



COMMUNITY  
HEALTH NURSES  
OF CANADA



INFIRMIÈRES ET INFIRMIERS  
EN SANTÉ COMMUNAUTAIRE  
DU CANADA

Public Health Nursing Discipline Specific Competencies Version 1.0 - May 2009



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## Acknowledgments

We wish to acknowledge the following for their contribution in supporting the completion of this work;

### **CHNAC Certification, Standards, Competency Standing Committee**

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## Introduction

The development of the Public Health Nursing Discipline Specific Competencies Version 1.0 was made possible through the commitment of the Community Health Nurses Association of Canada (CHNAC), the CHNAC board and president, the CHNAC Certification, Standards, Competency Standing Committee as well as the dedicated work of the Expert Group who provided ongoing input and guidance. Funding for this work came from the Public Health Agency of Canada and in-kind support from the Winnipeg Regional Health Authority (WRHA).

*Core Competencies for Public Health in Canada Release 1.0* was distributed in 2007 and helped to define the generic knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for the practice of public health. Core Competencies transcend the boundaries of specific disciplines and are independent of program and topic. (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2007).

The need to further define discipline specific competencies for public health nurses was identified as a priority by the Community Health Nurses Association of Canada (CHNAC) and the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC). Using the *Core Competencies for Public Health in Canada Release 1.0* (PHAC, 2007), the *Community Health Nursing Standards of Practice* (CHNAC, 2008), and the *Public Health Nursing Practice in Canada: A Review of the Literature* (Hogan, 2008) as a foundation, a Delphi process was used to achieve consensus on the development of the discipline specific competencies for public health nurses. The outcome of this work is the *Public Health Nursing Discipline Specific Competencies Version 1.0*. The "version 1.0" designation is intended to imply that the PHN competencies will evolve and change over time, as nursing and public health practice knowledge evolves.

## **The Public Health Nursing Discipline Specific Competencies Version 1.0.**

**Public Health Nursing Competencies are the integrated knowledge, skills, judgement and attributes required of a public health nurse to practice safely and ethically. Attributes include, but are not limited to attitudes, values and beliefs. (Canadian Nurses Association Code of Ethics, 2008)**

### **1 - PUBLIC HEALTH and NURSING SCIENCES**

This category includes key knowledge and critical thinking skills related to: the public health sciences (behavioural and social sciences, biostatistics, epidemiology, environmental public health, demography, workplace health, prevention of chronic diseases, infectious diseases, psychosocial problems and injuries) as well as nursing theory, change theory, economics, politics, public health administration, community assessment, management theory, program planning and evaluation, population health principles, community development theory, and the history of public health. Competency in this category requires the ability to apply knowledge in practice.

#### ***A public health nurse is able to...***

- 1.1 Apply knowledge about the following concepts: the health status of populations; inequities in health; the determinants of health and illness; social justice; principles of primary health care; strategies for health promotion; disease and injury prevention; health protection, as well as the factors that influence the delivery and use of health services.
- 1.2 Apply knowledge about the history, structure and interaction of public health and health care services at local, provincial/territorial, national, and international levels.
- 1.3 Apply public health and nursing sciences to practice and synthesize knowledge from a broad range of theories, models and frameworks.
- 1.4 Critically appraise knowledge gathered from a variety of sources.
- 1.5 Use evidence and research to inform health policies, programs and practice:
  - contribute to the development and generation of evidence-based nursing
  - use available resources to systematically plan and evaluate public health nursing practice

1.6 Pursue lifelong learning opportunities in the field of public health that are consistent with: current public health nursing practice; new and emerging issues; the changing needs of individuals, families, groups and communities; emerging research and evolving information about the impact of the determinants of health.

1.7 Integrate multiple ways of knowing into practice.

## **2 - ASSESSMENT AND ANALYSIS**

This category describes the core competencies needed to collect, assess, analyze and apply information (including data, facts, concepts and theories). These competencies are required to make evidence-based decisions, prepare budgets and reports, conduct investigations and make recommendations for policy and program development. Community members are involved in identifying and reinforcing those aspects of everyday life, culture and political activity that are conducive to health.

