



PEDIATRIC NURSING  
CERTIFICATION BOARD

# The Development & Validation of a Competency Framework for Pediatric Nurses

## Executive Summary for Stakeholders



January 2021

## Background & Acknowledgements

This executive summary describes research completed in 2020 by the Pediatric Nursing Certification Board (PNCB) with the goal of developing and validating a competency framework for pediatric nurses. This document presents recommendations regarding implementation of the framework to inform and support pediatric nurses as they develop in their careers, maintain their certification, and enhance their daily practice. It represents the culmination of 18 months of planning, execution, data analyses, and writing.

- PNCB developed this foundational pediatric nursing competency framework to better understand how pediatric nurses advance in their professional role and support its multiyear [Continuing Competency Initiative](#) research.
- The framework may inform future updates to PNCB's Certified Pediatric Nurse (CPN®) recertification program requirements.
- Additional stakeholders who prepare and support the professional development of the pediatric nursing workforce may also benefit from this research.

PNCB promises to keep CPNs and other stakeholders informed about future findings related to this pioneering framework for our specialty and any impact to recertification requirements or options.

A project of this magnitude depends on the hard work and commitment of many professionals, and we are pleased to acknowledge their contributions to the final product. We are indebted to the 13-member Competency Development Task Force (CDTF) for the insights and energy it provided. The following Task Force subject-matter experts worked tirelessly with us through the study:— Maureen Chin, MSN, RN, CNML, CPN; Eva Gomez, MSN, RN-BC, NPD-BC, CPN; LaVonda Hoover, MS, BSN, RN, CPNP, CPN; Dr. Sukhjit (Simmy) King, DNP, MS, MBA, RN-BC, NE-BC; Shannon Koty, MSN-NL, CPHON, CPN; Patricia Sarver, MSN, RN-BC, CPN; Kathryn Sheehan, MSN, APRN, CPNP-AC/PC, CCRN; Jennifer Stephen, MSN, RN, CPN; James (Ryan) Taylor, MSN, RN, CPN, NE-BC; Christine Tolliver, MSN-CSN, RN-BC, CPN. The following members of the PNCB Board of Directors participated and served as leadership liaisons: Donna Bigani, MSN, RN, CPN; Carly Byrne, MSN, APRN, PCNS-BC, CCNS, CPN, CCRN-K; Karla Nygren, MSN, MBA, RN, CEN, CFRN, CPEN, TCRN, CPRN, CPN.

During the development of this competency framework, a variety of resources, evidence-based material, and references were explored in pediatric nursing, other nursing specialties, and other disciplines. PNCB gratefully acknowledges these underlying, foundational resources such as the Pediatric Pre-Licensure Core Competency Model (2017) and the Pediatric Residency Core Competency Model (2017) from the Society of Pediatric Nurses. A bibliography is also shared within this document.

PNCB is also grateful for the ACT® Credentialing Services team of Patricia M. Muenzen, PhD and Carla M. Caro, MA for their vision, research, survey and focus group facilitation, and the analysis of findings.

Most importantly, PNCB is indebted to the many CPNs who responded to the survey invitation and participated in focus groups. Thank you for your time and feedback for this critical initiative.

# Executive Summary

In 2019, PNCB initiated a project to develop a competency framework for pediatric nurses. The competency development project represented a key element of PNCB's ongoing Continuing Competence Initiative. The goal of this initiative is to develop well-informed methods of ensuring continuing competence in the context of PNCB's certification maintenance programs.

The framework, while describing the evolution of practice for all pediatric nurses, was designed to support PNCB's Certified Pediatric Nurse (CPN) certification program. The goal was to create a framework that describes ways that pediatric nurses may develop professionally over time and with experience in different nursing roles.

Work to develop the competency framework took place between January 2019 and May 2020. The methodology was designed to align with best practices in competency development as articulated by Campion et al. (2011).

PNCB appointed a 13-member Task Force to create the competency framework. The composition of the Task Force was considered thoughtfully to ensure representation among the members of different demographic and practice-related perspectives found in pediatric nursing practice. The Task Force met several times, both in person and virtually, to develop the competency framework. Five focus groups with additional pediatric nurses were conducted to gather feedback regarding the draft framework during its development.

