

**Resolution: Clinical Nurse Specialists expanded formulary prescribing authority**

**Submitted by:** Dr. Paul-André Gauthier, RN, CNS; PhD nursing on behalf of the Clinical Nurse Specialist Association of Ontario

**Conflict of Interest:** No known conflict of interest

**WHEREAS**, Clinical Nurse Specialists (CNSs) have provided specialized care and expertise in Ontario and Canada for over 60 years, significantly contributing to improved patient outcomes and timely access to specialized care;

**WHEREAS**, the current lack of sufficient support for specialized nursing care in hospitals, long term care facilities, chronic diseases programs, etc., negatively impacts not only patient outcomes, but nurses also; CNSs have the capacity to provide a wide range of specialty services

**WHEREAS**, NPs in Ontario have successfully held prescribing authority in primary care for over 25 years, and CNSs in over 40 states in the U.S. have prescribing authority and title protection, and improved care delivery in hospital, etc.; and RNs in Ontario have recently been authorized to prescribe certain medications;

**THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED**, that the Registered Nurses Association of Ontario (RNAO), in collaboration with CNS-ON, develop and present a detailed proposal outlining the benefits and framework for CNS prescribing authority in Ontario, including an expanded formulary (to prescribe) appropriate to the area of specialization.

**THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED**, RNAO and CNS-ON jointly lobby policymakers, healthcare leaders, and other stakeholders to ensure the successful implementation of prescribing authority as core skills for CNSs, emphasizing its potential to enhance patient care and system efficiency.



Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario  
L'Association des infirmières et infirmiers  
autorisés de l'Ontario

## Background

Allowing Clinical Nurse Specialists (CNSs) to prescribe medications and treatments provides several advantages and benefits to patients, and healthcare organizations. Here are some key points:

### FOR PATIENTS

#### Improved Access to Care

- CNSs can address patient needs more promptly by prescribing necessary medications or treatments within their specialties without delays caused by waiting for physician approval.
- In under serviced or rural areas, CNS prescribing can significantly improve access to essential healthcare services and specialized care.

#### Continuity of Care

- CNSs have a deep understanding of their patients' health conditions, enabling them to provide seamless and personalized care.
- CNSs are specialists and skilled in identifying early warning signs of complications in their area of expertise (e.g., infection prevention, diabetes, mental health, cardiac care, wound management). Timely interventions minimize the need for expensive emergency care or extended hospital stays.
- CNSs can quickly adjust treatment plans based on their direct interaction with patients.

#### Comprehensive Care

- CNSs are skilled in advanced assessment, diagnosis, and treatment, ensuring that patients receive holistic and evidence-based care.
- CNSs specializing in chronic disease management (e.g., diabetes, depression, anxiety, COPD, heart failure) provide tailored care plans that reduce hospital admissions and emergency visits. They educate patients on self-management techniques, preventing costly disease exacerbations.
- CNSs excel in educating patients about their conditions, medications, and treatments, leading to better adherence and improved outcomes.

### FOR HEALTHCARE ORGANIZATIONS

#### Efficiency and Cost-Effectiveness

- CNSs excel in managing complex cases and ensuring patients receive appropriate care before discharge and reducing hospital readmissions, or avoiding hospitalization completely. CNSs use interventions, such as detailed discharge planning, patient education, and follow-up coordination, to significantly lower the risk of preventable readmissions. This not only improves patient outcomes but also reduces the hospitals visits and costs.
- CNS prescribing with an expanded formulary within their specialty reduces the need for multiple healthcare appointments, cutting costs and improving resource allocation.
- CNSs can streamline care processes by implementing evidence-based practices and clinical guidelines, and optimizing care delivery. For example, they can lead quality improvement projects that eliminate inefficiencies, reduce unnecessary tests or procedures, and enhance patient flow, directly saving time and resources.

#### Enhanced Team Collaboration

- CNSs can effectively collaborate with other healthcare providers by taking on prescribing responsibilities, reducing the workload on physicians and allowing for better division of labor, as CNSs are instrumental in delivering timely and effective care to patients.
- CNSs play a crucial role in staff training, mentoring, and professional development. By enhancing the competency of nursing staff and reducing burnout, CNSs contribute to higher job satisfaction and lower turnover rates. This helps hospitals avoid high costs associated with recruiting and training new personnel.

#### Filling Gaps in Care



# RNAO

Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario  
L'Association des infirmières et infirmiers  
autorisés de l'Ontario

- In areas with a shortage of physicians, CNSs with expanded formulary prescriptive authority can bridge gaps, ensuring patients receive timely and necessary interventions.

**Some references:**

Croan, L., and Quinn, B. (2023). Non-medical prescribing. In *The role of the Clinical Nurse Specialist in cancer care* (eds H. Kerr and J. Munter). Wiley – Online library. <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781119867029.ch12>

Lewandowski, W., & Adamle, K. (2009). Substantive areas of clinical nurse specialist practice: a comprehensive review of the literature. *Clinical nurse specialist CNS*, 23(2), 73–92.  
<https://doi.org/10.1097/NUR.0b013e31819971d0>

Canadian Nurses' Association (n.d.). Clinical Nurse Specialist. Retrieved from <https://www.cna-aiic.ca/en/nursing/advanced-nursing-practice/clinical-nurse-specialists>