### ***A public health nurse is able to...***

2.1 Recognize that a health concern or issue exists:

- apply principles of epidemiology
- conduct comprehensive community assessments with individuals, families, groups and communities using quantitative and qualitative strategies
- recognize patterns and trends in epidemiological data and service delivery
- assess the impact of the broad social, cultural, political and economic determinants of health.

2.2 Identify relevant and appropriate sources of information, including community assets, resources and values in collaboration with individuals, families, groups, communities and stakeholders.

2.3 Collect, store, retrieve and use accurate and appropriate information on public health issues.

2.4 Analyze information to determine appropriate implications, uses, gaps and limitations.

2.5 Assess impact of specific issues on health such as; political climate and will; values and culture; social and systemic structures; settings; as well as the individual, family, group, and community's readiness and capacity.

2.6 Assess the health status and functional competence of individuals, families, groups, communities or populations within the context of their environmental and social supports.

- 2.7 Determine the meaning of information, considering the ethical, political, scientific, socio-cultural and economic contexts:
- identify attitudes, beliefs, feelings and values about health and their effect on relationships and interventions
  - support individuals, families, groups and communities to identify risks to health and make informed choices about protective and preventive health measures
  - describe the role of power in relationships by giving voice to the vulnerable
  - demonstrate skill in dealing with diversity and high levels of ambiguity.
- 2.8 Recommend specific actions based on the analysis of information:
- identify a range of appropriate interventions including health promotion; health protection; disease and injury prevention and clinical care using a multi strategy and multi target approach.
  - identify short and long term goals
  - identify outcome indicators
  - identify research questions
- 2.9 Recognize opportunities to promote social justice.

### **3 – POLICY AND PROGRAM PLANNING, IMPLEMENTATION AND EVALUATION**

This category describes the core competencies needed to effectively choose options, and to plan, implement and evaluate policies and/or programs in public health. This includes the management of incidents such as outbreaks and emergencies.

#### **3(A) - POLICY DEVELOPMENT**

##### ***A public health nurse is able to...***

- 3A .1 Describe selected policy options to address a specific public health issue.
- 3A .2 Describe the implications of each policy option, especially as they apply to the determinants of health and recommend or decide on a course of action.
- 3A .3 Develop a plan to implement a course of action taking into account relevant evidence, legislation, emergency planning procedures, regulations and policies.
- 3A .4 Implement a policy.
- 3A .5 Support community action to influence policy change.

3A.6 Build community capacity to improve health and address health inequities.

3A .7 Advocate for healthy public policy and services that promote and protect the health and well-being of individuals, families groups and communities.

3A .8 Advocate for the reduction of inequities in health through legislative and policy making activities.

### **3(B) - PROGRAM PLANNING**

#### ***A public health nurse is able to...***

3B.1 Describe selected program options to address a specific public health issue.

3B.2 Describe the implications of each option, especially as they apply to the determinants of health and recommend or decide on a course of action.

3B.3 Develop a plan in collaboration with individuals, families, groups and communities to implement a course of action that is responsive to needs taking into account relevant evidence, legislation, emergency planning procedures, regulations and policies.

### **3(C) - IMPLEMENTATION AND INTERVENTION**

#### ***A public health nurse is able to...***

3C.1 Take action, across multiple levels, to address specific public health issues by using a comprehensive mix of public health strategies to address unique needs and to build individual, family, group and community capacity.

3C.2 Facilitate planned change with individuals, families, groups, communities, systems or population(s) by applying the Population Health Promotion Model, primary health care principles and appropriate change theory.

3C.3 Demonstrate the ability to integrate relevant research and implement evidence informed practice.

3C.4 Participate in collaborative, interdisciplinary and intersectoral partnerships to enhance the health of individuals, families, groups, communities and populations.



