



# CNL<sup>®</sup> CERTIFICATION GUIDE

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**TRANSFORM. LEAD. EXPERIENCE.**

**Commission on Nurse Certification (CNC)**

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**Effective: March 10, 2020**

All policies and procedures in this CNL<sup>®</sup> Certification Guide are effective as of the date listed above and supersede previous policies and procedures. The Certification Guide outlines the CNL<sup>®</sup> exam application process, testing and scoring methodology. To take the Clinical Nurse Leader<sup>SM</sup> (CNL<sup>®</sup>) Certification Exam, candidates must follow all applicable procedures and meet all eligibility requirements.

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The policies and procedures specified in the *CNL Certification Guide* are subject to change without notice.

## Contact Information

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Phone: (202) 370-3608

**Submit Application & Fees:**

[www.aacnnursing.org/CNL-Certification](http://www.aacnnursing.org/CNL-Certification)

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CNC Director

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# Introduction

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Congratulations on your decision to earn the Clinical Nurse Leader<sup>SM</sup> (CNL<sup>®</sup>) credential. We commend your commitment to advancing your career and the nursing profession. The *CNL<sup>®</sup> Certification Guide* provides information essential to the certification process from application through test taking to renewal. To date, more than 6,800 professionals have earned the CNL<sup>®</sup> credential. The CNL<sup>®</sup> certification represents a high level of professional achievement and is valued by employers and healthcare facilities.

## About the American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN)

The American Association of Colleges of Nursing (AACN) is the collective voice for academic nursing. AACN serves as the catalyst for excellence and innovation in nursing education, research, and practice.

## About the Commission on Nurse Certification (CNC)

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

To govern the CNL certification activities and promote CNL practice.

### CNC Vision

To establish a collaborative environment with evolving CNL stakeholders to improve health and healthcare delivery, promote certification and professional development and keep abreast of healthcare issues.

### CNC Values

Leadership, certification standards, professional development and collaboration.

### CNC Board of Commissioners

Governed by leading nursing professionals in practice and academia, the CNC 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.

# Exam Development

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The Examination Development Committee (Item Writing 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.

CNC conducts job analysis studies every 5 years or more often as circumstances may warrant, to verify the content of the examination. The rationale for performing a job analysis every 5 years is to ensure that the exam content reflect changes in the industry, determine the relative importance and level of each competency and if the competency still applies in the job of today's CNL. 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.

## Nondiscrimination

CNC does not discriminate against any candidate for certification on the basis of race, color, creed, age, national origin, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, disability, marital status, parental status, ancestry, sexual orientation, military discharge status, 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.

## 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 exam forms, examination development documents, examination results, examination items, active examination application information, and active applicant/candidate/certificants data permanently.

# Accreditation

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The Clinical Nurse Leader<sup>SM</sup> (CNL<sup>®</sup>) credential is accredited by the National Commission for Certifying Agencies (NCCA). The CNL Certification Examination is designed to meet the high-quality standards established by NCCA. Certification programs must demonstrate compliance with rigorous standards that represent the best practices in the professional certification industry to earn and maintain accreditation status. For more information on NCCA accreditation, visit <http://www.credentialingexcellence.org/>.

# Value of Certification

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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

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## What is a certified 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. Completion of a CNL master's education program at an accredited school of nursing is required to ensure the graduate program's quality and integrity and vets the institution's curriculum and teaching practices. 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. RN licensure is required to ensure that the nurse has passed the NCLEX-RN exam and has met all licensing requirements mandated by their state's board of nursing. 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 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.

## CNL Certification Process

The following are steps required to earn the CNL credential. Each section or step is also outlined in this guide:



Eligibility Requirements



Applying for the CNL Exam



Scheduling the Exam



Preparing for the Exam



On Exam Day



After the Exam

# Eligibility Requirements

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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 demonstrated CNL knowledge and CNL immersion experience are essential for individuals earning the CNL credential.

