



# Entry-Level Competencies for Health Care Aides in Alberta

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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.

To protect the public, the CLHA **enforces** standards of education and **competence** that are consistent with the HCA role, such as the Entry-Level Competencies (ELCs). ELCs are the foundational requirements for HCAs undergoing **registration** for the first time, following graduation from an approved HCA program or another pathway accepted by the CLHA.

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

## PURPOSE

This document outlines the knowledge, skills, judgment, and attitudes required of HCAs beginning their careers. These competencies are essential to providing safe, competent, and **ethical** care in the HCA role. The *Entry-Level Competencies for Health Care Aides in Alberta* can serve as a resource for employers and the public to promote awareness of the expectations of the entry-level HCA in Alberta.

## DISCUSSION

Entry-level HCAs are new to their role, and their confidence, knowledge, and abilities will grow through **self-reflection, collaboration**, mentoring, and support. With additional training and experience, HCAs expand their knowledge base and competence throughout their careers. Requirements for additional learning and professional growth are not addressed in this document.

The scope of practice for the HCAs in Alberta is defined by:

- **legislation** relevant to the HCA role;
- entry-level competencies; and
- other requirements set by the CLHA, such as regulatory documents.

The HCA role and scope of practice is based on the following four principles:

1. HCAs are **responsible** and **accountable** for providing safe, competent, and ethical care from birth to end of life.
2. HCAs provide person-centered and holistic care that includes **clients**, families, and caregivers.

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

3. HCAs follow their standards of practice and code of ethics while meeting the care needs of clients.
4. HCAs maintain and improve their individual competence and safe ethical practice.

HCA competencies are transferable across all healthcare settings in which HCAs provide care. They work with clients, families, and the healthcare team to promote the best possible outcomes.

## ENTRY-LEVEL COMPETENCIES

### Category 1 – Professionalism

An HCA:

1. Demonstrates an understanding of **self-regulation**.
2. Complies with legislation, as well as **regulatory** and employer **requirements**.
3. Demonstrates responsibility and accountability for decisions and actions.
4. Works within their own level of competence based on education, training, and experience.
5. Recognizes, responds to, and reports **unprofessional conduct** of self and others.
6. Demonstrates **privacy** and **confidentiality**.
7. Recognizes gaps in their own knowledge and abilities and seeks guidance, education, or training as appropriate.
8. Participates in self-reflection, continuing competence, and professional development.
9. Demonstrates time management.
10. Demonstrates **self-leadership**.
11. Manages their own **personal wellness**.
12. Demonstrates **fitness to practice**.
13. Demonstrates **emotional intelligence**.

## Category 2 – Foundational Knowledge

An HCA demonstrates an understanding and applies knowledge of:

1. Growth and development of clients from birth to the end of life, relevant to the HCA's practice.
2. Anatomy and physiology relevant to the HCA's practice.
3. The **psychosocial dimensions of health**.
4. The **social determinants of health**.
5. Common effects of aging.
6. The effects of common acute and chronic health conditions.
7. Palliative and end-of-life care.
8. Safe medication assistance.
9. Documentation fundamentals.
10. The history and legacy of residential schools, the *Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action*, Treaties and Indigenous rights, Indigenous teachings and practices, and how they continue to impact the health of Indigenous Peoples.

## Category 3 – Safe Work Environments

An HCA:

1. Promotes and maintains a safe, respectful, supportive, and healthy **workplace**.
2. Demonstrates safe infection prevention and control practices.
3. Applies safe body mechanics.
4. Demonstrates safe use of equipment.
5. Demonstrates safe food handling and nutrition assistance.
6. Prioritizes safety, including identifying, responding to, reporting, and preventing hazards, unsafe conditions, and responsive or harmful behaviours.
7. Demonstrates awareness of **emergency preparedness** procedures.
8. Recognizes emergency situations and responds appropriately.
9. Recognizes, responds to, and reports any near misses, errors, or **adverse events**, by the HCA or others.

## Category 4 – Client Advocacy

An HCA:

1. Obtains **informed consent** before providing care.
2. Promotes client independence.
3. Advocates for client rights and fair treatment of clients and families.
4. Demonstrates an understanding of the importance of advocating for the healing practices of Indigenous Peoples when they are requested by the client or family.

## Category 5 – Client Care

An HCA:

1. Provides **person-centered** care and performs skills safely within the HCA's scope of practice.
2. Follows the client's **care plan** and provides information for developing and updating the care plan.
3. Organizes care according to priorities.
4. Provides **trauma-informed care**.
5. Demonstrates **cultural humility** and **cultural safety** in all interactions.
6. Recognizes and reports changes in a client's condition.

## Category 6 – Ethics

An HCA:

1. Identifies and responds to ethical concerns.
2. Demonstrates knowledge of **human rights** and **anti-racism**.
3. Demonstrates self-reflection and **self-awareness** of personal **biases** to improve own practice.
4. Understands and maintains **professional boundaries**.
5. Initiates, maintains, and terminates the **therapeutic HCA-client relationship** appropriately.

