



Clinical Nurse Specialist Association of Canada **CNS-C**  
Association des infirmières et infirmiers cliniciens spécialisés du Canada **ICS-C**

## **Position Statement:**

### **The Role of Clinical Nurse Specialists in Canada**

#### **Introduction**

Clinical Nurse Specialists (CNSs) are advanced practice nurses prepared at the Master's or Doctoral level who bring a high level of expert specialist knowledge while integrating equity, diversity and inclusion. They play a critical role in the Canadian healthcare system by driving quality improvement, research, system efficiency, and promoting positive person outcomes. CNSs are uniquely positioned to bridge the gap between clinical practice, leadership, and evidence-based research, transforming healthcare delivery at individual, organizational, and systemic levels.

#### **Role of the Clinical Nurse Specialist**

CNSs practice in diverse settings, functioning both independently and collaboratively to lead complex initiatives. Through their expertise in research and clinical practice, they implement evidence-informed interventions for diverse populations by:

- Developing and implementing policies that ensure evidence-informed nursing care across the lifespan for individuals, families, groups, communities, and populations.
- Ensuring high-quality, evidence-informed care while maintaining fiscal responsibility and cost-effectiveness.
- Establishing partnerships that lead to innovative strategies and interventions to improve person-centered care.
- Supporting nursing education and practice, with a focus on recruitment and retention across the profession.
- Enhancing key healthcare indicators, including reducing hospital length of stay, improving cost efficiency, promoting better care experiences, and improving overall person outcomes.
- Promoting culturally appropriate care integrating the principles of diversity, inclusion, and anti-racism.
- Working to eliminate anti-Indigenous racism while advancing and advocating for culturally safe, respectful, and meaningful healthcare experiences that lead to stronger, more equitable, and sustainable health outcomes for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples.

#### **Education and Expertise**

Advanced education at the Master's or Doctoral level with a specialization in nursing is essential for CNS to develop the core competencies of clinical care, advancement of nursing practice, systems leadership and evaluation and research. Education programs need to include a strong foundation in evidence-based practice, quality improvement, and leadership. As the work of the CNS is to advance nursing practice and is grounded in complex care for persons receiving care and families, courses should include nursing theories relevant for clinical practice and highlight knowledge and research on nursing interventions.

## Impact of Clinical Nurse Specialists

CNSs contribute to healthcare transformation through four key domains:

1. **Clinical Care:** With specialized knowledge in specific populations or practice areas (e.g., pediatrics, oncology, critical care, public health, mental health), CNSs provide direct and indirect person-centered care. They serve as role models for evidence-based practice and develop strategies to address system-level issues.
2. **Evaluation and Research for Quality Improvement:** CNSs lead data-driven initiatives to enhance person-centered care. They conduct and integrate research, ensuring clinical practice is based on the best available evidence, leading to improved person safety and health outcomes.
3. **Advancement of Nursing Practice:** Through education and mentorship, CNSs support nurses and other healthcare professionals, ensuring they are equipped with up-to-date knowledge and skills. Their leadership fosters a culture of continuous learning and professional development.
4. **Systems Leadership:** CNSs advocate for persons receiving care and families while influencing healthcare policies, system efficiencies, and interdisciplinary collaboration. They contribute to the sustainability of healthcare by optimizing resource utilization and cost-effectiveness.

## Investment in Clinical Nurse Specialists

Investments in CNSs is critical to advancing nursing practice, optimizing person-centered care, and improving system-level outcomes. Leadership teams must support the CNS role by:

- Clearly defining the CNS scope of practice and differentiating it from other nursing roles.
- Supporting CNS engagement in all domains of advanced practice nursing.
- Building partnerships with key collaborators.
- Allocating resources for the successful integration and sustainability of the role.
- Providing access to education, networking, and mentorship opportunities.

## Call to Action

To maximize the impact of CNSs in the healthcare system, we call on government agencies, healthcare organizations, and academic institutions to:

- Establish standardized credentialing and regulatory frameworks for CNSs.
- Support access to CNS-specific graduate education and clinical training.
- Increase funding for CNS positions, graduate nursing education, and nursing research.
- Integrate CNSs into all areas of healthcare to enhance persons re outcomes, cost-efficiency, and quality of care.
- Ensure CNS are integrated as part of the policy and decision-making team to maximise their impact in the healthcare system.

## Conclusion

CNSs are essential to strengthening healthcare systems in Canada. Their expertise in clinical care, research, nursing practice advancement, and systems leadership contributes to high-quality, person-centered care. A national commitment to supporting and expanding CNS roles is necessary to ensure sustainable and effective healthcare delivery across the country.

*(References available upon request)*