



CNL® CERTIFICATION GUIDE

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CNL CERTIFICATION GUIDE

Commission on Nurse Certification

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About the Certification Guide

Introduction

Congratulations on your decision to earn the Clinical Nurse Leader (CNL) credential. We commend your commitment to advancing your career and the nursing profession. The *CNL Certification Guide* provides information essential to the certification process from application through test taking to renewal.

About the American Association of Colleges of Nursing

The American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) is the national voice for baccalaureate and graduate nursing education. AACN's educational, research, federal advocacy, data collection, publications, and special programs work to establish quality standards for nursing education; assist deans and directors to implement those standards; influence the nursing profession to improve healthcare; and promote public support for professional nursing education, research, and practice.

About the Commission on Nurse Certification

Established in 2007 as the certifying autonomous arm of the AACN and governed by the CNC Board of Commissioners (CNCBOC), the Commission on Nurse Certification (CNC) promotes the highest standards of professional nursing care practice through the development, implementation, coordination, and evaluation of all aspects of the certification and certification renewal processes.

CNC Mission

The mission of the CNC is to oversee CNL certification activities in order to assure communities of interest that certificants have met accepted standards of practice.

CNC Vision

The vision of the CNC is to improve health and health care delivery through developing and sustaining the CNL as a key role in the nursing profession.

CNC Board of Commissioners

Governed by leading nursing professionals in practice and academia, the Board of Commissioners (CNCBOC) endeavors to advance nursing education and practice by certifying competent Clinical Nurse Leaders and by providing nursing education to professionals and the public. The CNCBOC is solely responsible for essential decisions related to the development, administration, and ongoing maintenance of the CNL Certification Program. The Board ensures that all application and eligibility requirements, examination development and administration, renewal requirements, and all certification program policies and procedures are directly related to the purpose of the certification program.

There are nine (9) voting members of the CNCBOC: four members from the practice setting (practice partners and practicing certificants); four members from the educational setting (faculty and administration); and one public member.

CNC Examination Development Committee

The Examination Development Committee responsibilities are cyclical and include the development of content, review of content relevancy, evaluation of performance data, and expertise with the establishment of the passing standard for the examination.

CNC Examination Development Process

The CNC ensures the validity, reliability, and legal defensibility of the CNL Certification Program. The CNL certification examination is an assessment instrument which measures the competency of potential candidates against a body of knowledge, skills, and abilities designed to demonstrate the depth and breadth of knowledge appropriate for effective practice in the profession of nursing care.

A job analysis is a comprehensive definition of the tasks performed by professionals currently holding the CNL credential. The purpose of the job analysis is to describe, in specific terms, the precise nature of the tasks performed by incumbent professionals who work in the field of nursing for which the examination is being developed. Job analyses are conducted every 5 years, or more often as circumstances may warrant, to verify the content of the examination. The results of the job analysis influence to what extent the competencies are revised for the CNL certification examination.

The CNL is based on an explicit set of competencies. These competencies have been determined through a job analysis study conducted on practitioners. The competencies are grouped into domains, subdomains, and tasks. As the CNL examination may only assess knowledge pertaining to these competency statements, they serve as the outline, or blueprint for the examination.

The examination specifications are typically established or revised at the same time as the development of the examination blueprint. The specifications usually include the total number of test items (scored and pretest), test item type(s), total test duration, and scoring methodology.

All examination items (or questions) are directly linked to the approved examination specifications and are written and reviewed by panels of trained subject matter experts. The Examination Development Committee, working with the independent testing agency, regularly reviews items and approves the examinations.

Value of Certification

CNL-Certified Professionals

CNL certification validates a high level of professional achievement. Certified CNLs demonstrate proficiency and a broad base of knowledge beyond RN licensure. Professionals who receive the CNL designation must pass a rigorous examination and commit to ongoing professional development and renewal. When a professional earns the CNL credential, it reflects a deep personal commitment and sense of accountability, inspiring credibility and confidence in an individual's professional knowledge.

About the CNL Credential

CNL

A certified CNL is a master's educated nurse, prepared for practice across the continuum of care within any healthcare setting in today's changing healthcare environment. Graduate education is necessary because the CNL must bring a high level of clinical competence and knowledge to the point of care and serve as a resource for the nursing team. In practice, the CNL oversees the care coordination and integration of care for a distinct group of patients. This master's degree-prepared clinician puts evidence-based practice into action to ensure that patients benefit from the latest innovations in care delivery. The CNL evaluates patient outcomes, assesses cohort risk, and has the decision-making authority to change care plans when necessary. The CNL is a leader and active member of the interprofessional healthcare team. The implementation of the CNL role will vary across healthcare settings.

The Clinical Nurse Leader (CNL) designation demonstrates to colleagues, clients, employers, and the public at large that board certified individuals bring a master's level clinical competence and knowledge to the point of care while serving as a resource for the nursing team.

Professionals earn this distinction through CNL graduate education, supervised clinical experience, a clinical immersion, and meeting the highest standards of practice of professional nursing care validated by their performance through the CNL certification examination.

Nondiscrimination

CNC does not discriminate against any candidate for certification on the basis of race, color, creed, age, gender, national origin, religion, disability, marital status, parental status, ancestry, sexual orientation, military discharge status or source of income, or any other status protected by law. All candidates for certification will be judged solely on the criteria determined by the CNC Board of Commissioners.

Eligibility Requirements

CNC has developed requirements for eligibility to ensure that the application process is fair and impartial for all applicants. Each eligibility requirement has been established to ensure that individuals certified by CNC have an acceptable level of knowledge and proficiency needed to provide clinical and nursing care services expected of a Clinical Nurse Leader. A combination of both work experience and demonstrated knowledge are essential for individuals earning the CNL credential.

Examination Eligibility Criteria

The CNL examination is the first step in achieving certification. To be eligible to sit for the CNL examination, applicants must be a:

- graduate of a CNL education program
- OR
- student in their last term of a CNL education program

Credential Eligibility Criteria

The CNL credential is achieved when the candidate has met all eligibility requirements including:

- successfully passing the CNL examination
- AND
- having a current and active, unrestricted professional Registered Nurse License (the candidate will be ineligible if currently being disciplined by a state nursing board)
- AND
- graduating from an accredited* CNL master's or post-master's program
- AND
- submitting all required application documents and payment

**Accredited by a nursing accrediting agency recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education that prepares individuals with the competencies delineated in the AACN white paper: CNL Competencies and Curricular Expectations for Education and Practice.*

Certification will be awarded by CNC upon review of documentation and verification of RN licensure and graduation from a CNL education program following successful completion of the CNL certification examination.