## Category 7 – Collaboration and Communication

An HCA:

1. Demonstrates an ability to work in a variety of care settings.
2. Works collaboratively as part of the healthcare team.
3. Demonstrates effective problem-solving and conflict management.
4. Demonstrates an understanding of the HCA role and communicates it to clients, families, and other care providers where appropriate.
5. Demonstrates an understanding of the role of other healthcare providers within the healthcare team.
6. Demonstrates effective communication with clients, families, the healthcare team, and the regulatory college.
7. Demonstrates an understanding and use of verbal and non-verbal communication techniques.
8. Communicates with sensitivity, empathy, and compassion when interacting with clients, families, and members of the healthcare team.
9. Recognizes **communication barriers** and demonstrates effective communication with clients and families who have unique and diverse needs.
10. Understands and uses **medical terminology** appropriately.
11. Completes documentation as per regulatory and employer requirements.
12. Demonstrates competence in the use of **information technology**.

## CONCLUSION

This document outlines the basic knowledge, skills, judgment, and attitudes required of HCAs at the start of their careers. It serves as a resource for employers and the public to clarify the baseline knowledge, experience, and expectations of entry-level HCAs across all healthcare settings.

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

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

**Adverse event:** a harmful and negative outcome that happens to a client as a result of a medication or professional service that they have received.

**Anti-racism:** opposed to or intended to prevent racism. Racism includes unfair or harmful treatment of people based on their race.

**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.<sup>i</sup> Biases can influence how individuals, groups, or ideas are perceived or interacted with.

**Care plan:** the plan of care to be provided to an individual client. The client's abilities and physical, social, and emotional needs, as well as cultural and spiritual preferences, are considered when creating the care plan.

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

**Collaboration:** the process of working together with clients, their families, and other members of the healthcare team to determine and achieve a shared goal in the client's interest.

**Competence:** 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.

**Communication barriers:** obstacles that interfere with the clear sending, receiving, or understanding of a message. These barriers can distort or block the intended meaning, leading to misinterpretation, confusion, or conflict.

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

**Continuing competence:** the improvement of knowledge, skills, and judgment required to practice safely and ethically throughout one's career.

**Cultural humility:** a willingness to self-reflect and learn from others and having respect, empathy, and an openness to the client's view. Cultural humility involves humbly acknowledging oneself as a learner when it comes to understanding another's experience.

**Cultural safety:** an outcome based on respectful engagement that recognizes and strives to address power imbalances present in the healthcare system. It results in an environment free of racism and discrimination, where people feel safe when receiving healthcare. Cultural safety allows someone to authentically be who they are.

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

**Emotional intelligence:** the ability to manage your own emotions and understand the emotions of people around you. There are five key elements to emotional intelligence: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills.

**Enforces:** making sure people follow a law, rule, or obligation.

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

**Fitness to practice:** having the physical, mental, and emotional health required to provide safe, competent, and ethical client care.

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

**Human rights:** the right to live, work, and receive services without discrimination based on specific protected grounds: mental and physical disability, gender, gender identity or gender expression, sexual orientation, race and colour, religious beliefs, ancestry and place of origin, age, marital and family status, and source of income.

**Information technology:** the use of computer systems or devices to access information.

**Informed consent:** a process in which the client voluntarily decides to receive care after they have been given adequate information about that procedure or treatment.

**Legislation:** any legally binding rule that governs the HCA profession. This includes the *Health Professions Act* or other laws regulations, bylaws, standards of practice, and code of ethics.

**Medical terminology:** language used to describe the body's structures, processes, conditions, medical procedures, and treatments.

**Person-centered care:** providing healthcare 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.

**Personal wellness:** means being physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually healthy to maintain fitness to practice.

**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 HCA and clients, former clients, someone closely connected with a client, or a co-worker.

**Professional development:** gaining new skills and knowledge through continuing education and career training.

**Psychosocial dimensions of health:** include the mental, emotional, social, and spiritual aspects of health.

**Registration:** when a regulatory college approves an applicant to use a specific title, like Health Care Aide, and work in a certain profession.

**Regulatory requirements:** rules and guidance documents made by a regulatory body, such as the CLHA, that govern the practices of its regulated members. Some examples of regulatory documents include CLHA standards of practice, code of ethics, policies, and practice guidelines.

**Responsible:** duty to provide for the needs of a client following professional and legal standards.

**Self-awareness:** being aware of how our thoughts, feelings, behaviours, and values fit within our environment and the impact they could have on others.

**Self-leadership:** the practice of understanding who you are, identifying your desired experiences, and intentionally guiding yourself toward them.

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

**Self-regulation:** an individual's responsibility and accountability for their own decisions, actions, and professional conduct.

**Social determinants of health:** the conditions in an environment where people are born, live, learn, work, play, worship, and age that affect a wide range of health, functioning, and quality-of-life outcomes and risks. The main determinants of health include income and social status, employment and working conditions, education and ability to read/write, childhood experiences, physical environments, social supports and coping skills, and healthy behaviours. Other determinants are access to health services, gender, culture, and race/racism.

**Therapeutic HCA-client relationship:** a trusting relationship between a client and an HCA that respects and maintains professional boundaries and contributes to health-related treatment goals. A therapeutic relationship exists for a defined period of time.

**Trauma-informed care:** care that builds on the understanding that an individual's past and current experiences of trauma can affect their experiences within the medical system.

**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.

**Workplace:** a place of employment where people perform their work. A workplace is not limited to one location but could include any location where work is completed, in person or virtually.

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