

# Social Media Use

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

HCAs are expected to use social media **responsibly** and maintain **professionalism** online and in person. It is important for HCAs to consider the possible **negative outcomes** of their communication on social media platforms. This document outlines the principles, benefits, and risks of social media use.

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

## PURPOSE

This document guides HCAs on using social media. It outlines how social media should be used in keeping with the HCA standards of practice, code of ethics, and other policies.

## DISCUSSION OF EVIDENCE

### What is Social Media?

Social media is an umbrella term for electronic communication used to create online communities to share information, ideas, personal messages, and other content. Popular social media sites include Facebook, Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), TikTok, Snapchat, and YouTube. These websites have communities centred around sharing information about common interests and passions.

The International Nurse Regulator Collaborative (INRC) has developed guidance for health professionals on social media use. It summarizes its guidance as *The 6 “Ps” Principles of Social Media Use*.<sup>i</sup>

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

### **The 6 “Ps” Principles of Social Media E-Professionalism**

- Professional - act professionally at all times
- Positive - keep posts positive
- Client/person-free - keep posts client or person free
- Protect yourself - protect your professionalism, your reputation, and yourself
- **Privacy** - keep your personal and professional life separate; respect the privacy of others
- Pause before you post - consider consequences; avoid posting in anger

HCAs' use of social media should always be professional and ethical. Any information or opinions posted must respect the confidentiality and privacy of others.

### **Benefits of Social Media Use**

- self-expression
- finding others who have common interests
- discussing ideas freely while learning from others
- sharing experiences of events that may be difficult to discuss in person
- developing a professional network
- increasing personal awareness of current events

### **Risks of Social Media Use**

- confidential information posted to social media becomes public and can be accessed, read, saved, and utilized by others
- misinformation spreads quickly
- misuse of social media can harm the integrity of the profession
- **professional boundaries** can be violated

## **INFORMED PRACTICE**

### **Privacy & Confidentiality**

As required by the Health Information Act, HCAs must not disclose any client information (medical history, photographs, or documentation) on social media platforms. Best practices for protecting client privacy and **confidentiality** include:

- Do not **disclose** any information that violates a client's right to confidentiality and privacy.
- Avoid using personal devices in the workplace. If an employer requires the use of a personal device, try to use it for work-related purposes only during work hours.

- Do not post about clients at any time, with or without **consent**.

## **Professionalism**

- Avoid using protected titles (HCA/Health Care Aide) or a similar identifier on social media.
- Be familiar with employer requirements for using social media.
- Be professional in online interactions as you would face-to-face.
- Don't degrade or bully anyone online, especially clients, former clients, and colleagues.
- Protect the profession's **integrity**.
- Use appropriate communication channels—not social media — to discuss, report, and resolve workplace issues.
- Adding clients as "friends" on social media may violate professional boundaries. For more information, see the *Standards of Practice for Health Care Aides on Professional Boundaries*.

## **Evidence-Based**

Communicating information relating to healthcare (e.g., immunization, mental health, etc.) through social media should be evidence-based.

When sharing information (websites, videos, podcasts, etc.), all information should be accurate, current, and reliable. See the Evidence-Informed practice guideline for more information.

## **CONCLUSION**

If misused, social media can reflect poorly on the profession and the HCAs themselves. This guideline outlines best practices for using social media to avoid poor outcomes. If there are concerns that social media use may be inappropriate, refer to this document and consider if social media usage violates client confidentiality, privacy, or the reputation of the HCA profession.

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

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).

## **DEFINITIONS**

**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.

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

**Consent:** agreement to what is being done by another person such as, the client approves of the proposed actions of the HCA and the healthcare team. Consent also means an agreement to do something.

**Disclose:** to make personal health information available to others or to release it to another person.

**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.

**Negative outcomes:** an unexpected result of an action taken by an HCA that could harm a client.

**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, or other healthcare providers.

**Professionalism:** the behaviour, skills, and competencies that someone of a particular profession is expected to follow

**Responsibly:** having good judgment and the ability to act correctly.

## REFERENCES

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<sup>i</sup> “*International Nurse Regulator Collaborative*, “Social Media Use: Common Expectations for Nurses,” *INRC*, May 2017, <https://www.inrc.com/Social+Media+Use+Common+Expectations+for+Nurses.page>.”