
Practice Guideline

Medical Cannabis



Mandate

Regulation for safe, competent, and ethical nursing care.

Under the [Nurses Act](#), the Nurses Association of New-Brunswick (NANB) is legally responsible to protect the public by regulating members of the nursing profession in New Brunswick (NB). Regulation makes the profession, and nurses as individuals, accountable to the public for the delivery of safe, competent, and ethical nursing care.

Guidelines support best practice in nursing. They identify principles, give instructions, information, or direction, clarify roles and responsibilities, and/or provide a framework for decision making.

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Acknowledgements

Content of this guideline has been adapted from the Nova Scotia College of Nursing [Cannabis Practice Guideline](#) (2022).

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Introduction

This practice guideline is intended to help nurses¹ in all practice settings understand the following: how medical cannabis² is authorized, how clients obtain medical cannabis, nurses' accountabilities when caring for clients authorized to use medical cannabis, and when nurses are using medical cannabis as part of their own treatment plan.

This guideline must be used in conjunction with other core regulatory documents that guide nursing practice such as [Standards of Practice for Registered Nurses](#), [Standards of Practice for Nurse Practitioners](#) and the [Code of Ethics for Registered Nurses](#).

Nurse Practitioners Accountabilities When Authorizing Medical Cannabis

Under section 272(1) of the [Cannabis Regulations](#), nurse practitioners (NPs) are defined as health care practitioners authorized to provide a medical document or written order allowing clients to access cannabis for medical purposes. Cannabis is authorized by completing the Health Canada form [Medical document supporting the use of cannabis for medical purposes under the Cannabis Regulations](#) or a similar form containing the client and NP information required to obtain medical cannabis. NPs authorizing medical cannabis are expected to:

- have the necessary competence to do so safely;
- only provide medical documents for cannabis to clients under their professional care;
- authorize cannabis only when it is required or shown with evidence to be a therapy for the condition for which the client is receiving treatment;
- educate clients on the risks and benefits, expected therapeutic effects, possible side effects, safe transportation and storage of cannabis;
- articulate to the client the importance of obtaining their cannabis from an authorized supplier; and
- practice in accordance with employer policy related to educational requirements and authorizing of medical cannabis in their practice setting.

In situations where medical cannabis fails to meet the therapeutic goals established in the plan of care, or the risks outweigh the benefits to the client, the NP should stop authorizing the drug. As with any therapeutic intervention, NPs are expected to obtain informed [consent](#) in accordance with legislation, regulatory standards, and employer policies. Consent may include a signed treatment agreement.

¹ For the purposes of this document, the term “nurse” refers to graduate nurses, registered nurses, and nurse practitioners.

² The term « medical cannabis » is used to describe products derived from the whole cannabis plant or its extracts containing a variety of active cannabinoids and terpenes, which patients take of medical reasons such as alleviating symptoms while minimizing intoxication, after interacting with and obtaining authorization from their health care practitioner (Canadian Pharmacists Association, n.d.).

Unlike conventional drugs, cannabis is available in a variety of strains and formulations that vary significantly in their potency and chemical composition. Sensitivities to the psychoactive and therapeutic effects of cannabis may vary, depending on the strain/formulation. NPs are expected to consult established clinical guidelines when authorizing medical cannabis.

How do Clients Obtain Medical Cannabis in New Brunswick

Once authorized in accordance with the [Cannabis Regulations](#), clients can access medical cannabis by:

- purchasing directly from a federally [licensed seller](#);
- [registering with Health Canada](#) to produce a limited amount of cannabis for their own medical purposes; and
- [designate someone](#) to produce it for them.

Clients authorized by a health care practitioner to use cannabis for medical purposes can register this authorization with Health Canada by completing the [Registration for Possession Only](#) form if they intend to purchase cannabis from a licensed provincial or territorial retail outlet or online sales platform. A list of federally licensed sellers is available on the [Government of Canada](#) website.

Nurses Accountabilities When Caring for a Client Using Medical Cannabis

When providing care to clients who are using or are interested in using medical cannabis, nurses are responsible to:

- respect client diversity;
- respect a client's right to informed consent;
- optimize the client's role in decision-making and the care process; and
- advocate for and follow appropriate employer policies.

Administration of Medical Cannabis

The [Cannabis Regulations](#) authorize all nurses, including those working in home care settings, to possess and directly administer medical cannabis to clients who have the authorization to use it. Employer policy should indicate practice settings where nurses are permitted to engage in activities relating to the administration of medical cannabis.