The framework consisted of the following elements:

**Competency Areas and Definitions:** broad, potentially overlapping areas of proficiency

**Exemplars:** brief labels indicating ways in which the competency manifests in behavior on the job

**Behavioral Indicators:** describe what effective performance looks like *at a particular proficiency level*. When multiple proficiency levels are defined, they form developmental progressions. Developmental progressions *operationalize* competency at developmental anchor points of professional life.

The framework is structured around six broad role-based competency areas:



The framework was validated through a survey of 6,000 certified pediatric nurses. Rating scales assessed perceptions of the point in a pediatric nurse's development when each behavioral indicator was typically demonstrated. The return rate was 10%. Validation ratings generally affirmed the progressions. In the few instances where ratings did not confirm expected developmental progressions, the indicators were refined to more explicitly capture their intended meanings.

The finalized, validated competency framework follows, along with explanatory material providing context for its development and potential. It represents a rich resource for numerous stakeholders within the pediatric nursing community including pediatric nurses, educators, employers, and certifying bodies.

# PNCB Pediatric Nurse Competency Development Framework

## Purpose

PNCB developed this pediatric nursing competency framework to outline professional expectations inherent in the role of the pediatric nurse. Because the pediatric nurse has multiple responsibilities, the framework is structured around six role-based competency areas: Clinician, Collaborator, Advocate, Educator, Leader, and Innovator. Each competency area includes several exemplars of ways that the competency is manifested in practice. Developmental progressions associated with each exemplar reflect progressions of increasing proficiency that may be achieved over time and with experience based on interests and aptitudes, as well as organizational facilitators and barriers. Potential uses of this document include:

- supplying a basis for consideration of future updates to PNCB's Certified Pediatric Nurse (CPN®) recertification program requirements, which is one goal of PNCB's multi-year [Continuing Competence Initiative](#).
- establishing benchmarks for individual nurses and student nurses when engaging in self-assessment and self-reflection during their personal career journeys.
- assisting RN faculty, clinical educators, staff development nurses, and nursing leadership in explaining career progression, setting goals with nurses, and evaluating nurses' performance to ensure a competent workforce.
- providing information that may be of interest to employers, hospitals, organizations, and human resources personnel for staff development purposes.

## Special Notes

1. This framework is intended to be a guideline, not a standard.
2. This document should not be used to inform employer hiring decisions or decisions related to promotions.
3. The framework could serve as a guideline for pediatric nursing internationally, within the scope and standards of each country.
4. It is not expected that all pediatric nurses will attain Level 3 milestones in all competency areas or exemplars during their careers.
5. Variables which can influence attainment of competency milestones could include, but are not limited to, organizational facilitators and barriers (e.g., access to resources, personnel, and mentoring; staff development budget; emerging disruptors such as the COVID-19 pandemic) or available scenarios in which behavioral progressions can be demonstrated.
6. Job title is not a limitation to attaining competencies or a direct link to competency areas and attainment of those milestones.
  - For example, a nurse does not need to be in a leadership role to reach Leader competency milestones; a nurse does not need to be a nurse scientist, researcher, or informatics nurse to reach Innovator milestones.
7. It is expected that behavior(s) from higher level milestones may emerge in lower levels, but performance of those behaviors will be demonstrated more consistently at the higher level.
8. It is understood that the milestones are part of a continuum that starts during undergraduate education.

## Development

The Pediatric Nursing Certification Board began this project by establishing a special Task Force of pediatric nursing experts throughout the country with such roles as practice manager, clinical manager, manager for nursing education and professional development, advanced education specialist, among others. With the assistance of the Task Force, a pediatric nursing competency framework was drafted. Peer focus groups then reviewed the full draft document and revised portions as indicated. Many of the focus group volunteers actively held a PNCB credential. In March 2020, PNCB conducted a survey of pediatric nurses holding the CPN credential and related stakeholders in order to validate the work put forth in this document.