- 3C.5 Maximize the capacity of the individual, family, group or community to take responsibility for and to manage their health needs according to resources available and personal skills.
- 3C.6 Set and follow priorities and maximize outcomes based on available resources.
- 3C.7 Fulfill functional roles in response to a public health emergency.
- 3C.8 Facilitate access to services in the health sector and other sectors.
- 3C.9 Adapt practice in response to the changing health needs of the individual, family, group and community and in response to the unique characteristics of the setting.
- 3C.10 Take action to protect individuals, families, groups and communities from unsafe or unethical circumstances.
- 3C.11 Advocate in collaboration with, and on behalf of, and with individuals, families, groups and communities on social justice related issues.

### **3(D) - EVALUATION**

#### ***A public health nurse is able to...***

- 3D.1 Evaluate an action, policy or program in a systematic and continuous manner by measuring its effect on individuals, families, groups or communities.
- 3D.2 Evaluate programs in relation to determinants of health and health outcomes.
- 3D.3 Evaluate programs in partnership with individuals, families, groups, communities and other stakeholders.

### **4 – PARTNERSHIPS, COLLABORATION AND ADVOCACY**

This category captures the competencies required to influence and work with others to improve the health and well-being of the public through the pursuit of a common goal. This includes the concepts of: social justice, which is the fair distribution of society's benefits and responsibilities and their consequences (Canadian Nurses Association, Code of Ethics, 2008); partnership and collaboration which is to optimize performance through shared resources and responsibilities; advocacy which is to speak, write or act in favour of a particular cause, policy or group of people and aims to reduce inequities in health status or access to health services.

***A public health nurse is able to...***

- 4.1 Advocate for societal change in support of health for all:
  - collaborate with partners to address public health issues and service gaps in order to achieve improved health outcomes
  - build coalitions, intersectoral partnerships and networks
  - facilitate the change process to impact the determinants of health and improve health outcomes.
- 4.2 Use skills such as team building, negotiation, conflict management and group facilitation to build partnerships and to support group development.
- 4.3 Mediate between differing interests in the pursuit of health and well-being, and advocate for appropriate resource allocation and equitable access to resources.
- 4.4 Advocate for healthy public policies and services that promote and protect the health and well-being of individuals and communities.
- 4.5 Involve individuals, families, groups and communities as active partners to identify assets, strengths and available resources and to take action to address health inequities, needs, deficits and gaps.

## **5 - DIVERSITY AND INCLUSIVENESS**

This category identifies the competencies required to interact effectively with diverse individuals, families, groups and communities in relation to others in society as well to recognize the root causes of disparities and what can be done to eliminate them (Canadian Nurses Association, Code of Ethics, 2008). It is the embodiment of attitudes and actions that result in inclusive behaviours, practices, programs and policies.

***A public health nurse is able to...***

- 5.1 Recognize how the determinants of health (biological, social, cultural, economic and physical) influence the health and well-being of specific population groups.
- 5.2 Address population diversity when planning, implementing, adapting and evaluating public health programs and policies.
- 5.3 Apply culturally-relevant and appropriate approaches with people from diverse cultural, socioeconomic and educational backgrounds, and persons of all ages, genders, health status, sexual orientations and abilities.

## 6 – COMMUNICATION

Communication involves an interchange of ideas, opinions and information. This category addresses numerous dimensions of communication including internal and external exchanges; written, verbal, non-verbal and listening skills; computer literacy; providing appropriate information to different audiences; working with the media and social marketing techniques.

### ***A public health nurse is able to...***

- 6.1 Communicate effectively with individuals, families, groups, communities and colleagues:
  - use verbal, non verbal and written or graphic communication skills
  - speak and write in plain language
  - use multi-sensory forms of communication to address unique communication styles
  - use culturally relevant communication when building relationships.
- 6.2 Interpret information for professional, non professional and community audiences.
- 6.3 Mobilize individuals, families, groups and communities by using appropriate media, community resources and social marketing techniques.
- 6.4 Use current technology to communicate effectively.

