

The NCQAC continuing competency (continuing education and practice hours) rule changes are in 246-840-200 through 246-840-260 and go into effect June 12, 2021.

For frequently asked questions (FAQs) and responses about continuing competency, please review the Nursing Care Quality Assurance Commissions continuing education and competency FAQs below.

Contact: nursing@doh.wa.gov or 360-236-4703.

Changes to the Rules

LPN, RN, and Other License Status	Changes to Active Nursing Practice Hours	Changes to Continuing Education Hours	Action Required
Active RN and LPN *ARNP	From 531 hours every 3 years to a minimum of 96 hours yearly and will start with the licensee's first full renewal date, on an individual's birthday	From 45 hours every 3 years to a minimum of 8 hours yearly *ARNP continuing education remains the same	Yearly requirements to start on first full renewal date, on an individual's birthday *ARNP renewal remains on a two-year cycle
Retired Active	From 96 hours every 3 years to a minimum of 24 hours yearly (no more than 90 days a year)	From 45 hours every 3 years to a minimum of 8 hours yearly	Yearly renewal to start on first full renewal date, on an individual's birthday
Expired or inactive \leq 3 years	From 531 hours every 3 years to a minimum of 96 hours yearly	45 hours every 3 years to a minimum of 8 hours yearly	Yearly renewal to start on first full renewal date, on an individual's birthday
Expired \geq 3 years, not in active practice	Must complete an approved Nursing Commission refresher course		Must complete an approved Nursing Commission refresher course. Yearly renewal to start on the first active licensure full renewal date, on an individual's birthday
Endorsement			After endorsement, the required continuing education and active nursing practice hours apply

*ARNP- Your RN license is affected by the continuing competency change. You must have an active Washington State RN license to be eligible for an ARNP license to meet continuing education and active nursing practice hours with your national certifying body. The Nursing Commission's approved certifying bodies are found in [WAC 246-840-302](#) and continuing competency requirements found in [WAC 246-840-455](#).

General continuing competency information

How are continuing education hours defined?

Hours are defined as the time it takes the nurse to complete the continuing education activity. For example, one hour is defined as 60 minutes of education, training, or self-study.

How are continuing education credits calculated?

There is a difference between continuing education credits and contact hours. One contact hour is equal to 60 minutes of instruction. The Nursing Care Quality Assurance Commission accepts courses that carry a credit-hour designation using that calculation.

Nurses endorsing into WA get a full renewal cycle to complete continuing education and active nursing practice hour requirements. This is the same with new graduates, if an individual's birthday is within 90 days of issuing the license, they would have 90 days plus a year to complete continuing competency with the new rules.

Do continuing education contact hours for education have to be formal continuing education units or credits, or continuing nursing education?

The laws and rules do not require any continuing education hours to have formal continuing education units (CEUs) or continuing nursing education (CNE). The Nursing Care Quality Assurance Commission calculates by hours, not by CEU credits. Training can be through an employer or another entity. Example of earned hours related to nursing practice includes Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR), Advanced Cardiovascular Life Support (ACLS), Pediatric Advanced Life Support (PALS), reading a journal article or blood-borne pathogens-infection control training.

Methods of meeting continuing education and practice hour requirements

What types of continuing education meet the requirement?

Any type of continuing education that is related to the practice of nursing. Training by an employer/institution, self-study training, or accredited courses may be counted. Examples include CPR training or blood-borne-pathogen training and reading a journal article related to nursing practice.

Can the nurse count the required training for suicide prevention and telehealth training?

Yes, the nurse can count training in suicide prevention and telehealth training.

Can the nurse count volunteer hours to meet the practice hour requirement?

Yes, practice hour requirements can be paid, unpaid, or as a volunteer performing nursing care.

What activities qualify as practice hours?

Practice is interpreted liberally. Any job or position that requires or recommends a nursing license would meet the criteria as any activity performed as an employee or volunteer that is within the legal scope of nursing practice. Qualified activities include bedside nursing, teaching nursing, supervising care, consulting, clinical experience in a nursing program, caring for a family member, faith-based nursing, insurance nursing, coordinating/managing care, researching, regulatory nursing, paralegal nursing, or publishing/authoring.

Can providing nursing care for a family member be counted for practice hours?

Hours can be counted for active nursing practice hours when providing nursing care for a family member, friend, or neighbor whether this is in a paid or unpaid position.

Can preparation count as practice hours for a nursing-related educational presentation?

Hours used to prepare and present a nursing-related educational presentation can count for practice hours. An alternative is to count these for continuing education hours.

What types of continuing education courses are approved by the Nursing Care Quality Assurance Commission?

The commission does not approve continuing education courses.

Can online education classes count towards continuing education hours?

Yes. Continuing education hours may be obtained through successful completion of an online or in-person course.

Can an independent study or research project be counted towards practice hours?

An independent study or research project may be counted towards practice or continuing education hours.

Can the required suicide prevention training course be used for continuing education hours?

Since January 1, 2016, Washington requires that nurses and other health professionals complete a one-time mandatory six hours of continuing education (CE) in suicide assessment, treatment, and management. The training must be taken as a course from the DOH-approved [Model List](#). Legislation ([RCW 43.70.442](#)) requires that the health professions listed below take a suicide prevention course that meets their hour and content requirement before the end of the next full continuing education reporting period. The law exempts the Advanced Registered Nurse Practitioner-Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetists (ARNP-CNS) from the requirement.

Can the required telehealth training be used for continuing education?