Eligibility Waiver

CNC will waive the eligibility requirements for CNL faculty of existing CNL education programs through December 31, 2018 (applications must be received at CNC by this date). CNL faculty who meet the following criteria are eligible to sit for the CNL certification examination:

- Registered Nurse licensure
- Graduate degree in nursing or a related healthcare discipline (such as healthcare administration or public health) from an institution accredited by an agency recognized by the U.S. Department of Education.
- Teach in an existing CNL education program.

CNL faculty must submit the CNL Certification Application Form and the CNL Faculty Eligibility Documentation Form to CNC for consideration.

Applying for CNL Certification

Before submitting an application, carefully review the information contained in this guide. Taking the certification examination is voluntary. CNC strictly adheres to the eligibility requirements for certification. It is the responsibility of the applicant to comply with all policies, procedures, and deadlines in order to establish eligibility to take the examination.

CNL Examination Dates, Deadlines, and Fees

Exam Dates

CNC offers the CNL examination in testing windows spread out throughout the year. The four (4) CNL windows are as follows:

- December
- January - February
- April – May
- July – August

Designated testing windows are determined by CNC and are scheduled to coincide with the end of the academic semester. Testing windows provide the necessary flexibility for faculty at the individual schools to schedule a date for examination administration to serve the needs of the students. Current examination dates, corresponding application deadlines, fees and refund deadlines are published at <http://www.aacn.nche.edu/cnc/exam-date-and-fees>.

Exam Fees

Administration at a School of Nursing

- *CNL Exam Registration Fee (1st Time Applicant Only - online application): \$350.00*
- *Re-testing CNL Exam Registration Fee (online application): \$250.00*

Administration at a Testing Center

- *CNL Exam Registration Fee (1st Time Applicant Only - online application): \$425.00*
- *Re-testing CNL Exam Registration Fee (online application): \$325.00*

Changing Testing Periods

- *Request of an alternate testing period: \$75.00*

Application Requirements

Applicants must register online at <http://www.aacn.nche.edu/cnc/exam-application>

To apply for the CNL examination, the following forms must be submitted along with the appropriate application fee:

- CNL Examination Application
- Online acceptance of the Application Attestation and CNL Standards of Conduct
- Education Documentation Form
- Request for Special Accommodations Form and Documentation of Disability-Related Needs Form (if applicable)
- CNL Faculty Eligibility Documentation Form (if applicable)

When completing the application be sure to:

1. Ensure the name on the application matches the name on the identification (ID) to be used for admission to the test location (see section on Identification Requirements).
2. Make copies for your records.

Incomplete and Late Applications

Application forms, the application fee, and all supporting materials must be received by CNC no later than the published application deadline. An application will be considered incomplete if any of the requested information is missing, illegible, or the appropriate fee is not included.

Applicants whose eligibility has been internally reviewed and deemed incomplete or ineligible will be notified electronically of the applications deficiencies and possible remedies. If the applicant does not respond, or cure identified deficiencies prior to the published deadlines, a notification will be sent to inform the applicant that the application will not be processed.

Applications submitted after a published deadline will be charged a late application fee.

Eligibility Appeals

A candidate whose eligibility has been denied by CNC may appeal the decision to the CNC Director within 30 calendar days of receiving notification of ineligibility. The candidate must submit the appeal in writing, and explain in detail: 1) The nature of the request and the specific facts and circumstances supporting the request, and 2) all reasons why the action or decision should be changed or modified. The candidate must also provide accurate copies of all supporting documents. Eligibility appeals will be reviewed by the CNC Director and responded to in writing within 15 business days of the postmarked appeal request letter.

If the issue cannot be resolved by the CNC Director, he/she will refer the appeal to the Board of Commissioners. The decision of the Board of Commissioners is final.

Independent Testing Agency

Schroeder Measurement Technologies (SMT), Inc. has been contracted by CNC to assist in the development, administration, scoring, score reporting, and analysis of the CNC's certification program. SMT has been

providing comprehensive exam development and administration services to certification organizations and licensing agencies worldwide since 1995. SMT provides computer-based testing (CBT) through their corporate affiliate Iso-Quality Testing, Inc. (IQT); IQT is a test administration company specializing in the delivery of CBT exams that are secure, high quality, user-friendly, and reasonably priced. IQT successfully delivers thousands of exams annually at over 300 sites throughout North America and around the world. For more information about SMT, please visit www.smttest.com.

CNL graduates and online students who are not located near a CNL education program have the option of utilizing testing centers provided by SMT. To view the list of testing center locations, visit www.isoqualitytesting.com/locations.aspx.

Schools of Nursing

To be considered eligible for a CNL examination site, a CNL education program must submit a School of Nursing CNL Education Program Verification Form to CNC. This form must be signed by the dean or chief academic officer and approved by CNC prior to the school serving as a CNL examination site. Approved schools may be located at <http://www.aacn.nche.edu/cnc/apply-exam/eligible-programs>.

Scheduling the Examination

Scheduling with a School of Nursing

After applications have been reviewed and evaluated by the CNC staff, eligible candidates will receive an electronic notification from CNC confirming receipt of the CNL application. This notification includes the Registration Confirmation email, exam resources, and a reminder about the applicant's responsibility to contact the school of nursing for testing site details.

It is the responsibility of the program to notify CNC of the test date, site, time, and proctor contact information. The program must select a date within a testing period and administration should occur between 8:30 a.m. and 5:00 p.m. EST Monday through Friday to ensure that technical assistance is available.

Every program must seek verification and approval from CNC prior to the school serving as a CNL examination site.

Candidates will need their Registration Confirmation email from CNC and their government issued identification to be admitted to the testing location on examination day.