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**Competency Area: CLINICIAN**

*Definition: The pediatric nurse clinician uses evidence-based practice, clinical judgment, professional engagement and informatics to provide safe patient- and family-centered care for diverse pediatric populations. A pediatric nurse clinician engages in lifelong professional development to build and maintain competence.*

Exemplars	Behavioral Indicators		
	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
<b>Evidence-based practice</b>	Identifies and adopts evidence relevant to the practice environment	Compares and contrasts evidence from the literature to inform practice	Translates new evidence into practice through the appropriate channels and evaluates outcomes
<b>Caring practices</b>	Provides care for patients and families based on standards and protocols set by the practice setting	Recognizes the unique needs of each individual patients and families, collaborating with interdisciplinary experts in formulating a tailored plan	Orchestrates patient and family care meetings to ensure needs are met beyond the healthcare setting as patients transition to home and/or alternate settings
<b>Diversity and inclusion</b>	Recognizes personal biases in delivering care to diverse populations, and modifies care to meet patient and family needs	Minimizes the influence of personal biases by seeking opportunities to enhance understanding of diverse groups	Influences and educates others to value diversity and promote inclusion
<b>Clinical judgment</b>	Gathers and processes information, and seeks guidance in decision-making based on level of experience	Works collaboratively as an integral member of an interdisciplinary team, developing appropriate recommendations and interventions	Uses expert, intuitive reasoning to enhance clinical judgment and serves as a resource to other healthcare professionals
<b>Patient safety</b>	Minimizes or eliminates risk in practice by adhering to established pediatric safety standards	Proactively uses data to identify and mitigate risks to improve safety outcomes	Leads change initiatives to advance patient safety across the practice environment
<b>Informatics</b>	Navigates current technology (e.g., electronic record, virtual patient visits) to accurately input and access patient data when providing patient care	Gathers and interprets patient data and reports from multiple sources to improve clinical decision making	Uses knowledge generated from data and reports to identify gaps, improve care processes, and inform technology changes
<b>Professional development</b>	Maintains competence by attending continuing education or skills training	Uses information from performance evaluations and self-assessment to identify learning needs	Proactively seeks learning opportunities and obtains knowledge that advances clinical practice for self and others
<b>Professional engagement</b>	Joins internal or external committees or professional organizations applicable to pediatric specialty	Actively participates as a member of internal or external committees or professional organizations	Serves as leader of internal or external committees or professional organizations

**Competency Area: COLLABORATOR**

*Definition: The pediatric nurse collaborator builds relationships with patients, families, and the team in order to identify needs and goals and incorporates these into decision-making processes. A pediatric nurse collaborator works with interprofessional colleagues to assist in meeting optimal patient goals.*

Exemplars	Behavioral Indicators		
	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
<b>Self-engagement</b>	Receptive to recommendations and viewpoints of others	Respectfully offers perspective to augment recommendations and viewpoints of others	Creates a culture where seeking and sharing recommendations and viewpoints is expected
<b>Problem solving</b>	Recognizes need for help and seeks assistance in problem solving	Identifies issues, engages stakeholders, and uses variety of strategies for resolution	Serves as a resource by teaching others about best practices, and shares strategies for effective problem resolution
<b>Patient and family centered care</b>	Elicits feedback and listens to input from patients and families to make care decisions	Anticipates patients' and families' needs, incorporating their concerns in decision making	Partners with patients and families to influence and improve care delivery across the system
<b>Professional boundaries</b>	Develops self-awareness related to professional relationships through experiential learning and feedback from others and participates in therapeutic relationships with patients and families	Recognizes and addresses boundary violations which may jeopardize professional relationships with patients and families	Educates and assists others in establishing professional boundaries and provides guidance regarding effective management
<b>Interprofessional team collaboration</b>	Interacts with team members to provide quality patient care	Actively participates in crucial conversations with team members, and provides input based on own assessment of patient needs	Proactively initiates interactions with all team members based on needs of a given situation, and guides team in creating a mutually agreed plan



**Competency Area: ADVOCATE**

*Definition: The pediatric nurse advocate acts on behalf of patients and families, nurses, communities, and self to improve, influence, and transform patient care, healthcare systems, the nursing profession, and social and political health-related policy.*

