manage conflict of interest situations.
- 5.8 Maintain the required mental and physical wellness to meet the responsibilities of their role.

## APPENDIX A: Guidelines for Ethical Decision Making



The following Guidelines are designed to assist LPNs to work towards resolution when faced with an ethical challenge.

Steps in Decision Making	Decision Making Process
<p><b>Step 1:</b> Describe the issue and identify the nature of the problem.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What kind of issue is it?</li> <li>• What ethical principles are involved?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Step 2:</b> Gather the factual information relevant to the issue.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Elaborate and clarify what happened.</li> <li>• What is the sequence of events?</li> <li>• What are the applicable policies, legislation or regulations               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Does a workplace policy address the issue?</li> <li>- What does the Code say?</li> <li>- What does legislation or regulation say?</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Who are the relevant stakeholders? How do they view the situation?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Step 3:</b> Clarify the challenge or problem.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the issue?</li> <li>• What ethical principles are at stake?</li> <li>• What stakeholders need to be consulted or involved in resolving the issue?</li> <li>• Is unethical conduct by a peer or other professional colleague suspected?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Step 4:</b> Identify options for action, recognizing that the best option may not be obvious at the outset.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the options that could resolve the issue?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Step 5:</b> Assess the options in light of applicable policy, legislation, or regulation in terms of advantages and limitations of each.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the pros and cons of each option in terms of rectifying and/or satisfying the ethical principle?</li> <li>• Do all options fall within applicable laws or policies?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Step 6:</b> Decide on a course of action taking all the gathered information into account.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is the best option for the clients involved that upholds ethical principles?</li> <li>• How will you justify or defend your decision in light of ethical principles, applicable policy, legislation or regulation?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Step 7:</b> Implement your decision as thoughtfully and sensitively as possible.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How will you ensure that in the process of acting upon your decision you uphold ethical principles?</li> <li>• How will you explain and/or justify the reasons for your decision?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Step 8:</b> Assess the consequences of your decision.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evaluate the process you used to arrive at the decision and the decision itself.</li> <li>• Did things turn out as you thought they would?</li> <li>• Would you do the same thing again?</li> <li>• What went right? What went wrong?</li> <li>• Would others benefit from sharing the experience?</li> </ul>



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