Scheduling with Schroeder Measurement Technologies

After applications have been reviewed and evaluated by the CNC staff, eligible candidates will receive an electronic notification from CNC confirming receipt of the CNL application. Candidates who indicated a preference for testing at an IQT/SMT testing center will be contacted by SMT via email with login information to register with a testing center approximately 10 business days prior to the start of the testing window.

Candidates will need their Online Candidate Registration from IQT/SMT and their government issued identification to be admitted to the testing center on examination day.

Cancellation Policy

Note that all fees are non-refundable.

Request for Testing Date and Site Changes

Candidates who wish to change the scheduled examination date or site location must submit the CNL Exam Date/Location Change Form <http://www.aacn.nche.edu/cnl/cnc/doc/change-date-location-form.doc>. The candidate must also notify the faculty contact if testing at a school where the examination is to be administered. Candidates changing the test date or location will be charged a \$75 administration fee. If changing both, the administration fee is \$150. Candidates who fail to notify CNC of a change (no shows) are required to submit a new application and fee to sit for the exam at a later date. A date or location may be changed only once. If more than one change is necessary, resubmission of the application and fee will be required.

Alternate Testing Site

Candidates may sit for an examination at a school other than the school or institution from which they graduated from the CNL education program. Space is provided in the CNL Certification Examination Application to request an alternative examination location. CNC staff will attempt to identify a school that is geographically located closer to the candidate; however, depending upon where the examination is being administered during a specific testing window this may or may not be possible. Graduates of CNL education programs not located near a school serving as a testing site have the option to utilize SMT testing centers.

Preparing For the Exam

Examination Content and Format

The CNL examination contains 140 multiple-choice, single answer questions. Some items are presented in a case study format with multiple questions related to the specific case study. Candidates have 3 hours to complete the examination. Imbedded in the examination are "pretest" questions, which are included in the examination for statistical purposes only. Pretest questions are placed on the exam to evaluate the item's difficulty level for possible inclusion as a scored question in the future. Candidates' scores are based upon the number of scored items on the exam — pretest items do not affect the candidates' score. Pretest questions are dispersed throughout the examination and cannot be identified.

Tips for Success

Read through the entire *CNL Certification Guide* and visit "Prepare for the Exam" section of the CNC Website <http://www.aacn.nche.edu/cnc/exam-prep> to review or download the resources below.

- Familiarize yourself with the CNL Content Outline.
- Use the Personal Action Plan to assist in the development of a prep strategy for the CNL examination.
- Review the list of AACN and CNC resources. Use of the resources does not guarantee successful passing of the certification examination.
- Consider participation in the online CNL discussions. The online discussions provide an opportunity to communicate with those who have successfully completed the CNL exam. Visit <http://www.aacn.nche.edu/cnl/cnl-community>.
- Know when and where the test will be given, appear on time with any required materials (e.g. valid identification and exam confirmation notice), and be ready to be tested.

Language

The CNL examination, as well as all communications from CNC will be in English. Translation services and extended time for language challenges are not available.

Special Testing Accommodations

CNC and SMT comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and will request that the IQT testing centers and authorized school facilities provide reasonable accommodations for candidates with a disability covered by this Act. Candidates requiring special accommodations must complete the Request for Special Examination Accommodations Form and Documentation of Disability-Related Needs Form before scheduling the exam <http://www.aacn.nche.edu/cnl/certification/SpecialAccm.pdf>. These forms must be submitted with the CNL Examination Application to the CNC. Arrangements for special accommodations may take up to 45 days to coordinate.

Candidates testing at an authorized school with a CNL education program will be contacted by CNC to ensure all processes and procedures are explained and that a testing appointment is scheduled to accommodate their needs accordingly, if feasible. Candidates testing at an SMT testing center will be contacted by an SMT Customer Service Specialist to assist in scheduling a testing appointment to accommodate their needs accordingly, if feasible.

On Examination Day

Testing Sites

The CNL examination is administered at testing sites located throughout the United States. Testing sites have been selected to provide accessibility to the most candidates in the most controlled, secure, and consistent environments possible. To ensure that examination results for all candidates are earned under comparable conditions and represent fair and accurate measurement, test sites meet the following criteria:

- Examination rooms will be quiet and free of disruption.
- Rooms will have adequate and comfortable ventilation, lighting, and temperature.
- All exam administrations will be monitored by approved proctors.
- Entrances/exits will be monitored/controlled and working fire exits will be available.
- The test site will be ADA compliant.
- Candidates will have access to restroom facilities.

The CNC and SMT maintain examination administration and security standards that are designed to assure that all candidates are provided the same opportunity to demonstrate their abilities.

Examination Procedures

The CNL education program staff and SMT staff adhere to approved procedures to ensure the testing sites meet CNC's testing criteria. Please review the following information prior to the testing date to ensure familiarity with the procedures.

When arriving at the test site, candidates will:

- arrive approximately 20 minutes prior to the scheduled test administration time. Candidates who arrive more than 15 minutes after the scheduled testing time will not be admitted; additional time will not be given to accommodate late examinees.
- present their Registration Confirmation email from CNC or Online Candidate Registration from IQT/SMT.
- present a valid form of primary identification.
- sign a candidate log attesting that they have provided valid identification and agree to keep the contents of the examination confidential.

Identification Requirements

To be allowed to test, candidates must present a valid form of primary identification at the testing site. Acceptable forms of primary identification (photograph and signature required) include:

- government-issued driver's license
- passport or passport card
- permanent resident visa
- military issued identification card

Unacceptable forms of primary identification include, but are not limited to:

- birth certificates
- social security cards
- student IDs
- employee IDs
- marriage certificates

All identification must be valid and must be an original document. Candidates will not be admitted to the examination without proper identification. There will be no refund of the examination fee.