Exemplars	Behavioral Indicators		
	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
<b>Self</b>	Practices self-care by maintaining work-life balance	Identifies at-risk behavior, emotional distress, moral injury, or burnout, and seeks assistance as needed	Role models healthy behaviors and counsels others in need of self-care
<b>Patient and family</b>	Advocates for needs of patient and family (e.g., asks appropriate questions, clarifies orders)	Acts on behalf of patients and families at the multidisciplinary or organizational level	Anticipates and assists in navigating the competing needs and values of patients, families and healthcare systems
<b>Community</b>	Participates in employer or volunteer activities that promote health to community members	Facilitates delivery of community-based programs to improve health	Identifies needs and develops initiatives related to community or population health
<b>Nursing profession</b>	Participates in workplace initiatives related to nursing practice	Acts on behalf of nurses at the multidisciplinary or organizational level	Advocates outside the organization on local, state or national policies related to the nursing profession
<b>Social and political</b>	Seeks opportunities to learn about social and political health-related issues	Actively participates in social and political health-related advocacy efforts	Partners with legislators, governing bodies, and other stakeholders to influence health policy

**Competency Area: EDUCATOR**

*Definition: The pediatric nurse educator is engaged in the process of knowledge transfer at all levels of practice over the care continuum while tailoring approaches to the needs of specific target audiences in order to achieve optimal outcomes.*

Exemplars	Behavioral Indicators		
	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
<b>Patient and family education</b>	Follows established guidelines in delivering patient and family education based on needs of the patient	Adapts patient education programs to patients' and families' learning needs (e.g., health literacy, diversity and inclusion), actively addressing barriers	Creatively modifies or develops patient and family education programs based on clinical experience with consideration of health literacy and health disparities
<b>Interprofessional education</b>	Informally shares knowledge with peers and other health professionals	Facilitates learning for nurses and other healthcare professionals through formalized educational activities	Develops or modifies curricula or training programs, evaluating the effectiveness and outcomes of education activities
<b>Coaching and mentoring</b>	Responds to feedback, coaching, or mentoring by more experienced colleagues	Seeks and obtains coaching and mentoring to support own professional development; informally mentors peers	Formally coaches or mentors to support the growth and development of others

**Competency Area: LEADER**

*Definition: The pediatric nurse leader develops relationships, and uses systems thinking in the workplace to guide and influence nurses and the profession, resulting in improvements in the provision of care and health outcomes.*

Exemplars	Behavioral Indicators		
	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
<b>Quality outcomes</b>	Collects audit data to assess compliance (e.g., quality, safety, patient care outcomes)	Interprets and evaluates data to identify gaps and opportunities for improvement	Implements process changes and evaluates outcomes
<b>Professionalism</b>	Demonstrates behaviors congruent with professional scope and standards of practice	Reflects on personal beliefs, values, biases, and self-limitations, recognizing their impact on professional behavior	Promotes and models professional behavior to elevate the image of nursing
<b>Workplace diversity and inclusion</b>	Adheres to workplace expectations regarding civility, diversity, and inclusion practices	Demonstrates behaviors that embrace diversity and inclusion as assets in the workplace	Sets and models standards to foster a culture that is respectful of staff diversity
<b>Change agent</b>	Adopts required changes	Supports change and assists others in adopting change	Leads or facilitates change
<b>Resource management and utilization</b>	Uses available resources effectively in practice (e.g., supplies, equipment, staffing)	Seeks and obtains resources to support patient care and considers cost-effectiveness and efficiency in resource use	Leads or implements projects to minimize expense and maximize resources

**Competency Area: INNOVATOR**

*Definition: The pediatric nurse innovator creates or adopts new methods, ideas, processes, or products through creative solutions and generates new knowledge through scientific inquiry.*

Exemplars	Behavioral Indicators		
	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3
<b>Inquiry and development</b>	Asks questions about practice and processes; generates ideas that support quality outcomes	Creates and designs solutions for improvement	Drives change through adoption of new ideas and solutions
<b>Research</b>	Participates in and contributes to research conducted by others	Develops research questions related to pediatric nursing	Designs or leads research initiatives and disseminates results
<b>Technology</b>	Uses and integrates various technology applications, solutions, and devices in practice to support patient care	Acts as early adopter and/or change agent for technology	Engages in development or optimization of technology