



## The ABCs of APCs

An annual practising certificate (APC) tells the public that a nurse is competent, safe and fit to practise. This handout aims to answer all questions nurses may have and to provide them with a simple guide to what they need to know about this important requirement.

The Nursing Council of New Zealand (the Council) issues, on average, 45,000–50,000 practising certificates every year and places a lot of importance on ensuring that the processing of applications is smooth and efficient. Making sure nurses understand how APCs operate to protect public safety so that they, in turn, play their part in maintaining competence and renewing their practising certificates in a timely manner is an important part of making the system work well.

### Who needs an APC?

Any nurse who is using nursing knowledge directly or indirectly or whose role impacts on public safety needs an APC.

### Why do nurses need an APC?

Nurses, like other health practitioners, are governed by the Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act 2003 (the Act). The Act established a system of regulation to protect public health and safety, which includes:

- an independent authority to register and monitor nurses, namely the Council;
- a requirement that nurses are appropriately educated in nursing theory and practice, and are qualified before they can be registered; and
- a requirement that nurses continually update and improve their skills.

The Act requires all practising nurses to be registered and to hold a current APC. This provides the public with an authoritative assurance that nurses have kept their skills up-to-date and maintained the required standard of competence to protect public safety.

### What do nurses have to do to maintain the required standard of competence?

To maintain competence, nurses need to be practising a minimum of 450 hours every three years and demonstrating that they are continuing to learn by undertaking a minimum of 60 hours of professional development every three years. These hours need to be documented and verifiable. Nurses also need to meet the Council's competencies for their scope of practice. If they have not met these requirements, they may be issued with an interim practising certificate (IPC).



## How does a nurse obtain a renewal form for an APC?

An application form will be sent to a nurse three months before their renewal date. The renewal date is dependent on when an individual nurse's birthday falls as per the following chart:

Birthday	Annual Renewal Date	Application Forms Sent Out
1 April – 30 June	1 July	Late March
1 July – 30 September	1 October	Late June
1 October – 31 December	1 January	Late September
1 January – 31 March	1 April	Mid December

If a nurse returns to work outside their usual cycle, a practising certificate is issued for a shorter period of time and the fee payable is reduced. This allows them to work until they come back into the correct APC cycle.

## What should a nurse do if they haven't received an application form?

If a nurse did not receive an application form, it is likely to be because the Council does not have their current postal address. Nurses are legally required under the Act to notify the Council if their contact details change. The best way to advise Council of a change of address is by emailing: [nzreg@nursingcouncil.org.nz](mailto:nzreg@nursingcouncil.org.nz)

## How long does it take for the APC application to be processed?

The Council sets itself performance targets and aims to turnaround an application for a practising certificate in 20 working days or less. While this timeframe is generally met, efforts to improve performance are ongoing.

A nurse whose fully completed application has been received by the Council is deemed to hold an APC from the date the application and payment is received or until she or he is notified by the Registration Manager that a practising certificate will not be issued. This means that if there is a delay in issuing the APC for any reason, the nurse is still legally entitled to practise.

## What form does the APC take?

The APC comes as a plastic card, which can fit in a wallet. It has a signature panel on the rear for additional security. An IPC is a paper certificate.

## What is the cost of an APC?

The fee for a full-year APC is currently \$96. The fee is determined on a cost recovery basis and is reviewed from time to time.

## What is the role of employers?

Employers also have a responsibility to protect public safety by ensuring that nurses in their workplace hold a current APC.

## What happens if a nurse is late in getting their application in or they don't have an APC?

It is an offence to be practising without an APC. Any nurse who continues to practise without an APC may be referred to a professional conduct committee for investigation.

## How can you tell if someone has a current APC or not?

You can check the APC of any registered nurse on the online public register at [www.nursingcouncil.org.nz](http://www.nursingcouncil.org.nz)