Test Site Restrictions and Misconduct

The following actions by candidates during the examination will constitute misconduct and result in an automatic dismissal from the examination, cancellation of scores, and forfeiture of examination fees:

- Failure to adhere to testing site examination restrictions
- Creating a disturbance, being abusive, or being otherwise uncooperative
- Bringing restricted materials into the testing area
- Using electronic communications equipment such as cellular phones, PDAs, or pagers
- Gaining unauthorized admission into the examination testing area
- Attempting to take the examination for another individual
- Possessing books, notes, or other resources and study aids
- Attempting to remove or removing scratch paper from the testing site
- Recording or attempting to record examination questions or making notes
- Giving help or receiving help or being suspected of doing so during or after the examination
- Eating, drinking, and smoking are prohibited in the testing sites.
- Prohibited items include, but are not limited to, the following: calculators, pagers, cell phones, electronic digital devices (PDAs, iPads, tablets, netbooks, watches, and the like), recording or photographic devices, weapons, briefcases, computers or computer bags, and handbags or purses.
- Candidates may NOT discuss test questions, topic areas or scenarios, or possible answers, either during or after the test administration, with any other person(s) which includes faculty, other examinees or potential candidates.

Security

All proprietary rights in the examinations, including copyrights and trade secrets, are held by CNC. In order to protect the integrity of the examinations and to ensure the validity of the scores reported, candidates must adhere to strict guidelines regarding proper conduct in handling copyrighted proprietary examinations. Any attempt to reproduce all or part of the examinations, including, but not limited to, removing materials from the examination room, aiding others by any means in reconstructing any portion of the examinations, selling, distributing, receiving or having unauthorized possession of any portion of the examinations, is strictly prohibited by law. Alleged copyright violations will be investigated and, if warranted, prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law. It should be noted that all examination scores may be invalidated in the event of this type of suspected breach.

A candidate can be disqualified from taking or continuing to sit for an examination, or from receiving examination results, if through proctor observation, statistical analysis, and other evidence that the candidate's score may not be valid or that the candidate was engaged in collaborative, disruptive, or other unacceptable behavior during the administration of the examination.

Cancellation Due to Bad Weather or Other Emergencies

In the event of bad weather, a natural disaster, or another emergency (for example, a test center power outage), proctors will determine whether circumstances warrant cancellation and rescheduling of examinations at a particular test center.

- **Examinations will not be cancelled and rescheduled if the test center administrator can open the test site.**
- **Every attempt will be made to administer all examinations as scheduled.**
- **Every attempt will be made to restart a candidate's examination, if feasible.**

However, should examinations at a test center be cancelled, all affected candidates will be contacted by CNC staff about rescheduling their examinations.

After the Examination

Notification of Examination Results

After completing the examination, candidates will receive automatic results at the test site immediately following the exam (the candidate must click on the link that reads View Results). In addition, exam results will be sent to the candidate's email address that was provided on the certification application. **NOTE: Individuals taking the CNL exam during the Spring 2017 testing period will not receive immediate results. These will be sent to the candidate 6-8 weeks after the last day of the testing period.**

Score reports will include a "pass" or "fail" result, scoring information, and general information regarding administrative next steps.

Diagnostic information is provided on score reports for those candidates who were unsuccessful. Diagnostic breakdowns, calculated per domain, are intended to identify content areas by showing areas of relative strength and weakness. Information is provided to assist the candidate in identifying areas of study for purposes of subsequent examination.

Interpreting Examination Results

A criterion-referenced standard setting process is used to establish the passing point for each exam. This means that each candidate's performance on the exam is measured against a predetermined standard. Candidates are not graded on a curve and do not compete against each other or against a quota.

The passing points for the exams are established using a panel of subject matter experts who carefully review each exam item to determine the basic level of knowledge or skill that is expected. The passing point for each exam is established to identify individuals with an acceptable level of knowledge and skill. Receiving a higher than passing score is not an indication of more advanced knowledge or a predictor of better job performance. All individuals who pass the exam, regardless of their score, have demonstrated an acceptable level of knowledge and skill.

Validation of Scores

CNC and the testing agency reserve the right to cancel scores if their validity and integrity is compromised. Discrepancies such as computer malfunction or misconduct of a candidate may cause a score to be suspect. CNC and the testing agency will investigate the occurrence and may cancel or withhold the examination results if a violation of regulations is found.

Reexamination

Candidates who fail the exam may retake the exam. Candidates may not retest during the same testing period. To retake the exam, the candidate must repeat all registration processes as outlined in the Certification Guide, including the application and fee; the Education Documentation Form does not have to be resubmitted. Candidates may take the examination an unlimited number of times as long as they continue to meet the published eligibility criteria. Reexamination candidates are offered a discounted testing fee.

Completion of Program Requirements

Candidates who pass the CNL examination must successfully fulfill all CNL program requirements within two years from their CNL testing date. Examination results will expire for those candidates who have not met all program requirements within this two-year period, and reexamination will be required.

Credential Requirements | CNL Program Completion

The CNL credential, or program completion, is achieved when the candidate has met all eligibility requirements including:

- successfully passing the CNL examination; and
- having a current and active, unrestricted professional Registered Nurse license (The candidate will be ineligible if currently being disciplined by a state nursing board.); and
- graduating from an accredited* CNL master's or post-master's program; and
- attesting to comply with the CNL Standards of Conduct; and
- submitting all required application documents and payment.

**Accredited by a nursing accrediting agency recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education that prepares individuals with the competencies delineated in the AACN white paper: CNL Competencies and Curricular Expectations for Education and Practice.*

Certification will be awarded by CNC upon review of documentation and verification of RN licensure and graduation from a CNL education program following successful completion of the CNL certification examination. **Note:** Students in the last term of a CNL education program are eligible to sit for the exam but are not certified until CNC is notified and confirms that all eligibility requirements have been met.

Candidates who have successfully completed the CNL program are sent official notification by CNC. This notification serves as authorization for use of the CNL designation after the candidates' name.

Certificates

Candidates who complete their CNL candidacy will receive a certificate specifying that the CNL designation has been awarded; official certificates will be sent within 30 business days following the last date of the testing period. The candidate's name will appear on the certificate exactly as requested on the application.

Credential Verification

CNC maintains a database of all active certificants.

Employers, potential employers, or other agencies may request verification of a certificant or a certificant may request that verification be sent to an employer, potential employer, or agency. An individual's name and current certification status will be verified upon receipt of \$20 per agency/person for a single verification request. Rushed verification requests are available for \$35. Upon receipt of payment, rushed requests are fulfilled within five business days.

The CNL Verification Request Form is available online at <http://www.aacn.nche.edu/leading-initiatives/cnl/cnl-certification/pdf/verification.pdf>.

