

# A Nurse's Guide to the Nurses' Health Program



**NURSES'**  
Health Program

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# Welcome to the Nurses' Health Program (NHP)

## About the Nurses' Health Program

The Nurses' Health Program (NHP) is a voluntary bilingual program for Ontario nurses. It is designed to encourage nurses to seek treatment for substance use and/or mental health disorders that may affect their ability to practice nursing safely. It is a recognized best-in-class approach that focuses on early identification and referral for treatment. The program is modelled on similar ones used by other regulated health professions across the province.

NHP provides an opportunity for Ontario nurses with substance use and/or mental health disorders to receive support to recover and practice safely. It is designed so that eligible participants can continue practicing while following the terms of a contract and being closely monitored by the program.

The program monitors the nurse's recovery so that they may be supported to practice safely or return to practice, which promotes professional accountability and protects the public.

NHP was developed by the College of Nurses of Ontario (CNO), the Ontario Nurse's Association (ONA), the Registered Nurse's Association of Ontario (RNAO) and the Registered Practical Nurses Association of Ontario (RPNAO). Lifemark Health Group is the NHP service provider.

## Philosophy

The Nurses' Health Program embraces the philosophy that nurses who have substance use and/or mental health disorders should have an opportunity for education, treatment and recovery. We know nurses benefit from specialized treatments that recognize their unique needs as health care professionals.

Our focus reflects the balance between supporting nurses in recovery and protecting the public. We believe that with the right support nurses can continue or return to safe nursing practice benefiting both the nurse and the public.

## How you benefit from NHP

- access to professional advice and health care services, including treatment providers
- an initial assessment and case management paid for by NHP
- a program tailored to your unique needs to support your recovery
- confidence that your name will not be disclosed to the public if you follow the terms of your contract.

## Program entry requirements

To be eligible for the program you must be:

- registered with the College of Nurses of Ontario in the general or extended class
- experiencing issues with substance use and/or mental health disorders that impact your ability to practice safely.

## How NHP works

You may contact NHP for general information and referral to resources without enrolling in the program. Once you've signed the consent for assessment (Program Enrolment Consent Form), you are enrolled in the program.

### Step 1 – Referral

Anyone can contact NHP for program information. You can refer yourself or you may be referred by CNO as an alternative to the Fitness to Practise process.

If you are referred to NHP by CNO, you receive a letter from CNO advising you that you may have a possible health condition that affects your ability to practice safely. The letter outlines your option to enrol in NHP as an alternative to a possible health inquiry process.

### Step 2 – Enrollment and assessment

After your initial contact with NHP, you may be contacted by a qualified case manager for an initial assessment.

If required, you are referred for an independent medical evaluation (IME) with a regulated health professional specializing in addictions and/or mental health. The IME is conducted in person or through Ontario Telemedicine Services. Your NHP case manager coordinates the assessment and provides you with appointment details.

The assessment determines your eligibility for the program and the nature of the treatment(s) you may need. This assessment includes a review of relevant sources of information, including information from

interviews and an independent medical evaluation. The result of the assessment is used to create a treatment plan and a monitoring contract.

Following your assessment and determination of eligibility, you are asked to sign necessary consent forms and a contract with the program to complete formal treatment and undergo rigorous long-term monitoring.

If you are considered to be at risk of not practicing safely while in the program, you are removed from practice. NHP makes a recommendation on when a nurse can return to practice. At no time will your health disorder be publically disclosed. In addition, as long as you adhere to the program, neither the terms of your monitoring contract nor that you are being monitored is publicly disclosed.

### **Step 3 – Treatment**

If the assessment indicates you have a substance use and/or mental health disorder impacting your ability to practice safely, a treatment plan is developed. NHP supports you in your recovery and assists you, if needed, to secure an approved treatment provider.

The program provides support and referrals to resources across Ontario (see treatment fees section for information about what fees are covered by NHP).

If you choose not to continue with the treatment plan, NHP notifies CNO as outlined in your signed consent.

## Step 4 – Monitoring

NHP works with you to develop a written monitoring contract based on your treatment plan. The contract sets out the terms and conditions you must follow.

Your monitoring contract may include the following:

- contact with your treatment providers and NHP case manager
- limitations on practice
- random drug screens (if applicable)
- group or individual therapy requirements
- consequences of not adhering to your contract.

If you are working at the time of enrollment, you may continue working unless NHP identifies potential risk to safe practice. In that case restrictions may be applied to your practice. If you are off work at the time of enrollment due to your substance use and/or mental health disorder, you can only return to nursing practice once your treatment providers and NHP agree that you are ready. Your return to work is based on a specified work plan from your treatment providers and approved by NHP.

If you work against the advice of your treatment providers, or if you do not adhere to the conditions of the work plan without the prior approval of NHP, you are considered to be in breach of your contract. This type of breach could result in a report to CNO and other third parties that could initiate the Fitness to Practise process and a notation on the Find a Nurse public registry.

During the monitoring period, NHP communicates with you, your treatment providers and your employer(s) (when applicable) to support your safe nursing practice.



## Step 5 – Exiting the program

You exit the program once you successfully reach the end of your contract. You and NHP may also enter into a further agreement if it's determined that additional treatment is clinically necessary for your recovery.

## Your responsibilities while in NHP

### Abstinence

If you are recovering from a substance use disorder you are expected to abstain from all mood altering substances (unless otherwise prescribed by your treatment provider). You must also abstain from substances that may cause a positive test result such as:

- foods or hygienic products containing alcohol, including “non-alcoholic” beer or wine
- products containing poppy seeds (e.g., bagels, muffins or cakes)
- food or other products containing cannabis
- over-the-counter medications not prescribed to you by your treatment providers
- other substances as advised by your treatment providers.