## Examination Eligibility Criteria

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

- graduates of an accredited \*CNL master's or post-master's program **OR**
- students in their last term of an accredited \*CNL master's or post-master's program

*\*Accredited by a nursing accrediting agency recognized by the U.S. Secretary of Education that prepares individuals with the competencies delineated in AACN's [Competencies and Curricular Expectations for Clinical Nurse Leader<sup>SM</sup> Education and Practice](#). In addition, the CNL education program requires each student to complete as part of their formal CNL educational program a minimum of 300 total hours practicing as a CNL in a clinical immersion experience; and a minimum of 400 total clinical hours (may include the 300 clinical immersion hours) as listed in AACN's [Recommended CNL Practice Experiences](#).*

The CNL exam online application and payment must be submitted along with the student's Education Documentation Form submitted online by the CNL Program Director.

## Certification Eligibility Criteria

CNL certification is achieved when the candidate has met all eligibility requirements along with:

- successfully passing the CNL examination
- having a current and active, unrestricted professional Registered Nurse License (the candidate will be ineligible if currently being disciplined by a state nursing board)
- submitting the required application documents

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 exam.

## Faculty Eligibility Waiver

CNC will waive the eligibility requirements for CNL faculty of existing CNL education programs through December 31, 2020 (applications must be received at CNC by this date). The faculty waiver is necessary to increase the number of certified CNL faculty and ensures that they have met set standards in CNL knowledge and competency. CNL faculty who meet the following criteria are eligible to sit for the CNL exam:

- Registered Nurse licensure
- Graduate degree in nursing or a related healthcare discipline (i.e. 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 with payment and the CNL Faculty Eligibility Documentation Form to CNC for consideration.

# Applying for the CNL Exam

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:

<b>FALL: November – December</b>	<b>WINTER: January – February</b>	<b>SPRING: April – May</b>	<b>SUMMER: July – August</b>
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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 candidates to schedule a date for the CNL examination. Current examination dates, corresponding application deadlines, fees and refund deadlines are published at <http://www.aacnnursing.org/CNL-Certification/Apply-for-the-Exam/Exam-Date-and-Fees>.

### Exam Fees

The CNL Exam is administered at Prometric SMT Testing Centers. **No-Shows forfeit all exam fees.**

**Initial Exam Fee: \$425.00**

**Retake Exam Fee: \$325.00**

Changing Your Exam Date Within the Testing Period – **NOTE:** You must first email CNC at [CNL@aacnnursing.org](mailto:CNL@aacnnursing.org) to confirm approval of being able to change your exam date. Once approved by CNC, contact Prometric SMT at (866) 773-1114.

Number of Days Prior to Your Scheduled Exam Appointment	Policy	Fee Paid to Prometric SMT
*5 days or more	Allowed to reschedule or cancel a scheduled exam. <b>No documentation needed.</b>	\$25.00
4 days or less	Rescheduling not permitted <b>unless one of the four situations:</b> 1. Jury duty, 2. Death in immediate family (grandparents, parents, spouse, siblings, and children), 3. Military deployment, 4. Sickness. <b>Proper documentation must be provided to Prometric SMT /no refund or credit.</b>	No Fee

**\*NOTE:** If you do not schedule your actual exam date with Prometric SMT and want to change your exam date you will not be charged the \$25.00 fee.

Changing Your Exam to Another Testing Period – **NOTE:** You must first email CNC at [CNL@aacnnursing.org](mailto:CNL@aacnnursing.org) to confirm approval of being able to change to another testing period. Once approved, access the Exam Testing Period Change Form via [CNC's Portal](#) (under Forms tab)

Deadline	Policy	Fee Paid To
Payment must be received by the form's due date.	Allowed to reschedule. Payment must be received by the form's due date. A maximum of one change is allowed. Beyond one change, resubmission of the initial application and fee is required. No shows must submit a new initial application and fee for the exam. <b><i>Fees are subject to change at any time and are non-refundable.</i></b>	CNC \$75.00  and <b>Prometric SMT</b> \$25.00

## Application Requirements

Applicants must register online at <http://www.aacnnursing.org/CNL-Certification/Apply-for-the-Exam>.