Examination Appeals

Complaints or appeals may be submitted in writing prior to the exam and up until 30 days after exam administration. Written appeals must be submitted with supporting documentation or evidence to the CNC Director.

The burden of proof for examination appeals is borne by the applicant. The decision of the Board of Commissioners is final. Complaints or appeals will not be considered after the 30 days have expired. Due to the thorough review and analysis of each question during the examination construction procedures, there are no appeal procedures to challenge individual exam questions or answers. Because of the secure nature of these examinations CNC will not disclose examination questions prior to, or after, the administration. Candidate responses to particular test questions (correct or incorrect) will not be disclosed.

Complaints and Disciplinary Policy

In order to maintain and enhance the credibility of the CNC CNL Certification Program, the CNC Board of Commissioners has adopted the following procedures to allow individuals to bring complaints concerning the conduct of CNL certificants to the CNC.

In the event a certificant violates the CNL Standards of Conduct, certification rules, requirements, and/or policies, the CNC may reprimand or suspend the individual or may revoke certification.

The grounds for sanctions under these procedures may include, but are not necessarily limited to:

- Violation of established CNL Standards of Conduct, rules, requirements, and/or policies.
- Conviction of a felony or other crime of moral turpitude under federal or state law in a matter related to the practice of, or qualifications for, nursing.
- Gross negligence, willful misconduct, or other unethical conduct in the performance of services for which the individual has achieved CNL certification.
- Fraud, falsification, or misrepresentation in an initial application or renewal application for certification.
- Falsification of any material information requested by CNC.
- Misrepresentation of CNL status.
- Cheating on any certification examination.

Actions taken under this policy do not constitute enforcement of the law, although referral to appropriate federal, state, or local government agencies may be made about the conduct of the certificant in appropriate situations. Individuals initially bringing complaints are not entitled to any relief or damages by virtue of this process, although they will receive notice of the actions taken.

Complaints

Complaints may be submitted by any individual or entity. Complaints should be reported to CNC in writing and should include the name of the person submitting the complaint, the name of the person the complaint is regarding along with other relevant identifying information, a detailed description of factual allegations supporting the charges, and any relevant supporting documentation. Information submitted during the complaint and investigation process is considered confidential and will be handled in accordance with CNC's confidentiality policy. Inquiries or submissions other than complaints may be reviewed and handled by the CNC Board or CNC Director at their discretion.

Upon receipt and preliminary review of a complaint involving the certification program, the CNC Director in consultation with the Board Chair may conclude, in their sole discretion, that the submission:

- contains unreliable or insufficient information, or
- is patently frivolous or inconsequential.

In such cases, the CNC Director and Board Chair may determine that the submission does not constitute a valid and actionable complaint that would justify bringing it before the Board for investigation and a determination of whether there has been a violation of substantive requirements of the certification process. If so, the submission is disposed of by notice from the CNC Director and Board to its submitter.

Preliminary review will be conducted within 15 business days of receipt of the complaint.

If a submission is deemed by the CNC Director and Board to be a valid and actionable complaint, the Board will see that written notice is provided to the certificant whose conduct has been called into question. The certificant whose conduct is at issue also will be given the opportunity to respond to the complaint. The Board will ensure that the individual submitting the complaint receives notice that the complaint is being reviewed by the Board.

Complaint Review

For each complaint that the Board concludes is a valid and actionable complaint, the Board authorizes an investigation into its specific facts or circumstances to whatever extent is necessary in order to clarify, expand, or corroborate the information provided by the submitter.

The Board appoints a Review Committee of three or more individuals, who may or may not be members of the Board, to investigate and make an appropriate determination with respect to each such valid and actionable complaint; the Review Committee may review one or more such complaints as determined by the Board. The Review Committee initially determines whether it is appropriate to review the complaint under these Procedures or whether the matter should be referred to another entity engaged in the administration of law. The timeline for responses and for providing any additional information will be established by the Review Committee. The Review Committee may be assisted in the conduct of its investigation by other members of the Board or by Board and/or CNC staff or legal counsel. The Board exercises general supervision over all investigations.

Both the individual submitting the complaint and the certificant who is the subject of the investigation (or his or her employer) may be contacted for additional information with respect to the complaint. The Review Committee, or the Board on its behalf, may at its discretion contact such other individuals who may have knowledge of the facts and circumstances surrounding the complaint.

All investigations and deliberations of the Review Committee and the Board are conducted in confidence, with all written communications sealed and marked "Personal and Confidential," and they are conducted objectively, without any indication of prejudgment. An investigation may be directed toward any aspect of a complaint which is relevant or potentially relevant. Formal hearings are not held, and the parties are not expected to be represented by counsel, although the Review Committee and Board may consult their own counsel.

Members of the Review Committee will be reimbursed for reasonable expenses incurred in connection with the activities of the Committee.

Determination of Violation

Upon completion of an investigation, the Review Committee recommends whether the Board should make a determination that there has been a violation of Board policies and rules. When the Review Committee recommends that the Board find a violation, the Review Committee also recommends imposition of an appropriate sanction. If the Review Committee so recommends, a proposed determination with a proposed sanction is prepared under the supervision of the chair and is presented by a representative of the Review Committee to the Board along with the record of the Review Committee's investigation.

If the Review Committee recommends against a determination that a violation has occurred, the complaint is dismissed with notice to the certificant, the certificant's employer (if involved in the investigation), and the individual or entity who submitted the complaint.

The Board reviews the recommendation of the Review Committee based upon the record of the investigation. The Board may accept, reject, or modify the Review Committee's recommendation, either with respect to the determination of a violation or the recommended sanction to be imposed. If the Board makes a determination that a violation has occurred, this determination and the imposition of a sanction are promulgated by written notice to the certificant, and to the individual submitting the complaint, if the submitter agrees in advance and in writing to maintain in confidence whatever portion of the information is not made public by the Board.

In certain circumstances, the Board may consider a recommendation from the Review Committee that the certificant who has violated the certification program policies or rules should be offered an opportunity to submit a written assurance that the conduct in question has been terminated and will not recur. The decision of the Review Committee to make such a recommendation and of the Board to accept it are within their respective discretionary powers. If such an offer is extended, the certificant at issue must submit the required written assurance within 30 days of receipt of the offer, and the assurance must be submitted in terms that are acceptable to the Board. If the Board accepts the assurance, notice is given to the certificant's employer and to the submitter of the complaint, if the submitter agrees in advance and in writing to maintain the information in confidence.