### Keeping NHP informed

You must inform NHP as soon as possible when:

- your treatment provider approves an over-the-counter medication and/or controlled and/or mood altering substance
- you have an urgent situation where medication is prescribed or administered, and it is not reasonably possible to obtain approval from the addictions physician
- you experience any minor recurrences of psychiatric symptoms (if applicable)

- you experience a significant period of instability
- you are directed to stop work by your health care practitioner and/or workplace supervisor.

### **Your obligations**

While participating in the program, you must:

- follow all terms and conditions of the contract
- follow the practice restrictions as outlined and agreed upon
- return phone calls and/or emails from NHP within the time frame specified by the case manager
- identify potential workplace supervisor and workplace monitor candidates to your NHP case manager for approval
- log in and/or call in daily to find out if you are required to go to a collection site for testing
- provide blood, urine, hair and/or other biological testing as requested by the NHP
- notify NHP of any reasons that may impact your ability to attend a required collection before the scheduled collection
- discuss with NHP any future change in a health care and/or treatment provider prior to making the change
- reach out to your treatment providers and the NHP case manager if you have issues or need additional assistance
- notify NHP if you're unable to work for any reasons such as waiting to participate in inpatient and/or outpatient treatment
- notify NHP of any vacation that may affect your monitoring requirements prior to taking the vacation (approval from NHP may be required in some cases)
- notify NHP when working in a nursing setting
- notify your employer about participating in the program, along with any practice restrictions identified and agreed upon

- notify NHP of any changes to your employment status
- discuss any new employment offers with NHP and your treatment providers prior to starting to work.

## Treatment fees

The cost to participate in NHP varies depending on your diagnosis, treatment, continuing care requirements and health insurance coverage. Costs for collections and laboratory tests depend on your location. Additional fees may be charged if further testing confirmation is required. Your case manager provides you with accurate pricing for your area, along with options of programs available in the community.

### What NHP pays:

- case management services
- any independent medical examination requested by NHP and associated sample collections, if required.

### What you pay:

- costs associated with inpatient or outpatient treatment programs, which are payable directly to the treatment facility
- all sample collections associated with the maintenance and monitoring components of the contract.

### Payment method:

NHP requests that you provide a credit card authorization consent when you sign your contract to pay for any charges you incur. You receive an invoice and receipt for every expense.

## Length of program

Programs are usually three to five years in length depending on the treatment you require. The program length is based on best practices and research that demonstrates what is needed to support treatment and recovery from substance use and/or mental health disorders. In some cases, your monitoring term may be increased or varied if your treatment providers and NHP feel it is medically appropriate.

## Monitoring and compliance

As a participant in NHP, you are assigned a case manager who clarifies, supports and ensures you follow any drug testing, treatment, support group attendance and documentation specified in your monitoring agreement. The NHP approach recognizes the relapsing nature of your disorder. A single relapse will not necessarily lead to your removal from the program.

## Reportable breaches

A breach occurs when you fail to adhere to the requirements outlined in your contract with NHP. Most breaches are dealt with by the program. However, some breaches are considered reportable.

A reportable breach is a one that is significant and poses a high risk of direct harm to clients or is intractable and must be reported to CNO.

Examples of reportable breaches:

- practicing nursing without the approval of your treatment provider and NHP
- working for an employer without notifying NHP
- using an unauthorized substance while practicing nursing
- refusing to cease practice contrary to NHP direction

- rejecting or not following treatment and/or monitoring recommendations
- discontinuing contact with NHP for a significant period of time
- repeated substance use posing a clear and present danger to yourself and your clients
- not responding to treatment after multiple treatment episodes.

If NHP reports you to CNO for a breach, it makes one of the following recommendations:

- 1) No action; you should remain in the program.
- 2) You should remain in the program with a notation on the public registry.
- 3) You should be discharged from the program.

In all cases of a reportable breach, CNO is given access to your complete case file.

## **Return-to-work guidelines**

After any work interruption for health reasons related to substance use and/or mental health disorders, you can only return to nursing practice once your treatment providers and NHP have agreed that you are ready. Your return to work is based on a specified work plan from your treatment providers and must be approved by NHP prior to its implementation.

Before returning to work, you are required to identify individuals who can be your workplace monitors and someone who can be a workplace supervisor. You must agree not to practice nursing until workplace monitoring arrangements have been made to NHP's satisfaction.

## Privacy and confidentiality

Your privacy is important to us. No one has access to any of your information without a signed consent form outlining specifically what you are consenting to. NHP adheres to the professional standards of confidentiality as outlined in the *Personal Health Information Protection Act, 2004 (PHIPA)*. Our intake and referral coordinators are available to answer any questions or concerns you have regarding the collection, use and dissemination of any personal and/or health information you disclose.

Your participation in NHP is not shared with the public. CNO will be aware of your enrollment in the program and will have access to information about your progress. A reportable breach of your NHP contract could result in the initiation of the Fitness to Practise process and a notation on *Find a Nurse*. However, if you adhere to your NHP contract requirements, neither the terms of your contract nor the fact that you are being monitored will be noted on *Find a Nurse*.

**At the Nurses' Health Program we believe that with the right support nurses can return to safe nursing practice, which benefits both the nurse and the public.**

## Have questions or want to learn more? Contact us today.

 Toll-free in Canada: **1-833-888-7135**

 Weekdays: **7am – 7pm EST**

 Email: **info@nurseshealth.ca**

 **www.nurseshealth.ca**

**Messages left after hours will be returned the next business day.**

**Note:** The Nurses' Health Program is not a crisis line. If you are experiencing a crisis, please contact 911, your local crisis line, Employer Assistance Program provider, or go to your local hospital for assistance. Once your crisis has been addressed, we can assist you in accessing resources.

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