

**Guidelines**



College & Association of  
Registered Nurses of Alberta

# **Registered Nurse Prescribing Schedule 1 Drugs and Ordering Diagnostic Tests**

**Guidelines**

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Approved by the College and Association of Registered Nurses of Alberta (CARNA) Provincial Council, January 2020.

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## Purpose

The *Registered Nurses Profession Regulation (2005)* authorizes registered nurses (RNs) who meet certain requirements to prescribe **Schedule 1 drugs**<sup>1</sup> and order diagnostic tests. Throughout this document, the phrase “RN prescribing” will refer to the full authorization of RN prescribing schedule 1 drugs (except for controlled drugs and substances) and ordering diagnostic tests.

This supplemental guideline document provides:

- additional information on the authorization of RN prescribing;
- enhanced information on meeting employer support requirements for RN prescribing authorization;
- assistance to RNs, employers, and other health professionals in understanding the **clinical practice areas** where RN prescribing can occur; and
- guidance on the requirements for follow up when diagnostic tests are used with the RN prescribing process.

This document is a companion document and must be used with the following two standards documents:

- *Registered Nurse Prescribing Schedule 1 Drugs and Ordering Diagnostic Tests: Requirements and Standards* (CARNA, 2019)
- *Competencies for Registered Nurse Prescribing Schedule Drugs and Ordering Diagnostic Tests* (CARNA, 2019)

This document is **not** intended to address the expectations for the authorization of the restricted activity of RNs ordering diagnostic imaging with the use of a clinical support tool that does not include RN prescribing. The *Restricted Activities Standards* (CARNA, 2019) Standard 1, Criteria 1.7 outlines the expectations for ordering medical radiography with the use of a clinical support tool outside of authorization of RN prescribing and ordering diagnostic tests.

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<sup>1</sup> Words or phrases in bold italics are listed in the Glossary. They are displayed in bold italics upon first reference.

## Guidelines for RN Prescribing

### Guideline 1: Identified Clinical Practice Areas

Registered nurse prescribing will only be authorized in the clinical practice areas identified by CARNA.

The identified clinical practice area where RN prescribing can occur may be related to the type of care (e.g. wound care), practice setting (e.g. emergency department, home care, supportive living, primary care, ambulatory clinics, occupational health, etc.), specific issue (e.g. sexually transmitted infection, sexual assault), or medical diagnostic grouping (e.g. diabetes or other chronic diseases). The following is a list of identified clinical practice areas for RN prescribing:

- ambulatory clinics
- continuing care
- corrections
- emergency or urgent care
- home care
- occupational health
- primary care
- public health
- sexual assault clinics
- sexual health
- travel health
- workplace health and safety
- wound care

CARNA will review the identified clinical practice areas on a regular basis to ensure the identified clinical practice areas continue to support improved client health outcomes. RNs and employers can email [rnprescribing@nurses.ab.ca](mailto:rnprescribing@nurses.ab.ca) to request CARNA consider authorizing RN prescribing in new clinical practice areas.

## Guideline 2: Client Need

Addressing client health-care needs and improving client health-care outcomes is the goal when incorporating RN prescribing within a clinical practice area.

Incorporating RN prescribing into practice is only done in the best interest of the client. The RN must base the assessment of client need on improving client outcomes, reducing barriers to **evidence-informed** care, having timely access to care, improved continuity of care, and upholding safe client care.

**Registered nurse prescribing is not for** the convenience of health-care professionals, cost-cutting measures that can result in harm to the client, or the exclusion of other health-care professions required for the safe delivery of client care.

Nurses have a professional, legal, and ethical responsibility for client safety and must consider all of the following factors when assessing client need and the intent of RN prescribing:

- stability and predictability of the client's health-care needs
- safe client outcomes and health benefits
- client's ability to access care and assessment of any unnecessary delays in care
- current barriers or gaps in the client's care
- continuity of care for the client
- consequences or potential unexpected outcomes to the client's care
- required consultation with other health professionals

### Guideline 3: Employer support

Employer support for RN prescribing in the identified clinical practice is required.

#### Clinical Practice Area Support

Registered nurse prescribing can only occur in clinical practice areas where the employer has demonstrated and implemented support; this requires an **employee-employer relationship**. **Self-employed** RNs may not have an employee-employer relationship and should call CARNA before considering applying for RN prescribing.