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

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

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. Save a copy 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

Prometric 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. Prometric SMT has been providing comprehensive exam development and administration services to certification organizations and licensing agencies worldwide since 1995. Prometric SMT provides computer-based testing (CBT) through their corporate affiliate Iso-Quality Testing, Inc. (IQT) and Prometric; both are test administration companies specializing in the delivery of CBT exams that are secure, high quality, user-friendly, and reasonably priced. They have successfully delivered thousands of exams annually at over 650 sites throughout North America and around the world. For more information about Prometric SMT, please visit [www.smttest.com](http://www.smttest.com).

To view the list of testing center locations, visit [www.aacnnursing.org/CNL-Certification/Apply-for-the-Exam/Exam-Date-and-Fees](http://www.aacnnursing.org/CNL-Certification/Apply-for-the-Exam/Exam-Date-and-Fees).

## Scheduling the CNL Exam

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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 will be contacted by Prometric SMT via email with login information to register with a testing center approximately 1 week prior to the start of the testing window.

Candidates will need their Online Candidate Registration from Prometric/SMT/IQT, 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 Changes

- **Candidates needing to change the scheduled exam date within the testing period 5 days or more from the scheduled exam appointment (you have selected a date/time/location)** need to first email CNC at [CNL@aacnursing.org](mailto:CNL@aacnursing.org) to confirm approval of being able to change your exam date. Once approved, contact Prometric SMT at (866) 773-1114 and will be charged a \$25 fee by Prometric SMT. **NOTE:** If you did not schedule your exam appointment, the fee will not be charged by Prometric SMT.
- **Candidates needing to change the scheduled exam date within the testing period 4 days or less from the scheduled exam appointment (you have selected a date/time/location)** are only able to reschedule or cancel the exam if one of the following situations occur: 1. Jury duty, 2. Death in immediate family (grandparents, parents, spouse, siblings, children), 3. Military deployment, 4. Sickness. Candidates need to first email CNC at [CNL@aacnursing.org](mailto:CNL@aacnursing.org) to confirm approval of being able to change your exam date. Proper documentation must be provided to Prometric SMT within 10 days from the missed exam appointment.
- **Candidates changing the test date to another testing period** need to first email CNC at [CNL@aacnursing.org](mailto:CNL@aacnursing.org) to confirm approval of being able to another testing period. Once approved, candidates must submit the online CNL Exam Testing Period Change Form by login in to their [MyCNC Profile](#) (under the “Forms tab” select “View Available Forms”). There is a \$75 administration fee by CNC and a \$25 fee by Prometric SMT.
- **Candidates who fail to notify CNC of a request for change** (no shows) are required to submit a new application and fee to sit for the exam at a later date. The exam date may be changed only once. If more than one change is necessary, resubmission of the application and fee will be required.

## Examination Content and Delivery

The CNL examination is a computer-based test (CBT) that 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.

## Preparing for the Exam

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Read through the entire *CNL Certification Guide* and visit “Prepare for the Exam” section of the CNC Website <http://www.aacnursing.org/CNL-Certification/Prepare-for-the-Exam> 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.aacnnursing.org/CNL-Certification/Get-Involved>.
- 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 Prometric SMT comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and will request that the IQT/Prometric testing centers provide reasonable accommodations for candidates with a disability covered by this Act. Candidates requiring special accommodations must complete the ADA Special Accommodations Request Form made available online as part of the exam application process. The forms must be submitted and uploaded with the CNL Examination Application. Arrangements for special accommodations may take up to 45 days to coordinate. Candidates will be contacted by a Prometric SMT Customer Service Specialist to assist in scheduling a testing appointment to accommodate their needs accordingly, if feasible.

## On Exam Day

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The CNL examination is administered at testing centers located throughout the United States and internationally. Testing centers 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 centers 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 center will be ADA compliant.
- Candidates will have access to restroom facilities.

The CNC and Prometric 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 Prometric SMT staff adhere to approved procedures to ensure the testing centers 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 center, 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 Prometric/SMT/IQT.
- 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 center. Acceptable forms of primary identification (photograph and signature required) include:

- government-issued driver's license
- government-issued ID
- state ID
- 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.

## Testing Center 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 center 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, iPads, tablets, watches, smart glasses, 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 center
- 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 centers.
- 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 center.
- 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 Exam

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After completing the examination, candidates will receive automatic results at the test center 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.