Sanctions

Any of the following sanctions may be imposed by the Board upon a certificant whom the Board has determined to have violated the policies and rules of its certification program(s), although the sanction applied must reasonably relate to the nature and severity of the violation, focusing on reformation of the conduct of the member and deterrence of similar conduct by others:

- written reprimand to the certificant;
- suspension of the certificant for a designated period; or
- termination of the certificant's credential.

Verification of this information will be made available only after any appeal has either been considered or the appeal period has passed.

Reprimand in the form of a written notice from the Board normally is sent to a certificant who has received his or her first substantiated complaint. Suspension normally is imposed on a certificant who has received two substantiated complaints. Termination normally is imposed on a certificant who has received two substantiated complaints within a two year period, or three or more substantiated complaints. The Board may at its discretion, however, impose any of the sanctions, if warranted, in specific cases.

Certificants who have been terminated will have their certification revoked and may not be considered for CNC certification in the future. If certification is revoked, any and all certificates/diplomas or other materials requested by the Board must be returned promptly to the CNC.

Appeal

Within 30 days from receipt of notice of a determination by the Board that a certificant violated the certification program policies and/or rules, the affected certificant may submit to the Board in writing a request for an appeal.

Upon receipt of a request for appeal, the Board establishes an appellate body consisting of at least three, but not more than five, individuals. This Appeal Committee may review one or more appeals, upon request of the Board. No current members of the Review Committee or the Board may serve on the Appeal Committee; further, no one with any personal involvement or conflict of interest may serve on the Appeal Committee. Members of the Appeal Committee may be reimbursed for reasonable expenses incurred in connection with the activities of the Committee.

The Appeal Committee may only review whether the determination by the Board of a violation of the certification program policies and/or rules was inappropriate because of:

- material errors of fact, or
- failure of the Review Committee or the Board to conform to published criteria, policies, or procedures.

Only facts and conditions up to and including the time of the Board's determination as represented by facts known to the Board are considered during an appeal. The appeal will not include a hearing or any similar trial-type proceeding. Legal counsel is not expected to participate in the appeal process, unless requested by the appellant and approved by the Board and the Appeal Committee. The Board and Appeal Committee may consult legal counsel.

The Appeal Committee conducts and completes the appeal within 90 days after receipt of the request for an appeal. Written appellate submissions and any reply submissions may be made by authorized representatives of the committee and of the Board. Submissions are made according to whatever schedule is reasonably established by the Appeal Committee. The decision of the Appeal Committee either affirms or overrules the determination of the Board, but does not address a sanction imposed by the Board. The decision of the Appeal Committee, including a statement of the reasons for the decision, is reported to the Board.

The Appeal Committee decision is binding upon the Board, the certificant who is subject to the termination, and all other persons.

Resignation

If a certificant who is the subject of a complaint voluntarily surrenders his or her certification(s) at any time during the pendency of a complaint under these procedures, the complaint is dismissed without any further action by the Review Committee, the Board, or an Appeal Committee established after an appeal. The entire record is sealed and the individual may not reapply for certification. However, the Board may authorize to communicate the fact and date of resignation, and the fact and general nature of the complaint which was pending at the time of the resignation, to or at the request of a government entity engaged in the administration of law. Similarly, in the event of such resignation, the certificant's employer and the person or entity who submitted the complaint are notified of the fact and date of resignation and that Board has dismissed the complaint as a result.

Certification Renewal

Purpose

CNC supports the ongoing professional development of its certificants. The mandatory renewal process provides certificants with the opportunity to demonstrate the retention, reinforcement, and expansion of their knowledge and skills pertaining to new clinical advances as well as state of the art information over the full spectrum of nursing education and healthcare. Renewal also provides encouragement to, and acknowledgement for, participation in ongoing professional development activities and lifelong learning. To support this purpose, the renewal requirements require continuing education and professional activities that enhance ongoing professional development, recognize learning opportunities, promote continuing competence, and provide a process for both attaining and recording professional development achievements.

To maintain competence and prevent professional obsolescence, the Board of Commissioners requires that each CNL certificant participate periodically in continuing education to refresh existing knowledge and skills, and to acquire knowledge and proficiency pertaining to new advances as well as state of the art information over the full spectrum of nursing education and healthcare.

To maintain use of the CNL credential, certification must be renewed once every five years. The five-year time period established for renewal is based on both the scope of issues that face nursing care professionals and the Board's belief that new practices, research, and information are introduced in the field with enough frequency that professional development activities should be conducted routinely so that certificants remain current with best practices and emerging knowledge.

Requirements

CNC strictly adheres to the standards of maintenance requirements for certification. It is the responsibility of the certificant to comply with all procedures and deadlines in order to maintain their credential.

Certificants who have received the CNL credential are required to complete 50 continuing education hours during a five-year reporting cycle. Renewal of the CNL credential requires:

- Current CNL certification (active status)
- Current and active, unrestricted professional Registered Nurse license
- Employment status attestation: minimum of 2,000 hours including direct clinical practice; nursing administration; nursing education; research; or consultation (employment in a CNL role and Clinical Nurse Leader title is not required for renewal)
- 50 continuing education hours that support the CNL role (continuing education used for RN licensure is acceptable)
- Online Renewal Application and \$310 USD fee

CNC will mail/email candidates a renewal reminder approximately 6 months prior to their renewal date; however, it is the candidate's responsibility to be aware of and comply with renewal requirements. The expiration date of a CNL certificate is December 31 of the fifth complete year after certification.

No later than 30 days prior to the end of the certification cycle, candidates are required to complete the online renewal application, accompanied by supporting documentation and pay the nonrefundable renewal fee. Candidates should allow three weeks for processing renewal applications.

The Renewal Application along with additional information is available online at <http://www.aacn.nche.edu/cnc/renewal>.

CNLs are responsible for maintaining records of their continuing education credits and may be required to substantiate these units during random audits. Certificants are encouraged to maintain an electronic portfolio. However, documentation may be submitted to the CNC electronically or in a hardcopy format.