The RN applying for authorization to prescribe needs their employer to provide CARNA with:

- a satisfactory reference of the RN applying for authorization;
- confirmation that the employer permits an RN to prescribe in the specific clinical practice area;
- confirmation that there are **Clinical Support Tools** (CSTs) developed by the **inter-professional team** for the identified specific clinical practice area, and
- confirmation there is a collaborative practice relationship between the authorized RN and a prescriber that is authorized to autonomously<sup>2</sup> prescribe medications.

The employer and the RN authorized to prescribe share the responsibility of the ongoing evaluation of RN prescribing in the specific clinical practice area. This evaluation includes the review, development, and improvement of RN prescribing practice such as, but not limited to, quality improvement and risk management practices, prescribing auditing tracking systems, CSTs, and organizational policies which support safe RN prescribing practices.

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<sup>2</sup> Physicians, nurse practitioners, and dentists are examples of prescribers who are authorized to autonomously prescribe medications within their regulations.

### Clinical Support Tool

Registered nurses seeking authorization to prescribe must provide CARNA the established CST specific to the clinical practice area. The CST must clearly guide both prescribing decisions and any ordering of diagnostic tests.

The CST should be developed, reviewed, supported, and regularly revised by an inter-professional team of subject matter experts, with both content expertise and practice experience in the relevant clinical practice area. The CST must be evidence-informed and based on best practices. The CST must align with the expectations outlined in the *Registered Nurse Prescribing Schedule 1 Drugs and Ordering Diagnostic Tests: Requirements and Standards* (2019).

#### Guideline 4: Ordering Diagnostic Tests

Registered Nurses with the authorization to prescribe only order the diagnostic tests that are clearly identified in the CST.

Diagnostic test results can support safe and appropriate RN prescribing decisions. See Appendix A for a list of common diagnostic and medical radiography tests that can be included in a CST. An RN might order diagnostic tests to:

- ensure the medication and dose ordered are congruent with expected therapeutic responses;
- monitor the response of the client to the medication therapy to ensure optimal outcomes;
- monitor for adverse effects to ensure client safety; or
- screen the client for certain conditions.

RNs are **not** authorized to order any form of ionizing radiation in nuclear medicine or radiation therapy, non-ionizing radiation in lithotripsy or magnetic resonance imaging, or tests requiring radiopharmaceuticals or imaging contrast.

If the CST includes ordering diagnostic tests, the RN authorized to prescribe and order diagnostic tests will have to apply for a practitioner identification number (PRAC ID) through Alberta Health. Please contact CARNA for further information on the need for a PRAC ID at [rnprescribing@nurses.ab.ca](mailto:rnprescribing@nurses.ab.ca).



When ordering diagnostic tests, the CST must be in alignment with the *Continuity of Care* standard of practice approved by the College of Physicians and Surgeons of Alberta (CPSA, 2015). The review, follow-up, process, and documentation of the diagnostic test(s) must include:

- a process to ensure that the diagnostic test was not already ordered or done to avoid duplication;
- a process to ensure accurate client contact information and an alternative contact method are obtained,
- who is responsible for receiving and reviewing the test results in a timely manner,
- who will be interpreting the results;
- what arrangement is in place for receiving and responding to critical diagnostic test results reported after regular working hours or in the RNs absence including:
  - ◆ ensuring that the laboratory or imaging facility is able to reach the RN or designate,
  - ◆ the after-hours emergency number that will be provided, and
  - ◆ clearly identifying on the test requisition when the results are expected to fall in the critical range;
- who will be communicating the test result and any follow-up care with the client;
- who will be providing the follow-up care;
- what additional health-care professional review is required and any required communication between health-care providers;
- who will follow-up when diagnostic tests results are not received within a period of time equal with the urgency of the investigation; and
- how the RN will refer clients for any needed follow up or treatment.

There must be a clear responsibility for the follow-up of diagnostic tests and CARNA requires the CST to outline the relationship between the RN role and any other health-care professional involved to ensure the seamless provision and continuity of client care. Good communication between health-care professionals and the client is vital to continuity of care and quality client care (CPSA, 2019).

## Glossary

**Client** – Refers to patients, residents, families, groups, communities, and populations (CARNA, 2013).

**Clinical practice area** – The clinical area where an RN who is authorized to prescribe and to order diagnostic tests, practices.

