Nurses' Health Program: A Guide for Employers



NURSES' Health Program

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Nurses' Health Program: A Guide for Employers

The facts are clear: at least one in five people suffer from mental health and/or substance use disorders in Canada. They can affect anyone regardless of age, ethnicity, gender or occupation, including nurses. The Nurses' Health Program (NHP) recognizes mental health and substance use disorders as illnesses. It understands nurses' unique needs as health care professionals while acknowledging the importance of protecting the public.

Ontario needs every nurse to help provide quality care to patients. Nurses' skills and knowledge are critical to our health care system. It is essential that nurses receive the assistance they need to address their mental health and/or substance use disorders so they can continue to provide quality patient care.

This voluntary, bilingual program is designed to encourage Ontario nurses to seek treatment for mental health and/or substance use disorders that may affect their ability to practice nursing safely.

What is the NHP?

The NHP is a voluntary program for all Ontario nurses. It encourages nurses to seek treatment for substance use and/or mental health disorders that may affect their ability to safely practice nursing. The NHP provides an opportunity for nurses to receive support to recover and practice safely. It is designed so that eligible participants can continue practicing while following a treatment and monitoring plan.

The program monitors a nurse's recovery so that they may be supported to practice safely or return to practice, which promotes professional accountability and protects the public.

Our philosophy

The Nurses' Health Program embraces the philosophy that nurses who have substance use and/or mental health disorders should have an opportunity for education, treatment, and recovery. We know nurses benefit from specialized treatments that recognize their unique needs as health care professionals. Our focus reflects the balance between supporting nurses in recovery and protecting the public. We believe that, with the right support, nurses can continue or return to safe nursing practice benefiting the nurse, the employer, and the public.

Who supports the NHP?

The Nurses' Health Program is supported by:

- College of Nurses of Ontario (CNO)
- Ontario Nurses' Association (ONA)
- Registered Nurses' Association of Ontario (RNAO)
- Registered Practical Nurses Association of Ontario (WeRPN)

The NHP was developed when the four nursing organizations agreed this approach provides an effective channel for nurses with substance use and/or mental health disorders to receive support to recover and return to practice nursing safely.

How the NHP helps

The NHP enables and encourages support for nurses who are experiencing mental health and/or substance use disorders. This program offers nurses direct access to resources, a dedicated Case Manager, comprehensive assessment, individualized treatment plan and monitoring. Treatment is provided by the nurse's own health care providers, not the NHP. Research indicates that voluntary and confidential professional health programs are highly effective in supporting recovery while protecting the public.

How does the program work?

The NHP offers a proven, evidence-based approach to assess and provide monitoring support while nurses are being treated by their service providers for these disorders. Nurses can enter the program voluntarily through self-referral or as an alternative to the current Fitness to Practise process of the CNO.

The program closely monitors recovery so nurses can be supported to practice safely or return to practice.

Support includes:

- access to an NHP Case Manager
- coordination of treatment providers who specialize in mental health and substance use disorders
- access to comprehensive assessment and treatment coordination services

Benefits to employers

- assistance from the NHP Case Manager to:
  - help with accommodation efforts
  - monitor the nurse's progress
  - provide and receive regular updates
  - work with you to develop a return-to-work plan and provide the limitations and restrictions from treatment providers
  - discuss monitoring requirements
  - notify you of any changes to restrictions and limitations
- helps nurses with ongoing support and monitoring as they return to work
- increases access to effective mental health and substance use support for nurses
- may save on costs related to short-term and long-term disability
- may help in relapse prevention
- retention of experienced and valuable nurses

What is the role of the employer?

Employers play an integral role in the nurse's recovery. When a nurse is enrolled in the NHP, a dedicated Case Manager can assist the employer's efforts to accommodate the affected nurse. The Case Manager monitors the nurse's progress and compliance with the program, receives updates from you as the nurse's employer, and is readily available to communicate with you about the nurse's monitoring requirements and return to work.

Employers should offer a supportive environment, as well as:

- communicate with the NHP regarding return to work
- prepare the department/team for the nurse's return
- implement medically supported restrictions and limitations and recommend gradual return to work
- contact the NHP Case Manager if any issues/ concerns are identified during the return to work
- provide the nurse with documentation needed to support leaves of absence

How is return to work facilitated?

There are many partners who work together in the return-to-work process. The NHP works with the nurse, employer, and treatment providers when a return to work has been initiated. This is a comprehensive and thorough process among the key parties. An NHP Case Manager coordinates the ongoing monitoring using a multidisciplinary approach.

Return-to-work guidelines

The return to work is based on a detailed treatment plan approved by the nurse's treatment providers and the NHP. An individual monitoring contract is developed, which includes medically supported restrictions and conditions, regular urine screens, if applicable, and the identification of a workplace supervisor and workplace monitor. The Case Manager remains in regular contact with the nurse, the treatment provider and the employer for the duration of the contract.

How are employers notified if there is a concern/issue?

The NHP Case Manager monitors information received from the multidisciplinary team and random urine screens. Employers and all other parties on the monitoring contract are notified if any concerning information is received that will impact the nurse's ability to practice. In these instances, the NHP Case Manager will discuss next steps with the employer.

Costs

There are no costs to the employer for the NHP. The nurse is responsible for the cost of the random urine screens; however, some employers have chosen to assist with these costs. Some employers have also assisted their employees with the cost of treatment.

At the Nurses' Health Program, we believe that with the right support, nurses can return to safe nursing practice, which benefits both the nurse and the public.

Have questions or want to learn more? Contact us today.

Weekdays: **7am – 7pm EST**

8 AM – 4 PM: **905-813-1559**

7 AM–8 AM & 4 PM–7 PM: **289-505-0170**

Email: **NHP@thp.ca**

www.nurseshealth.ca

Messages left after hours will be returned the next business day.

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