Renewal Categories

Registered Nurse (RN) Licensure

Certificants will be ineligible if they are currently being disciplined by a state nursing board. It is the responsibility of the certificant to notify the CNC when any restriction is placed on his/her RN license. The CNCBOC reserves the right to revoke, and may revoke, the CNL credential with respect to a certificant who has failed to notify the CNC of any restriction placed on their RN license.

Professional Practice

Certificants must attest to their employment status of a minimum 2,000 hours in the five year certification period. Employment may be in any of the following areas of advanced nursing practice, including direct clinical practice, nursing administration, nursing education, research, and/or consultation. A CNL job title is not required for renewal.

Contact Hours/Continuing Education

Minimum of 50 contact hours that support the CNL role are required.

Contact Hour Calculations:

- 1 CME (Continuing Medical Education unit) = 1 contact hour
- 1 CNE (Continuing Nursing Education unit) = 1 contact hour
- 1 CEU (Continuing Education Unit) = 10 contact hours
- 1 quarter credit or unit = 10 contact hours
- 1 semester credit or unit = 15 contact hours

The above is not an all-inclusive list of contact hour calculations.

Recognition of Graduate Course Work

Graduate course work in nursing or a related field can be used in place of continuing education. Graduate course work must be accredited by an agency recognized by the U.S. Department of Education.

Failure to Renew Certification

Renewal is mandatory for all certificants. If certification is not renewed, it will expire on December 31 of the fifth completed year after certification. Individuals whose certification has expired or been suspended or revoked may not represent him/herself as a CNL certificant and may not use the designation until he/she

receives official notice that the renewal requirements have been satisfied or that certification status has been reinstated.

Reinstatement

If certification has been expired for 11 months or less, an individual may reinstate his/her certification by meeting all of the published renewal requirements, submitting the complete Intent to Reinstatement Application and fee with a professional portfolio, and completing the Online Renewal Application and submitting the renewal fee. If the application is approved, the individual's expiration date for the reinstated credential will be the same as if the certification had been renewed on time.

CNL Reinstatement requires:

- Professional Portfolio or other method to demonstrate activities since CNL certification expiration date
- CNL certification which expired within the past 11 months, or within inactive or retired status
- Current and active, unrestricted professional Registered Nurse license
- Employment status attestation: minimum of 2,000 hours in advanced nursing practice, including direct clinical practice; nursing administration; nursing education; research; or consultation
- 50 continuing education hours that support the CNL role
- Renewal Application and Reinstatement fee \$460 USD fee

To Reinstatement, visit <http://www.aacn.nche.edu/cnc/renewal>.

If certification has been expired for more than 11 months, an individual who wishes to regain CNL status must meet all eligibility requirements in effect at the time of re-application and pass the examination.

Audit Process

CNC reserves the right to verify information supplied by, or on behalf of, a certificant. If selected for a review, the certificant will be asked to submit documentation substantiating eligibility.

The CNC randomly audits approximately 10% of certificant renewal applications for review. An individual selected for review will be required to submit verifiable documentation for each activity listed in the renewal application. **It is recommended that certificants retain all records for at least two years following the cycle end date.**

If credit for any program or CE activity is denied as a result of the review, the certificant will be given 60 days to report additional hours to cure the deficiency. The certificant will remain authorized to use the CNL designation during this 60-day period. If the deficiency is not cured within the 60-day period, a deficiency notice will be sent. If the necessary hours remain unreported the individual will no longer be certified and will not be authorized to use the CNL designation.

Renewal Appeals

The certification renewal decision will be based solely on materials submitted by, or on behalf of, the certificant.

Appeals regarding renewal eligibility and status must be submitted in writing to the CNC Director 30 calendar days after the adverse decision or notification. The candidate must submit the appeal in writing (email is acceptable), and explain in detail: 1) The nature of the request and the specific facts and circumstances supporting the request, and 2) all reasons why the action or decision should be changed or modified. The candidate also must provide accurate copies of all supporting documents. The CNC Director will review the appeal within 15 days.

CNC Board of Commissioners Policies

Use of the Credential

Individuals may use the CNL credential once they have received specific written notification from CNC that they have successfully completed all requirements, including passing the exam. After receiving official notification of the CNL designation, individuals may use their credential in all correspondence and professional relations. The credential is typically used after the certificant's name following any academic degrees and licensure (e.g. Mary Smith, MSN, RN, CNL).

The certification mark may be used only as long as the CNL certification is valid and in good standing.

Confidentiality Procedures

CNC is committed to protecting confidential information related to applicants, candidates, and certificants. Confidential materials include, but are not limited to: an individual's application, application status, personal applicant /certificant information, exam items and answers, exam forms, and individual exam scores.

Personal information about a candidate/certificant will only be released to that candidate/certificant if release of the information is authorized in writing by the individual or is required by law. Personal information submitted by applicant /certificants with an application or renewal application is considered confidential. Personal information retained within the applicant/certificant database will be kept confidential.

Examination scores are released only to the examination candidate unless a signed release is provided in writing by the individual or is required by law.

Release of Information

The names of certified individuals are not considered confidential and may be published by the CNC.

Aggregate exam statistics (including the number of exam candidates, pass/fail rates, and total number of certificants) is published on the CNC/CNL section of the AACN website. Aggregate data is also sent to CNL educational faculty contacts. Aggregate exam statistics, studies and reports concerning candidates will contain no information identifiable with any candidate.

Application status, information about whether or not an individual has taken the exam, and score information will not be released.

Record Retention

CNC retains all examination forms, examination development documents, examination results, examination items, active examination application information, and active applicant/candidate/certificants data permanently.

