

## ETHICS STANDARD

# Nurses: Duty to Report

## Introduction

**Nurses** (in all positions and settings) have a legal and ethical obligation to report incompetent or impaired practice or unethical conduct of **regulated health professionals**. It is important for nurses to understand when to report, what to report and how to report, and to know what is legally and ethically required.

In B.C., the *Health Professions and Occupations Act* establishes a legal duty for nurses to report situations in which there is a good reason to believe that a regulated health professional's practice is impaired or incompetent and may pose a danger to the public. Nurses must also report any sexual misconduct by a regulated health professional. Nurses who make a report in good faith are protected from legal liability in circumstances where the nurse has a legal duty to report under the Act.

Under this practice standard, nurses also have an expanded duty to report situations in which they have reason to believe that a regulated health professional's practice poses a danger to the public because of unethical behaviour or for other reasons.

Nurses may have obligations to report regulated health professionals under other legislation and regulations. The specific legislation or regulation that applies to a nurse's practice depends on the work setting and the nature of the work.

## Standards

1. When nurses identify that a colleague is unable to perform their duties, they take the necessary steps to protect **client** safety.
2. Nurses report, in writing, to the appropriate regulatory body when they have reason to believe that a regulated health professional is practising when they:
  - a. are suffering from a mental or physical problem, an emotional disturbance, or an addiction to drugs or alcohol that impairs their ability to practise;
  - b. have a pattern of incompetent practice that may pose a danger to the public;
  - c. have behaved unethically in a way that may pose a danger to the public;
  - d. otherwise present a danger to the public.
3. Nurses report, in writing, to the appropriate regulatory body if they believe that a regulated health professional has engaged in sexual misconduct.
4. If concerns about sexual misconduct are based on information from a client, nurses must first obtain the client's (or substitute decision-maker's) consent before making a report.

5. Nurses may have additional employment obligations to report any unprofessional conduct to their supervisor/employer and should also follow applicable employment policies. If no report has been made by the supervisor or employer, the nurse must make a direct report to the regulatory body.
6. Nurses working as employers, managers or business partners or associates of regulated health professionals report, in writing, to the appropriate regulatory body when they take any of the following actions against a regulated health professional based on a belief that their continued practice may pose a danger to the public because they are not competent to practise, or because their practise is impaired by a mental or physical problem, emotional disturbance, or an addiction to drugs or alcohol:<sup>1</sup>
  - a. terminating the regulated health professional's employment;
  - b. revoking, suspending or imposing restrictions on the regulated health professional's privileges; or
  - c. dissolving a partnership or association with the regulated health professional.
7. Nurses have a legal duty to report to BCCNM when they have been charged with or convicted of a criminal offence identified by legislation as relevant to working with children or vulnerable adults. Nurses working as employers also have a legal duty to notify the appropriate regulatory body when they become aware that an employee who is a regulated health professional has been charged with or convicted of such an offence (*Criminal Records Review Act*, ss. 12 and 17).

## Glossary

**Client:** individual, family, group, population or entire community receiving nursing care or services from a nurse.

**Nurses:** licensed practical nurses, nurse practitioners, registered nurses, registered psychiatric nurses, licensed graduate nurses, employed student nurses, and employed student psychiatric nurses.

**Regulated Health Professional:** a registrant of BCCNM or any health profession college under the *Health Professions and Occupations Act*.

## Revision history

Version #	Approved by board	Bylaw in-force	Description
1.0	March 1, 2026	April 1, 2026	Initial publication

Effective April 1, 2026, this ethics standard, and any amendments to it, is made a bylaw under the authority of the *Health Professions and Occupations Act, B.C.*

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<sup>1</sup> This duty to report also applies if a nurse intends to take such action but the regulated health professional resigns, relinquishes their privileges, or dissolves their partnership or association before the nurse acts.