

## ACCNS-N EXAM ELIGIBILITY

Neonatal Clinical Nurse Specialist (wellness through acute care)

Staff Review: August 2023  
Board Approved: March 2024  
Last Revised: March 2024

### 1.0 POLICY

#### Exam Eligibility

Current, unencumbered licensure as an RN or APRN in the U.S.<sup>1</sup> is required. An unencumbered license is not currently being subjected to formal discipline by the Board of Nursing in the state(s) in which the applicant is practicing and has no provisions or conditions that limit the nurse's practice.<sup>2</sup>

- Provisions or conditions may include, but are not limited to, direct supervision of practice, drug administration limitations and/or practice area exclusions.
- Documentation of all provisions and conditions from the board or its designee must be reviewed prior to approval for testing.
- Candidates and ACCNS-N certificants must notify AACN Certification Corporation (Cert Corp) within 30 days if any provisions or conditions are placed on their RN or APRN license(s).

An APRN whose license has provisions or conditions that limit their practice may be eligible for Conditional Certification. Refer to the Conditional Certification policy for additional information.

Completion of a graduate-level advanced practice education program that meets the eligibility requirements for the ACCNS-N based on the Consensus Model for APRN Regulation and other foundational national standards for APRN education, accreditation and regulation. Program eligibility requirements are as follows:

1. The education program is offered by an accredited college or university that offers a CCNE or ACEN accredited master's degree or higher in nursing with a concentration as a neonatal clinical nurse specialist (CNS) covering the spectrum of wellness through acute care.
2. Both direct and indirect clinical supervision must be congruent with current AACN and nursing accreditation guidelines.
3. The curriculum includes, but is not limited to:
  - a. Biological, behavioral, medical and nursing sciences relevant to practice as a CNS, including pathophysiology, pharmacology and physical assessment;
  - b. Legal, ethical and professional responsibilities of the CNS; and
  - c. Supervised clinical practice relevant to the neonatal CNS (wellness through acute care) role.
4. The curriculum meets the following criteria:
  - a. Curriculum is consistent with the competencies of neonatal CNS practice.
  - b. Instructional track/major has a minimum of 500 supervised clinical hours overall.
  - c. The supervised clinical experience is directly related to the knowledge and all role components of the neonatal CNS.

Five-hundred (500) supervised clinical hours in all roles of the neonatal CNS within the graduate program are required. All clinical hours must have been in direct care of the neonatal patient population. A portion of the total clinical hours must be focused on wellness and a portion on acute care in the neonatal patient population.

## **2.0 PROCEDURES**

Candidates must request that official, final versions of all graduate-level educational transcripts be sent *directly from their school*. Transcripts may be emailed from the school to [APRNcert@aacn.org](mailto:APRNcert@aacn.org) or mailed in a sealed envelope from the school to AACN Cert Corp. The program director of the candidate's educational program must complete and sign the ACCNS-N Educational Eligibility Form to be submitted with the exam application (or submitted electronically via the Program Director Portal).

Applicants may request a review of their certification eligibility at any time. The review process will be conducted by the staff of AACN Cert Corp. The appeal process is conducted by the AACN Cert Corp Appeals Panel. Applicants determined to be ineligible for the ACCNS-N exam will have their application fee refunded within 30 days of determination.

AACN Cert Corp may adopt additional eligibility requirements at its sole discretion. Any such requirements will be designed to establish, for purposes of ACCNS-N certification, the adequacy of a candidate's knowledge and experience in caring for the neonatal patient population.

## **3.0 PURPOSE & RATIONALE**

The purpose of ACCNS-N certification is to help ensure public protection. New graduate clinical nurse specialists are required to pass a psychometrically sound exam that measures the advanced practice competencies needed to perform safely and effectively as a newly licensed, entry-level clinical nurse specialist with authority to diagnose and prescribe. State Boards of Nursing may use the results of ACCNS-N exam as a factor in making APRN licensure determinations.

Eligibility requirements for the ACCNS-N are based on the Consensus Model for APRN Regulation and other foundational national standards for APRN education, accreditation and regulation.

As regulatory partner, AACN Cert Corp master's prepared registered nurses are required to evaluate the curriculum for compliance with these national and state standards.

An unencumbered U.S. license as an RN or APRN is required to validate that nurse is following accepted legal nursing practice in compliance with State Board of Nursing requirements.

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<sup>1</sup> Includes District of Columbia and U.S. territories of Guam, Virgin Islands, American Samoa and Northern Mariana Islands. Puerto Rico is not an NCSBN member and, therefore, not included.

<sup>2</sup> If a restriction (temporary or permanent) is placed on an RN or APRN license for an incident that occurred prior to obtaining the license, AACN Certification Corporation (AACN Cert Corp) will evaluate such an occurrence on a case-by-case basis to determine if exam eligibility requirements are met.