Score reports will include a "pass" or "fail" result. Individuals who fail will receive a score report with diagnostic information and areas that need improvement. 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 minimum passing scaled score (MPSS) for the 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 minimum passing scaled score of 350 for the CNL exam was established using a panel of subject matter experts who carefully reviewed each exam item to determine the basic level of knowledge or skill that is expected. The MPSS for the exam is established to identify individuals with an acceptable level of knowledge and skill. All individuals who pass the exam, regardless of their score, have demonstrated an acceptable level of knowledge and skill (**Note:** Only those who fail will receive their actual exam score).

### 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.

### Re-testing

Candidates who fail the exam may retake the exam once per testing period. Candidates may not retest during the same testing period to avoid over exposure to exam items. To retake the exam, the candidate must repeat all registration processes as outlined in the certification guide, including the online application, fee and attest to the Standards of Conduct; 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 online 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 certifiants. Employers, potential employers, or other agencies may request verification of a certifiant or a certifiant 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 by login into the [CNC Portal](#) (under the "Forms tab" click on "View Available Forms").

## 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

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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.

## Purpose of Certification Renewal

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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.

## Renewal 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 capacity, and job title as Clinical Nurse Leader is not required for renewal**)
- 50 continuing education hours that support the CNL (**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.

Prior to the end of the five year certification cycle (December 31<sup>st</sup>), 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 the CNL Certification Renewal Guidelines is available online at <http://www.aacnnursing.org/CNL-Certification/Renew-Certification>.

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 Criteria

### 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. A CNL job title is not required for renewal.

### Contact Hours/Continuing Education

Minimum of 50 contact hours that support the CNL 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

CNL Renewal is mandatory for all certificants. If certification is not renewed, it will expire on December 31 of the 5th completed year after certification. Individuals whose certification has expired, suspended or revoked may not represent themselves as a certified CNL and may not use the designation until they receive 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 criteria:

- Demonstrate participation in continuing education 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
- Renewal Application and Reinstatement fee \$460 USD fee

To Reinstatement, visit <http://www.aacnnursing.org/CNL-Certification/Renew-Certification>.

An individual with lapsed certification (expired for more than 11 months) who wishes to regain CNL active 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. **Certificants should 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.

## 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. **First Last, MSN, RN, CNL**).

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

# Summary of Website Links

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**ADA Special Accommodations Request Form** Part of the online exam application process when you log into the [CNC Portal](#)

**Apply for the Exam** <http://www.aacnursing.org/CNL-Certification/Apply-for-the-Exam>

**Career Services** <http://www.aacnursing.org/CNL-Certification/CNL-Career-Services>

**Eligible CNL Education Programs** <http://www.aacnursing.org/CNL-Certification/Apply-for-the-Exam/Eligible-CNL-Programs>

**Exam Content Outline** <http://www.aacnursing.org/CNL-Certification/Prepare-for-the-Exam>

**Exam Dates, Application Deadlines and Fees** <http://www.aacnursing.org/CNL-Certification/Apply-for-the-Exam/Exam-Date-and-Fees>

**FAQs** <http://www.aacnursing.org/CNL-Certification>

**Get Involved** <http://www.aacnursing.org/CNL-Certification/Get-Involved>

**Order CNL Merchandise** Log into the [CNC Portal](#) and click on the "Online Store" gray tab

**Prepare for the Exam** <http://www.aacnnursing.org/CNL-Certification/Prepare-for-the-Exam>

**Publications and Resources** <http://www.aacnnursing.org/CNL-Certification/CNC-Publications-Resources>

**Recommended Reading List** <http://www.aacnnursing.org/CNL-Certification/Prepare-for-the-Exam/CNL-Recommended-Reading>

**Renew and Reinstate CNL Certification** <http://www.aacnnursing.org/CNL-Certification/Renew-Certification>

**Testing Centers** <https://www.aacnnursing.org/CNL-Certification/Apply-for-the-Exam/Exam-Date-and-Fees>



## Appendix A

# Test Taker's Rights and Responsibilities (Attestation)

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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.