



# Code of Ethics for Health Care Aides in Alberta

Effective Date: February 2, 2026  
College of LPNs and HCAs of Alberta

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## 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** Health Care Aides (HCAs)\* in a manner that protects and serves the public interest.

The *Code of Ethics for Health Care Aides* (HCAs) establishes six fundamental principles that govern HCA practice and that HCAs are held **accountable** for upholding. The principles define best practices for HCAs, communicate the profession's commitment to **client** safety, and serve to protect the public. HCAs must not **engage** in any activity or behaviour that may cause harm to clients or decrease public trust in the profession.

The HCAs' primary **responsibility** is to the client. The HCA works in an environment that promotes teamwork and where the HCA applies the **ethical** principles below through their work with the public, the profession, **co-workers**, and themselves.

The ethical expectations of HCAs are broken down into six principles:

1. Support health and well-being;
2. Provide physically, mentally, emotionally, and **culturally safe care**;
3. Support and advocate for client choice, independence, and **dignity**;
4. Maintain **professional boundaries** while developing relationships;
5. **Self-reflect** and maintain personal well-being; and
6. Contribute to a healthy practice environment.

The six principles are applicable to HCAs in all settings. Performance expectations accompany each principle and describe the expectations for HCA practice. The principles and performance expectations are not in order of priority.

HCAs must follow all legal requirements, standards of practice, and the code of ethics, to provide safe, **competent**, and ethical care. Any action or behaviour that does not follow CLHA standards of practice or the code of ethics could be considered **unprofessional conduct** and may result in disciplinary action by the CLHA under the HPA.

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

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

## PRINCIPLE 1: PROMOTE HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

1.0 HCAs promote health and well-being for their clients through **person-centered care** and developing supportive relationships.

### Performance Expectations

HCAs must:

- 1.1. promote the health and well-being of the client by providing person-centred care.
- 1.2. recognize and **respect** different views of health, well-being, and illness.
- 1.3. engage with clients and families in a caring and nonjudgmental way.
- 1.4. provide care to clients that focuses on supporting health and well-being.
- 1.5. identify and reduce risks to client safety.
- 1.6. develop supportive relationships with clients, families, and the healthcare team while maintaining professional boundaries and keeping the client's goals at the centre of care.
- 1.7. advocate for the client and families that support them, within their HCA role, and quickly share relevant observations with the **most responsible healthcare practitioner** or supervisor.

## **PRINCIPLE 2: PROVIDE CARE THAT IS PHYSICALLY, MENTALLY, EMOTIONALLY, AND CULTURALLY SAFE**

2.0 HCAs apply knowledge and expertise to provide physically, mentally, emotionally, and culturally safe care to clients.

### **Performance Expectations**

HCAs must:

- 2.1. use professional knowledge and experience to provide safe, competent client care from birth to end of life.
- 2.2. promote inclusion and belonging and build environments that are free of racism and **discrimination**.
- 2.3. provide culturally safe care to all clients.
- 2.4. use sensitivity and compassion while communicating with clients, families, and members of the healthcare team, respecting their individual values, beliefs, and cultures.
- 2.5. learn and apply knowledge about the discrimination faced by clients.
- 2.6. recognize that **social factors** may influence a client's ability to accept and receive care.

## PRINCIPLE 3: SUPPORT AND ADVOCATE FOR CLIENT CHOICE, INDEPENDENCE, AND DIGNITY

3.0 HCAs support and advocate for client choice, independence, and dignity while respecting the client's **right to privacy** and **confidentiality**.

### Performance Expectations

HCAs must:

- 3.1. respect a client's rights and recognize that care may differ based on a client's background, values, and beliefs. It is important to respect the client's choices, even if they differ from the personal beliefs of the HCA.
- 3.2. advocate for the fair treatment of clients when HCAs identify that an individual is being treated differently as a result of their **social identity**.
- 3.3. support and advocate for a client's ability to make independent and informed decisions regarding their care.
- 3.4. respect and protect a client's right to privacy during in-person interactions or when meeting through the use of technology.
- 3.5. handle a client's personal information with confidentiality.

## **PRINCIPLE 4: MAINTAIN PROFESSIONAL BOUNDARIES WHILE DEVELOPING RELATIONSHIPS**

4.0 HCAs maintain professional boundaries while developing relationships built on empathy, honesty, and trust.

For more information on professional boundaries, please refer to the *Standards of Practice for Health Care Aides on Professional Boundaries*.

### **Performance Expectations**

HCAs must:

- 4.1. apply empathy, honesty, trust, **integrity**, and respect to the HCA-client relationships.
- 4.2. be responsible for maintaining professional boundaries.
- 4.3. avoid sharing too much personal information with the client and recognize the impact oversharing can have on the HCA-client relationship.
- 4.4. not share confidential information about their client, employers, or work through social media or any other communication methods.
- 4.5. provide care that is focused on the client's goals, values, beliefs, and needs, rather than one's own.

## PRINCIPLE 5: SELF-REFLECT AND MAINTAIN PERSONAL WELL-BEING

5.0 HCAs self-reflect and take action to maintain individual competence, improve professional development, and care for their personal well-being.