**Clinical support tool** – An evidence-informed tool used by the practice setting to guide decisions related to prescribing and ordering of diagnostic test, and ordering of medical radiography.

**Employee** – A person hired into a contract as an employee and agrees, for a limited or indeterminate period, to undertake work for the employer. The person carries out the service of work in exchange for remuneration and the work is carried out according to the direction and control of the employer. The terms of the contract are binding and enforceable (The Canadian Payroll Association, 2014).

**Employee-Employer Relationship** – The payer is considered an employer and the worker an employee (Canada Revenue Agency, 2019).

**Evidence-informed** – Practice based on successful strategies that improve client outcomes and are derived from a combination of various sources of evidence including client perspectives, research, national guidelines, policies, consensus statements, expert opinion and quality improvement data (Canadian Health Services Research Foundation, 2005).

**Inter-professional team** – Health-care providers from different professional backgrounds who provide comprehensive, high-quality care for clients within the clinical practice area where RN prescribing occurs.

**Schedule 1 drugs** – Drugs set out in Schedule I of the National Association of Pharmacy Regulatory Authorities Drug Schedules published by the National Association of Pharmacy Regulatory Authorities (Scheduled Drugs Regulation, 2007).

**Self-employed** – Under a contract for service, a person, contractor or service provider makes a commitment to another person, the client, to carry out material or intellectual work or to provide a service for a price or fee. The self-employed worker is free to choose the means of performing the contract with no relationship of subordination existing with the client in respect of such performance (The Canadian Payroll Association, 2014).

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[Registered Nurses Profession Regulation](#), Alta. Reg. 232/2005.

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## **Appendix A: CARNA List of Identified Diagnostic Tests that may be included in a Clinical Support Tool**

- Electrocardiogram
- Ultrasound

### **Common Laboratory Tests:**

- Blood
- Urine
- Stool
- Sputum
- Swabs
- Semen

### **Common Medical Radiography Tests** (taken from the Alberta Health Care Insurance Plan Schedule of Medical Benefits)

#### **Head**

- X1      Skull
- X2      Skull (Including stereos)
- X4      Facial bones
- X5      Mandible
- X6      Nasal bones
- X6A    Adenoids or nasopharynx
- X7      Mastoids
- X8      Sinuses – paranasal
- X9      Temporo-mandibular joints
- X10     Sella turcia
- X12     Orbit – for foreign body
- X13     Orbit – for foreign body localization

- X13A    Optic foramina
- X17     Tooth (single)
- X18     Teeth (half set)
- X19     Teeth (complete)

**Chest**

- X20     Chest – single view
- X21     Chest – multiple views
- X21A    Thoracic inlet views
- X22     Ribs
- X26A    Mammoductography
- X27     Mammography (both breasts)
- X27C    Screening mammography (age 40 to 49 years inclusive)
- X27D    Screening mammography (age 50 to 74 years inclusive)
- X27E    Screening mammography (age 75 years and over)
- X28     Sternum and/or sterno-clavicular joint

**Upper Extremity**

- X29     Finger
- X30     Hand
- X31     Wrist or carpal bone (or wrist and hand)
- X32     Radius and ulna
- X33     Elbow
- X34     Humerus
- X35     Clavicle
- X36     Shoulder girdle
- X36A    Scapula

**Lower Extremity**

- X38     Toe
- X39     Foot

- X40 Ankle
- X41 Os Calcis
- X42 Tibia and fibula
- X43 Knee

**Skyline or Tunnel View of Knee**

- X45 Femur or thigh
- X46 Femur, including hip and knee
- X47 Hip
- X51 Pelvis
- X52 Pelvis and one hip
- X53 Pelvis and both hips
- X54 Sacro-iliac joints

**Spine**

- X55 Spine, one area
- X56 Spine, one area – with obliques
- X57 Two areas
- X57A Two areas (of the spine) with obliques of each area
- X58E More than two areas (of the spine) with obliques of each area
- X58 Complete spine

**Genito Urinary**

- X68 Kidney, ureters, bladder (K.U.B)

**Gastrointestinal Tract**

- X98 Abdomen – single view
- X99 Abdomen – multiple views
- X100 Abdomen for obstruction or perforation