Summary of Links

Apply for the Exam

<http://www.aacn.nche.edu/cnc/apply-exam>

Career Services

<http://www.aacn.nche.edu/cnc/career-services>

CNL Discussions

<http://www.aacn.nche.edu/cnl/professional-development/online-community>

Documentation of Disability-Related Needs Form and Special Accommodations Request Form

<http://www.aacn.nche.edu/cnl/certification/SpecialAccm.pdf>

Exam Content Outline

<http://www.aacn.nche.edu/leading-initiatives/cnl/cnl-certification/pdf/ExamContentOutline11.pdf>

Exam Dates, Application Deadlines and Fees

<http://www.aacn.nche.edu/cnc/exam-date-and-fees>

FAQs

<http://www.aacn.nche.edu/cnc/contact-us>

Get Involved

<http://www.aacn.nche.edu/cnc/get-involved>

Order CNL Merchandise

<http://www.aacn.nche.edu/cnc/cnl-merchandise>

Prepare for the Exam

<http://www.aacn.nche.edu/cnc/exam-prep>

Proctor Information

<http://www.aacn.nche.edu/cnc/proctors>

Publications and Resources

<http://www.aacn.nche.edu/cnc/publications-resources>

Recommended Readings

<http://www.aacn.nche.edu/cnc/exam-prep/recommended-reading>

Renew and Reinstate CNL Certification

<http://www.aacn.nche.edu/cnc/renewal>

Schools of Nursing Testing Centers

<http://www.aacn.nche.edu/cnc/apply-exam/eligible-programs>

SMT Testing Centers

www.isoqualitytesting.com/locations.aspx

APPENDIX A

Special Accommodations Request Form

EMAIL: CNL@aacn.nche.edu FAX: (202) 785-8320

If you have a disability covered by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), please complete this form and the Documentation of Disability-Related Needs Form. The information you provide, and any documentation regarding your disability and special accommodation, will be treated with strict confidentiality and will not be shared with any source, without your express written permission, except for CNC.

APPLICANT CONTACT INFORMATION *(Please Print)*

Name: _____

Degree/Credential: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____ Fax: _____

Email: _____

SPECIAL ACCOMMODATIONS *(Check all that apply)*

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Accessible Testing Site | <input type="checkbox"/> Reader Required for Learning |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Separate Testing Room | <input type="checkbox"/> Disability Reader Required for Visual Disability |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Screen Magnifier (Large Font) | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Extended Testing Time - ____ minutes (maximum 90 minute extension) | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ | |

Comments: _____

ELECTRONIC SIGNATURE

Name: _____ Date: ____/____/____

I Accept (By selecting the "I Accept" button, you are signing this Application electronically. You agree your electronic signature is the legal equivalent of your manual signature on this Application.)

APPENDIX B

Documentation of Disability-Related Needs Form

EMAIL: CNL@aacn.nche.edu FAX: (202) 785-8320

If you have a disability covered by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), please complete the Special Accommodations Request Form and Documentation of Disability-Related Needs Form. The information you provide, and any documentation regarding your disability and special accommodation request, will be treated with strict confidentiality. Please have this section completed by a licensed healthcare provider to ensure that CNC is able to provide the required testing accommodations.

LICENSED HEALTHCARE PROVIDER DOCUMENTATION *(Please Print)*

I have known: _____ Since: ____/____/____
(Exam Applicant)

in my capacity as a: _____
(Professional Title)

SPECIAL ACCOMMODATIONS *(Check all that apply)*

The applicant has discussed with me the nature of the test administered. It is my professional opinion that because of this applicant's disability, _____ should be accommodated by providing the following:

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Accessible Testing Site | <input type="checkbox"/> Reader Required for Learning |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Separate Testing Room | <input type="checkbox"/> Disability Reader Required for Visual Disability |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Screen Magnifier (Large Font) | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Extended Testing Time - ____ minutes (maximum 90 minute extension) | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other: _____ | |

Comments: _____

ELECTRONIC SIGNATURE

Name: _____ Date: ____/____/____

Title: _____ License: _____
(if applicable)

I Accept (By selecting the "I Accept" button, you are signing this Application electronically. You agree your electronic signature is the legal equivalent of your manual signature on this Application.)

APPENDIX C

Test Taker's Rights and Responsibilities (Attestation)

I certify that I have read the *Clinical Nurse Leader (CNL®) Certification Guide*, and I comply with all admission policies for the CNL Certification Examination. I certify that the information I have submitted for the CNL Certification Application is complete and correct. I understand that, if the information I have submitted is found to be incomplete or inaccurate, my application may be rejected or my examination results may be delayed, not released or invalidated by the Commission on Nurse Certification (CNC) of the American Association of Colleges of Nursing. I also understand that as a candidate, I may NOT discuss test questions, topic areas or scenarios, or possible answers, either during or after the test administration, with any other person(s) which includes faculty, other examinees or potential candidates.

I acknowledge and agree that as a condition of taking the CNL exam, I am hereby giving my irrevocable permission to CNC to release information about my credentialed status to any entities it believes to be pertinent in its sole discretion, including but not limited to state agencies, state boards of nursing, specialized nursing accreditation bodies, employers, and the CNL program from which I graduated.

Participation in the CNL Certification Examination acknowledges that CNC may release information, in aggregate form, regarding the information included on this application, examination scores and credentialing status for evaluation and reporting purposes. I understand that aggregate examination score reports that include my exam data will be released to the school of nursing (CNL education program) from which I graduated.

I also am aware that I may be contacted by CNC representatives at some future date regarding optional participation in additional evaluation processes.

I certify that I have read the policy on inactivation of eligibility records in *The CNL Certification Guide*. I acknowledge that if I do not sit for the certification examination originally applied for and do not notify the CNC office prior to the end of the current certification testing period, this will inactivate my application. Under such circumstances, I will have to submit a new application and documentation of my eligibility in compliance with the then current admission requirements and pay the new applicant fee.

I further acknowledge that I am responsible for tracking and maintaining documentation required to support the renewal process. I also understand that allowing my certification to lapse without completing and submitting the necessary document for renewal (see CNL Certification Guide) will result in the nullification of my CNL certification and will require me to submit the CNL Certification Application and successfully complete the CNL Certification Examination.

I understand I am responsible for notifying the CNC of any change in my mailing address and my electronic mailing address to receive official notices regarding my CNL credential issued by the CNC. CNC staff shall not be responsible for non-receipt of notices due to my failure to provide a current mailing address and electronic address. I understand that upon earning certification and maintaining an active status that I will be included in an online directory of CNL certificants made available to the public.

As a candidate for CNL certification through CNC, I agree to act with integrity, comply with the law, avoid conflicts of interest and report any violations of the law, avoid conflicts of interest and report any violations of the law or any unethical behavior.