

# Expectations and Obligations During Emergencies

Effective: December 5, 2023

## INTRODUCTION

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

In accordance with the *Standards of Practice for Licensed Practical Nurses in Canada* and *Code of Ethics for Licensed Practical Nurses*, the CLHA expects LPNs to assume and continue their role in practical nursing as health care professionals during emergencies\* such as **pandemics**.

**Emergency preparedness** can help minimize societal disruption and increase protection for the public during times of **emergency**.

This policy focuses on the obligations of LPNs and describes the CLHA's registration practices during emergencies to help LPNs understand their responsibility and accountability in these challenging situations.

Terms found in the definitions section are **bolded** where they appear for the first time in this document.

## PURPOSE

The purpose of this policy is to provide clarity to LPNs about their nursing responsibility during emergencies. A non-practicing nurse or a nurse from another jurisdiction can find information about registration practices in this document if they want to contribute as a practicing LPN during emergencies.<sup>i</sup>

## POLICY

All LPNs are expected to fulfill their commitments to clients, the profession, and the public during emergencies by providing safe, competent, compassionate, and ethical care. Demands for services in some health care settings may increase dramatically due to staff absenteeism and other factors. LPNs may be trained for and asked to perform unfamiliar job tasks.

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\* In this document, "LPN(s)" has the same meaning as "regulated member(s)" in the *Health Professions Act*

\* When referring to emergencies, this also covers disasters. See the definitions for more information.

LPNs are reminded that they must continue to practice within their scope of practice as outlined in *Health Professions Restricted Activity Regulation* (HPRAR), standards of practice, and code of ethics.

The CLHA will provide LPNs with updates during emergencies, including information on ministerial orders and when LPNs may practice in an expanded scope of practice. For more details on expanded scope of practice, please see the Special Note on Performance of Restricted Activities section below.

### **Duty of Care**

LPNs have a duty of care to their clients, which means they have a legal obligation to avoid actions that could likely cause harm to their client. During times of emergencies, LPNs are expected to balance their professional obligations and other personal responsibilities, including the LPN's mental and physical wellbeing.

LPNs may refer to the *Standards of Practice for Licensed Practical Nurses in Canada* and *Code of Ethics for Licensed Practical Nurses* to help them consider the underlying ethical principles as they balance these competing obligations. LPNs should be mindful of their responsibilities when they have accepted client assignment(s), as abandonment of care may result in employer disciplinary action or a finding of unprofessional conduct.

During emergencies, LPNs may be more involved in performing medical procedures with a high risk of exposure to communicable diseases. LPNs should apply nursing principles to their practice, including the *Infection Prevention and Control* practice guideline, as they are accountable for practicing in a manner that protects clients, colleagues, and themselves from communicable diseases. Adherence to routine practices and any additional precautions will decrease the risk of communicable disease transmission.

### **Duty to Report**

LPNs have a duty to report and are obligated to report the information to the Medical Officer of Health if they become aware:

- that a client under their care or supervision is infected with a communicable disease; or
- that a health condition may become dangerous to public health.

The Alberta's Pandemic Influenza Plan (2014) outlines a provincial strategy to guide emergency response and recovery through a collaborative effort from stakeholders in the government and the health sector.<sup>ii</sup>

Please refer to the *Duty to Report* interpretive document for more information.

## Communicating During Emergencies

LPNs play an important and public facing role during emergencies and **disasters** and are often approached by clients, families, and organizations asking for surveillance data or information regarding the situation.<sup>iii</sup> When providing any information related to emergencies and disasters, LPNs are expected to provide information that is accurate, confirmed, and within their right of disclosure. It is an expectation that LPNs will not share false or misleading information.

## Registration Practices During Emergencies

The CLHA recognizes the importance of emergency preparedness. Necessary services will be maintained to support LPNs during emergencies. This includes helping LPNs and relevant stakeholders understand legislative directives on LPN professional practice via practice consultations and maintaining registration and renewal practices.

Only LPNs of the CLHA may apply licensed practical nursing knowledge, skills, and judgment to assess clients' needs and provide nursing care for clients and families. Individuals seeking to practice as an LPN in Alberta must be registered under one of the registration categories listed in the *Licensed Practical Nurses and Health Care Aide Profession Regulation* (LPNs and HCAs Profession Regulation) and meet the registration requirements for that category. Without special legislation such as a ministerial order (discussed below), all CLHA registration requirements remain in force during an emergency.

Qualified practical nurse graduates who are not registered or practicing in Alberta and wish to provide nursing care as an LPN during an emergency can apply for general, provisional, or courtesy registration under the conditions outlined in the *Declarations and Registration Requirements* policy. This includes individuals who want to volunteer. For example, applicants applying for initial registration are required to complete a personal declaration on good character, reputation, and fitness to practice. The CLHA will assess and process the applications as quickly as possible.

## Special Note on Performance of Restricted Activities

In the case of a **public health emergency**, the Minister of Health has the authority to use a ministerial order that changes the above-mentioned registration requirements. The order can authorize a person, or group of people, to perform a restricted activity subject to any conditions that the Minister establishes. Ministerial orders are not always granted in emergency situations.

If a ministerial order is issued to expand the restricted activities that may be performed by an LPN, this does not mean that all LPNs may perform that restricted activity. An LPN's ability to perform a new restricted activity as a result of this order will depend on their practice

environment and employer requirements. In all circumstances, an LPN must practice within their scope, individual competence, and professional judgement.

During times of emergency and disaster management, the CLHA will assist in relaying government updates to its LPNs, including any expansion of authorization to perform restricted activities under special legislation or amended standards of practice.

## **CONCLUSION**

This policy outlines the expectations and obligations of LPNs and the required registration practices during emergencies and disasters. LPNs are reminded that they are held to the same standards and accountabilities regardless of whether nursing care is provided in an employment or a volunteer situation during an emergency/disaster.

Documents are updated frequently. For the most current version and access to related documents and resources, please visit the Knowledge Hub on [clha.com](http://clha.com).

If after reading this document you have questions, please contact the CLHA's Professional Practice Team via [practice@clha.com](mailto:practice@clha.com) or 780-484-8886 or 1-800-661-5877 (toll free in Alberta).

## DEFINITIONS

**Disaster:** an event that results in serious harm to the safety, health or welfare of people or in widespread damage to property.

**Emergency:** a serious, unexpected, and often dangerous situation requiring immediate action.

**Emergency Preparedness:** includes all activities, such as plans, procedures, contact lists, and exercises, undertaken in anticipation of a likely emergency.

**Epidemic:** a worldwide outbreak of a specific disease which affects a large proportion of the population.

**Pandemic:** a widespread occurrence of an infectious disease over a whole country or the world at a particular time.

**Public health emergency:** the occurrence or threat of a dangerous health-related event that puts public health at risk. Examples of these events include an illness, a health condition, an epidemic or pandemic disease, a new or highly infectious agent, or other harmful materials.

## REFERENCES

<sup>i</sup> Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC), Pan-Canadian Public Health Network, *Canadian Pandemic Preparedness: Planning Guide for the Health Sector* (2015), <http://www.phac-aspc.gc.ca/cpip-pclcpi/assets/pdf/report-rapport-2015-eng.pdf>.

<sup>ii</sup> Government of Alberta, *Pandemic influenza*, <https://www.alberta.ca/pandemic-influenza.aspx>.

<sup>iii</sup> National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, National Academy of Medicine, Committee on the Future of Nursing 2020–2030, Jennifer Lalitha Flaubert, Suzanne Le Menestrel, David R. Williams, and Mary K. Wakefield (2021). *Nurses in Disaster Preparedness and Public Health Emergency Response*.