Nurses are accountable to have the necessary knowledge, skills, and judgment to be able to administer medical cannabis safely. This includes but is not limited to:

- ensuring a client-specific order authorizing the nurse to administer;
- ensuring the medical cannabis is appropriately labeled;
- competently administering or assisting with the administration of the medical cannabis;

- evaluating the effectiveness of the medical cannabis;
- identifying and managing adverse reactions;
- accurately documenting outcomes;
- supporting clients to manage their own health;
- storing, transporting, and disposing of medical cannabis properly; and
- educating clients on how to safely store as appropriate (example homecare or self-administration).

When administering medical cannabis to mature minors³ and children, in addition to the above considerations, nurses need to consider the applicable legislation, rules, standards of practice, and employer policies governing consent and capacity.

Administration of Medical Cannabis Grown by the Client or Designate

The nurse may be asked to administer or assist with the administration of medical cannabis grown by the client or a designate. They must consider the risks to the client associated with the administration of any client supplied medication, including medical cannabis. Reasonable steps should be taken by the nurse to ensure the integrity and safety of these types of medications. Employer policies related to the administration or assistance with the administration of medical cannabis, which is grown by the client or designate, should guide the nurse in their practice. If no employer policy exists, nurses should advocate for and collaborate in its development.

Self-Administration of Medical Cannabis

When the client wishes to self-administer medical cannabis, the nurse must assess the client's capacity (e.g., judgment, memory, understanding, functional ability) to establish and document a plan for self-administration. This plan should include but is not limited to:

- dose, frequency, and route;
- expected outcomes;
- potential adverse effects; and
- assessing the expected and unexpected effects of the medical cannabis.

Clients should be assessed regularly for their capacity to self-administer medical cannabis or other medications. As with all assessments, these must be documented appropriately according to the [Standards for Documentation](#) and employer policy. If the client cannot participate in self-administration, the responsibility may be assumed by a family member. Employer policies relating to the assistance with the administration of medical cannabis should guide the nurse in their practice.

For further information related to medication management, please consult the [Standards for Medication Management](#).

³ The New Brunswick's [Medical Consent of Minors Act](#) states that minors 16 years or older have the right to consent or refuse treatment as if they had reached the age of majority.

Nurses Accountabilities if Using Medical Cannabis as Part of Their Own Treatment Plan

Nurses are always accountable to meet their standards of practice, regardless of their medical condition and treatment plan. They are accountable to assess their [fitness to practice](#). If the nurse decides that the use of medical cannabis is preventing them from making appropriate care decisions or meeting their standards of practice, they should refrain from practice and discuss the situation with their employer. Fitness to practice should also be discussed with the health care provider who authorized the use of medical cannabis to ensure there is a safe plan for working while being treated with medical cannabis.

Nurses who assess their fitness to practice and decide that it is not impacted by their use of medical cannabis may be able to continue to work while being treated with medical cannabis. Medical cannabis is no different than another prescribed medication, for example an opioid for chronic pain, which could impact the nurse's ability to provide safe, competent, compassionate, and ethical nursing care while meeting their standards of practice.

There may be circumstances when a nurse is not able to self-assess and may require an assessment by others who can determine if they are able to provide safe, compassionate, competent, and ethical care. Resources which may be useful in a situation like this may include their primary care provider, employee assistance program, and employer policy.

Incapacity

Nurses that suspect a colleague is impaired have a professional responsibility to respond and report the situation. Guidance on when to report can be found in NANB's [Practice Guideline: Duty to Report](#). To respond appropriately when impairment is suspected in a co-worker, nurses need to be able to recognize possible signs and symptoms. If a nurse suspects a colleague is impaired, ensuring client safety is the priority. Further information on recognizing problematic substance use, and what to do if a nurse suspects a co-worker is impaired, is available in NANB's [Practice Guideline for Problematic Substance Use](#).

For questions or further guidance on medical cannabis, please contact a nurse consultant at practiceconsultation@nanb.nb.ca.

Resources

[Cannabasics](#)

[Canada's Lower-Risk Cannabis Use Guidelines](#)

[Lower Risk Cannabis Use Guidelines](#)

[Lower-Risk Cannabis Use Guidelines for Youth](#)

[Access to Cannabis for Medical Purposes: What Every Nurse Should Know](#)

References

Canadian Pharmacists Association. (n.d.). *Medical Cannabis*.

<https://www.pharmacists.ca/advocacy/issues/medical-cannabis/>



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