## 7 – LEADERSHIP

This category focuses on leadership competencies that build capacity, improve performance and enhance the quality of the working environment. They also enable organizations and communities to create, communicate and apply shared visions, missions and values.

### ***A public health nurse is able to...***

- 7.1 Describe the mission and priorities of the public health organization where one works, and apply them in practice.
- 7.2 Contribute to developing key values and a shared vision to assess, plan and implement public health programs and policies in the community by actively working with health professionals and in partnership with community partners to build capacity.

- 7.3 Use public health and nursing ethics to manage self, others, information and resources and practice in accordance with all relevant legislation, regulating body standards and codes (e.g. provincial health legislation, child welfare legislation, privacy legislation, Canadian Nurses Association Code of Ethics for registered nurses).
- 7.4 Contribute to team and organizational learning in order to advance public health goals.
- 7.5 Contribute to the maintenance of organizational performance standards.
- 7.6 Demonstrate an ability to build capacity by sharing knowledge, tools, expertise and experience:
- participate in professional development and practice development activities
  - mentor students and orient new staff
  - participate in research and quality assurance initiatives.

## **8 – PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITY AND ACCOUNTABILITY**

This category addresses a number of dimensions including the recognition that nurses are accountable for their actions and are responsible for making sure they have the required knowledge and skills needed to ensure the delivery of safe, compassionate, competent and ethical care. It includes the competencies required to maintain quality work environments and relationships needed in a professional practice. Public Health nurses are responsible for initiating strategies that will address the determinants of health and generate a positive impact on people and systems. They are accountable to a variety of authorities and stakeholders as well as to the individual and community they serve. This range of accountabilities places them in a variety of situations with unique ethical dilemmas.

### ***A public health nurse is able to...***

- 8.1 Demonstrate professionalism in independent practice in multiple settings with multiple stakeholders.
- 8.2 Apply ethical standards and principles taking into consideration appropriate public health and nursing ethics.
- 8.3 Consult as needed to determine the best course of action in response to: ethical dilemmas, safety issues, risks to human rights and freedoms, new situations and new knowledge.

- 8.4 Use reflective practice to continually assess and improve practice:
- examine practice in relation to personal and individual, family, group or community attributes, existing knowledge and context
  - adapt public health nursing techniques, approaches and procedures to the challenges in a particular community situation or setting.
- 8.5 Advocate for effective, efficient and responsible use of resources.
- 8.6 Act upon legal and professional obligations, and practices in accordance with relevant legislation.
- 8.7 Contribute to the quality of public health nursing work environments by identifying needs, issues, solutions and mobilizing colleagues by actively participating in team and organizational structures and mechanisms.

**Mapping the Community Health Nursing Standards  
to the Public Health Nursing Competencies**

For Canadian nurses, the Community Health Nursing Standards define the scope of practice or expectations for acceptable nursing practice while the Public Health Nursing Discipline Specific Competencies define the essential skills, knowledge and abilities necessary for the practice of public health nursing.

Underwood (2007) defines competencies as a “behaviors” and standards as “the level of service intervention or outcome”. In other words, competencies describe the activity that a public health professional engages in to meet a standard or set of standards. Both ‘standards’ and ‘competencies’ could refer to structure, process or outcomes.

A mapping document was created to highlight the inter-connection between the Community Health Nursing Standards of Practice and the Public Health Nursing Discipline Specific Competencies. *Mapping the Community Health Nursing Standards and the Public Health Nursing Competencies* document can be found on the Community Health Nurses Association of Canada web site at <http://www.chnac.ca>

## **Conclusion**

The identification of the required knowledge, skills and abilities is a vital contribution to the development of a strengthened public health nursing workforce. These discipline specific competencies will hopefully guide undergraduate nursing curriculum planning and professional development activities in addition to providing a framework for public health nursing practice evaluation and feedback.

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