



Promoting Excellence in Nursing Certification

The Accreditation Board for Specialty Nursing Certification (ABSNC) is the only accrediting body specifically for nursing-related certification programs. ABSNC promotes excellence in health care through the application of rigorous accreditation processes. Organizations that pursue ABSNC accreditation demonstrate a commitment to advancing health, supporting professional growth, and ensuring the highest standards of care.

In alignment with our core values of excellence, education, service, integrity, and leadership, the exam-based accreditation standards reflect ABSNC's commitment to trust and accountability in all aspects of specialty nursing certification and accreditation. ABSNC acknowledges that excellence in care has not historically been accessible to all¹, and that health justice remains an ongoing global effort. Structural inequities have led to exclusion and harm of many people seeking care or professional opportunities. The standards are designed to guide organizations in developing certification programs that are rigorous and reflective of modern practice, but also equitable, inclusive, and responsive to the evolving needs of nurses and the diverse populations they serve.

Accreditation Standards

Standard 1 Definition and Scope of Nursing Specialty

The certification examination program is based on a distinct and well-defined field of nursing practice that subscribes to the overall purpose and functions of nursing. The nursing specialty is distinct from other nursing specialties and is national in scope. There is an identified need for the specialty and nurses who devote most of their practice to the specialty. The ABSNC *encourages* nurses to respect, honor and value diversity in all forms and prioritize belonging.

Standard 2 Research Based Body of Knowledge

A body of research-based knowledge related to the nursing specialty exists. Mechanisms have been established for the support, review, and dissemination of research and knowledge in the specialty. Activities within the specialty contribute to the advancement of nursing science within the specialty.

Standard 3 Organizational Autonomy

The certifying organization is an entity with organizational autonomy governed in part or in whole by certified nursing members.

Standard 4 Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Non-discrimination

The organization respects, honors and values diversity in all forms, does not discriminate among candidates and prioritizes belonging.

Standard 5 Public Representation

The certifying organization includes at least one Public Member with full voting rights on its Board of Directors.

Standard 6 Eligibility Criteria for Test Candidates

The eligibility criteria for specialty RN nursing certification at a minimum include:

- Current active RN licensure or the equivalent thereof outside of the United States in country of practice.

The eligibility criteria for advanced nursing certification at a minimum include:

- Current active RN licensure or the equivalent thereof outside of the United States in country of practice.
- A minimum of a graduate degree in nursing or the appropriate equivalent, including content in the specified area of advanced specialty practice.

- Experiential qualifications as determined by the certifying organization.

The eligibility criteria for Advanced Practice Registered Nurse (APRN) certification at a minimum include:

- Current active RN licensure.
- Completion of a graduate degree program in nursing or the appropriate equivalent (or post-master's or post-doctoral certificate program) from a nationally accredited program in one of the four APRN roles across at least one of the six APRN population foci as described in the *2008 Consensus Model for APRN Regulation: Licensure, Accreditation, Certification, and Education*.
- Completion of three separate courses in advanced pathophysiology across the life span, advanced health/physical assessment, and advanced pharmacology as part of graduate educational preparation.
- Completion of a minimum of 500 clinical hours as part of graduate educational preparation.

The eligibility criteria for Advanced Practice Registered Nurse (APRN) specialty certification at a minimum include:

- Current active APRN certification or licensure.
- Education and/or experiential qualifications as defined by the certifying organization.

The eligibility criteria for non-RN nursing team member certification at a minimum include:

- Licensure or registration as required or the equivalent thereof outside of the United States in country of practice.
- Education and/or experiential qualifications as defined by the certifying organization.

Standard 7

Validity

The certifying organization has conducted validation studies to assure inferences made on the basis of test scores are appropriate and justified.

Standard 8

Test Development

Certification examinations are constructed and evaluated using methods that are psychometrically sound and fair to all candidates.

Standard 9

Reliability

The certifying organization assures test scores, including sub scores, are sufficiently reliable for their intended uses.

Standard 10

Test Administration

The certification examination is administered in a manner that minimizes construct-irrelevant variance and maintains examination security.

Standard 11

Test Security

Procedures are in place to maximize the security of all certification examination materials.

Standard 12

Standard Setting, Scaling, And Equating

Passing score for the certification examination is set in a manner that is fair to all candidates, using criterion referenced methods and equating and scaling procedures that are psychometrically sound.

Standard 13

Recertification and Continuing Competence

The certifying organization has a recertification program in place that facilitates continuing competence in the specialty over the course of a candidate's certification period and encourages inclusion of recertification requirements that emphasize health equity.

Standard 14

Communications

The certifying organization provides information that clearly describes the certification and recertification process to candidates, certificants, and other stakeholders.

- Standard 15** **Confidentiality**
The certifying organization assures confidential information about candidates and certificants is protected.
- Standard 16** **Appeals**
The certifying organization has an appeal process available to candidates/certificants who have been denied recertification or access to an examination, or who have had certification suspended or revoked.
- Standard 17** **Misrepresentation and Noncompliance**
The certifying organization has a mechanism in place to respond to instances of misrepresentation and noncompliance with eligibility criteria or the certifying organization's policies; this mechanism includes reporting cases of misrepresentation and noncompliance to appropriate authorities.
- Standard 18** **Quality Improvement**
The certifying organization shall have an internal audit and management review system in place, including provisions for continuous corrective and preventive actions for quality improvement.

¹Reflecting priorities of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation's [Framework for Achieving Health Equity](#), and recommendations of [The Future of Nursing 2020-2030](#) report, ABSNC approached standard development with a reflexive awareness of nurses, patients, and populations that have been *historically excluded* from equitable access to health care and/or professional opportunities. These include, but are not limited to, those affected by systemic barriers related to personal characteristics. We acknowledge that disadvantage is not limited to select identities, and that addressing belonging in nursing requires attention to a range of lived experiences.