



Canadian Association  
of Schools of Nursing  
Association canadienne des  
écoles de sciences infirmières

## Position Statement

---

### CASN Position Statement on Master's Level of Nursing

#### Background

CASN establishes and promotes national standards of excellence as reflected in the CASN National Nursing Education Framework (2015) for nursing education.

CASN recognizes that while baccalaureate nursing education programs are vital for preparing generalist nurses for entry to practice (CASN, 2016), master's level nursing education programs prepare registered nurses<sup>1</sup> for advanced professional nursing roles and for the integration of knowledge, skills and abilities for nursing scholarship. The Canadian healthcare system benefits when the voices of nurses in advanced roles are added to the interdisciplinary discourse on healthcare.

#### Position

##### CASN's position on master's education and masters programs

As reflected in the Masters section of the National Nursing Education Framework the assumption is that the student already possesses the components outlined at the baccalaureate level. Master's education is also based on the assumption that, although the master's degree is a terminal degree for many students, it is often the requirement for admission into a doctoral program in nursing.

Over the last four decades, nursing roles requiring additional expertise and a deeper, more extensive knowledge base, developed through post-graduate study, have increased progressively. While some of these roles, such as the clinical nurse specialist (CNS) and the nurse practitioner (NP) have a clinical focus, others in areas such as health policy, nursing research, health system management, nursing education, and nursing administration may have a non-clinical focus, affecting the recipients of health care services indirectly. Practice in graduate programs in nursing includes action and experiences designed to support the development of knowledge and expertise in non-clinically focused advanced nursing roles and action and experiences to support

---

<sup>1</sup> Some master's of nursing programs address both baccalaureate entry-to-practice requirements for registration and preparation for graduates to work in advanced professional nursing roles

development of the indirect and direct care competencies for advanced clinical roles including the CNS and NP. Emphasis is placed on developing the ability to analyze, critique, and use research and theory to further nursing practice. Provision is also made for examination of current issues in health care and the ethical values that influence decision-making.

Master's programs encompass a *program continuum* that includes programs that require a master's thesis, programs that require a major project or practicum, and programs that are course based. Individual master's programs may include both required and elective courses designed to prepare graduates to assume positions in advanced nursing practice, teaching, administration, policy development and/or to provide a foundation for doctoral study.

While master's programs and specialization streams have increased substantially, the framework pinpoints core expectations for all master's programs in nursing, regardless of stream or specialization. It also identifies what a master's degree adds in value to baccalaureate education in nursing.

The framework is organized into six domains. The domains represent a sphere of degree level outcomes and provide a heuristic organizing structure for the framework. In reality, they do not exist in silos, but are interwoven together and are interdependent.

The domains and a guiding principle for the master's level are listed below:

*Knowledge:*

Programs provide a comprehensive and substantive understanding of nursing knowledge, and a critical awareness of complex problems and/or new insights.

*Research, methodologies, critical inquiry & evidence:*

Programs foster the ability to contribute to nursing knowledge through systematic inquiry, knowledge development, translation, and scholarship.

*Nursing Practice:*

Programs provide practice learning experiences to foster the use of best available evidence, theories, and expertise in an advanced nursing role.

*Communication & collaboration:*

Programs prepare students to use advanced communication, collaboration and consultation abilities to participate and lead in diverse contexts.

*Professionalism:*

Programs prepare students to initiate and model best practices, and to promote their own personal and professional growth in an advanced nursing role.

*Leadership:*

Programs prepare students to provide leadership, oversight, and accountability for practice delivery and outcomes.

Masters programs prepare students to demonstrate in-depth nursing knowledge in a particular area of graduate study. This includes of knowledge related to interprofessional collaboration in advanced professional roles, complex health systems and policy environments, as well as advanced knowledge across research, practice, education, and communication.

Graduates are able to analyze and compare different methods of inquiry, identify gaps in knowledge, and collaborate in research producing new knowledge. Graduates are also able to use a systematic approach to assess, plan, implement and evaluate solutions to complex nursing practice problems. Graduates have the ability to engage in and contribute to nursing scholarship.

Practice learning is an integral component of master's education, although practice is conceived broadly and is associated with the preparation for roles having a non-clinical focus as well as a clinical focus.

Graduates of masters programs in nursing are able to articulate an advanced nursing perspective, lead teams and communicate to a wide range of audiences related to the delivery of health care. They are prepared to address complex issues in advanced nursing roles, demonstrating initiative, professional responsibility and accountability. Graduates have the leadership abilities to provide oversight and accountability for practice delivery and outcomes, with practice being defined broadly.

**Approved** - November 13, 2011

Revised – November 2016

---

CASN provides permission to reproduce – please acknowledge CASN

Canadian Association of Schools of Nursing, 1145 Hunt Club Rd, Ste 450, Ottawa ON K1V 0Y3

Tel: (613) 235-3150 Fax: (613) 235-4476 Web site: [www.casn.ca](http://www.casn.ca) Email: [inquire@casn.ca](mailto:inquire@casn.ca)

## References

Canadian Association of Schools of Nursing (CASN). 2016. *Position statement: baccalaureate education and baccalaureate programs*. Retrieved from <http://www.casn.ca/en/68/item/0>

International Council of Nurses (ICN). 2016. *Definition of nursing*. Retrieved from <http://www.icn.ch/who-we-are/icn-definition-of-nursing/>

Canadian Association of Schools of Nursing (CASN). 2015. *Nursing Practice in Master's Education*. Retrieved from <http://www.casn.ca/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/Nursing-Practice-in-Masters-paper.pdf>