### Performance Expectations

HCAs must:

- 5.1. engage in **self-care**, including caring for their mental and physical well-being.
- 5.2. self-reflect and look for opportunities for ongoing personal and professional development.
- 5.3. reflect and seek guidance or support when their ability to practice safely, competently, or ethically is at risk.
- 5.4. report situations that may affect their well-being and their ability to practice safely to the regulatory college or the employer, as appropriate.
- 5.5. inform the employer if there is a conflict in personal beliefs that affects their ability to provide a specific service to clients.

**Note:** A conflict in personal beliefs is not a reason to end an HCA-client relationship or a reason to refuse care to a client.

## **PRINCIPLE 6: CONTRIBUTE TO A HEALTHY PRACTICE ENVIRONMENT**

6.0 HCAs contribute to a healthy practice environment through teamwork, respect, safe practices, and effective time management.

### **Performance Expectations**

HCAs must:

- 6.1. work together with clients, families, people who support the client, and co-workers to promote health and well-being.
- 6.2. contribute to a practice environment that is free of discrimination, harassment, and bullying.
- 6.3. respect the knowledge, skills, and efforts of co-workers and all other healthcare professionals.
- 6.4. take action to prevent or address conflict with others.
- 6.5. prioritize and organize work duties to meet client needs and support the healthcare team, including responding to urgent or time-sensitive requests.
- 6.6. respond to and report unsafe conditions and harmful behaviour as soon as possible, considering the urgency of the situation.

## DEFINITIONS

**Accountable:** the ability to explain why actions were taken or not for a job or task for which the HCA is responsible.

**Authority:** refers to the power or right to give orders, make decisions, and enforce obedience. It can also mean the appropriate person to give orders or make decisions.

**Bias:** the action of supporting or opposing a particular person or thing unfairly because of allowing your personal opinions to influence your judgment. Biases can influence how individuals, groups, or ideas are perceived or interacted with.

**Client:** an individual who receives a professional service from an HCA. The term client is interchangeable with patient and resident, depending on the work setting.

**Competent:** the ability to apply the knowledge, skills, behaviours, judgments, and personal attributes required to practice safely and ethically. Personal attributes include attitudes, values, and beliefs.

**Confidentiality:** the ethical duty to protect personal and health information about a client.

**Co-worker:** any employee, volunteer, student, or contractor who works with the HCA.

**Culturally safe care:** providing care to clients that is respectful of the power imbalance that exists between HCAs and clients while ensuring that the care provided is free from discrimination or **bias** based on any of the protected grounds set out in the Alberta Human Rights Act.

**Dignity:** the right of a person to be valued and respected.

**Discrimination:** an action or decision that has a negative effect on an individual or group based on personal characteristics, including a person's race, religious beliefs, colour, gender, gender identity, gender expression, physical disability, mental disability, age, ancestry, place of origin, marital status, source of income, family status or sexual orientation.

**Engage:** to be involved, participate, or show interest in something.

**Ethical:** the principle of something being right or wrong.

**Govern:** to lead, control, or manage an organization or group, often by creating rules and making decisions that guide their actions.

**Integrity:** being honest and trustworthy.

**Most responsible healthcare practitioner:** the health practitioner/professional with ultimate responsibility and accountability for the specific treatment/procedure(s) provided to a client.

**Person-centered care:** providing health care in a way that focuses on advocating for clients and respecting their choices, opinions, values, independence, and involvement in decisions. It also includes supporting their physical, mental, social, emotional, thinking, cultural, and spiritual needs.

**Right to privacy:** the right of a client to have some control over how their personal information or personal health information is collected, used, accessed or disclosed.

**Professional boundaries:** the behavioural expectations of an HCA that create and maintain a safe relationship between the LPN and clients, former clients, someone closely connected with a client, or a co-worker.

**Respect:** means treating clients and their families with dignity, considering their personal choices, and ensuring they have control over their own care while keeping their private information safe.

**Responsibility:** the ability to respond and answer for one's actions and duties. Being responsible means that an individual is trustworthy and reliable.

**Self-care:** any activity that supports a person's physical, mental, and spiritual well-being.

**Self-reflect:** the process of thinking about and examining your own thoughts, feelings, actions, and experiences to gain insight and improve one's practice.

**Social factors:** include protected grounds under the *Alberta Human Rights Act*, such as a person's race, religious beliefs, colour, gender, gender identity, gender expression, physical disability, mental disability, age, ancestry, place of origin, marital status, source of income, family status or sexual orientation and other factors such as education, employment, and historical trauma.

**Social identity:** a person's sense of who they are based on their background and any of the social factors that constitute a protected ground under the *Alberta Human Rights Act*.

**Unprofessional conduct:** according to the HPA, unprofessional conduct includes displaying a lack of knowledge, skill or judgment in the provision of professional services, contravening the HPA, code of ethics, or standards of practice, engaging in conduct that harms the integrity of the profession, or any other behaviour that is defined as unprofessional conduct under section 1(1)(pp) of the HPA.

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