A nurse can count telehealth training as continuing education. Since January 2021, Washington requires that nurses providing nursing telehealth services are required to complete telemedicine training. To learn more about the law, visit [RCW 43.70.495](#). For training options, visit the [Washington State Telehealth Collaborative Training page](#).

I'm attending graduate nursing school, do these hours count for continuing education?

A nurse may receive continuing education for attendance and completion of courses within the framework of a curriculum that leads to an academic degree in nursing or an academic course relevant to the licensee's area of nursing practice. The academic course must have been completed within the licensing period for which the renewal takes place.

Continuing education and practice hour requirements for LPNs and RNs

Will the new continuing education and practice hour requirements change affect my nursing licensure?

Yes, for licensing renewal, LPNs and RNs must complete 8 continuing education hours in the nurse's area of practice, and 96 active practice hours yearly.

Continuing education and practice hour requirements for Retired Active RNs

What are the continuing competency practice hour requirements?

For retired active nurses, education hours are reduced to a minimum of eight hours yearly and practice hours are reduced to a minimum of 24 hours yearly.

Continuing education and practice hour requirements for inactive and expired license

Is a nurse with an inactive nurse license required to complete continuing education hours?

Completion of continuing education and practice hours are not required with an inactive or expired nursing license.

Is a nurse with an active license who does not practice in Washington, but practices in another state, required to meet the continuing education and practice hour requirements?

Yes. A nurse with a Washington state license must meet the continuing competency (education and practice hour) requirements regardless of which state they practice or reside in.

Do continuing education or practice hours completed in another state or country meet the requirement?

Yes. The education or practice hours can be completed in another state or country if they meet the required education and practice hours.

Approval of continuing education and practice hour requirements

Does the Nursing Care Quality Assurance Commission approve and/or accredited continuing education programs?

No. The Nursing Care Quality Assurance Commission does not approve and/or accredited continuing education programs.

Does the continuing education/training course require approval by an accredited organization for formal continuing education hours or credits?

No. The training or continuing education course does not require approval or accreditation for continuing education hours from a nursing or other professional organization.

How does the nurse choose what continuing education to take?

Continuing education should relate to the nurse's area of professional practice or specialty or areas identified through reflection and self-assessment for professional growth.

Licensure renewal cycle and continuing competency

Is a nurse who renews their license in October 2021 required to meet the new continuing education and practice hour rules?

A nurse has a full renewal cycle to complete the new continuing education and practice hour requirements. For example, if a nurse is required to renew the nursing license in October 2021 (birthdate), then the new continuing education and practice hour requirements take place between October 2021 and October 2022 (the licensing period for the 2022 renewal).

A reminder to be aware to renew your license before or on the expiration date. If you do not renew your license before the expiration date, you will not be able to renew online. A delay in processing time may affect your active licensure status.

Is a nurse who gets a license through the endorsement process and in between their birthdate, required to get the full nursing practice and continuing education hours, or is this pro-rated?

The Washington state nursing renewal cycle is based on the nurse's birthdate. A nurse endorsing into Washington state will have a full renewal cycle to complete continuing education and practice hour requirements.

Is a new graduate who gets a license required to get the full nursing practice and continuing education hours, or is this pro-rated?

The Washington state nursing renewal cycle for licensure is on the nurse's birthdate. A new graduate nurse who gets the initial license within 90 days of license issuance, would not need to meet the continuing practice hour and continuing education hour requirement until the full renewal cycle.

Can continuing education or practice hours be carried over if more continuing education or practice hours are completed during the renewal period?

No. nurses cannot carry over any hours to the next renewal period.

Maintaining records

Does the nurse need to send in documentation to the Nursing Care Quality Assurance Commission of practice hours or continuing education hours to renew a nursing license?

No. The nurse does not need to send in documentation to renew a nursing license.

How long should continuing education hour and practice hour documentation be retained?

The Nursing Care Quality Assurance Commission recommends keeping these documents for at least two years.

Does the Nursing Care Quality Assurance Commission ever ask for documentation for practice or continuing education hours?

The Nursing Care Quality Assurance Commission may ask for documentation for nursing practice and continuing education hours during a disciplinary investigation.

Practice and continuing education hours are NOT required for initial licensure and with the endorsement process.

What types of documentation demonstrate compliance with practice hour requirements?

The Nursing Care Quality Assurance Commission recommends maintaining an electronic or paper log of practice hours. More options are summarized in this [link](#).

<https://www.doh.wa.gov/Portals/1/Documents/Pubs/669332.pdf> .

What types of documentation demonstrate compliance with continuing education requirements?

Certificates of satisfactory course completion;

- A current certificate from a nationally recognized certifying body;
- Meeting minutes or meeting attendance rosters documenting participation in professional nursing organizations or employer-sponsored committees;
- Certificates of completion of attending conferences with hours of the event identified;
- A final transcript or transcript of classes documenting current progress towards an advanced degree in a field related to nursing practice;
- Documentation of completion of a nursing research project as the principal investigator, co-investigator, or project director, such as a summary of findings, thesis, dissertation, abstract, or granting agency summary;
- Publication or submission for publication to a health care-related article, book chapter, or other scholarly work;
- Presentations on a health care or health care system related topic with documentation such as a program brochure, agenda, course syllabi, or a letter from the offering provider identifying the nurse's participation;
- Documentation of an independent study;
- Advanced education toward an advanced degree at an accredited college or university.

Audit Process

I am late renewing my RN license and would like to reactivate my license. Is there a grace period for a late renewal?

There is no grace period for those reactivating their license from expired or inactive license status. A renewal fee is due on an individual's first birthday after reactivation. Keep in mind, once the license is reactivated into "active" status, an individual must renew on their birthday even if it is a week later.