

AACN CERTIFICATION CORPORATION FACT SHEET

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Background

The American Association of Critical-Care Nurses, the world's largest specialty nursing organization, has been serving the needs of nurses caring for acutely and critically ill patients since 1969.

AACN Certification Corporation was established in 1975 as a separate entity to provide comprehensive credentialing for nurses to ensure their practice is consistent with established standards of excellence in caring for acutely and critically ill patients and their families.

AACN Certification Corporation accomplishes its mission through providing certification exams and renewal programs for individuals involved in the care of acutely and critically ill patients.

Number of Certified Nurses

According to data collected by the American Board of Nursing Specialties (ABNS) in 2019, nurses in the U.S. and Canada held more than 922,610 certifications, an increase of over 100,000 certificants when compared to 2016 survey data. These certifications were granted by 24 different certifying organizations, and 38 different credentials designate these certifications. More than 136,000 acute and critical care nurses hold credentials through AACN Certification Corporation.

Exams

AACN Certification Corporation develops and administers the CCRN, PCCN, ACNPC, ACNPC-AG, CCNS, ACCNS-AG, ACCNS-P and ACCNS-N certification programs and the CMC and CSC subspecialty certification programs. These exams have been demonstrated to be legally defensible and psychometrically sound indicators of mastery of the knowledge and skills necessary to practice effectively.

The exams are administered via computer-based testing at over 300 locations across the U.S. The exams are open to nurses caring for acutely and critically ill patients who meet the eligibility requirements, which for specialty and subspecialty certifications include a specified period of clinical practice in the role being tested. APRN exam eligibility is based on graduate-level education.

SPECIALTY CERTIFICATIONS

The CCRN certification program, introduced in 1976, is for nurses providing care to or influencing the care of acutely/critically ill adult, pediatric or neonatal patients. These patients may be found in such units as intensive care, cardiac care, combined ICU/CCUs, medical/surgical ICUs, trauma or critical care transport/flight. Three eligibility pathways are available.

- **Direct Care** - for RNs or APRNs who provide direct care to acutely/critically ill adult, pediatric or neonatal patients. These patients may be found in such units as intensive care, cardiac care, combined ICU/CCUs, medical/surgical ICUs, trauma units or critical care transport/flight.
- **Knowledge Professional** - for RNs or APRNs who influence the care delivered to acutely/critically ill adult, pediatric or neonatal patients, but do not primarily or exclusively provide direct care. These nurses may work in roles such as Clinical or Patient Educator, Academic Faculty, Manager/Supervisor, Clinical Director.
- **Tele-critical Care** - for RNs or APRNs working in a tele-critical care setting monitoring/caring for acutely/critically ill adult patients from a remote location.

CCRN certifications must be renewed every 3 years.

The PCCN certification program, introduced in 2004, is for progressive care nurses providing direct care to acutely ill adult patients who are moderately stable with an elevated risk of instability. They require a high intensity of care and vigilance and are commonly found in areas such as intermediate care, direct observation, step-down, telemetry and transitional care units. Two eligibility pathways are available.

- **Direct Care** - for RNs or APRNs who provide direct care to acutely ill adult patients. These patients may be found in areas such as intermediate care, direct observations, stepdown telemetry or transitional care units.
- **Knowledge Professional** - for RNs or APRNs who influence the care delivered to acutely ill adult patients, but do not primarily or exclusively provide direct care. These nurses may work in roles such as Clinical or Patient Educator, Academic Faculty, Manager/Supervisor, Clinical Director.

PCCN certifications must be renewed every 3 years.

SUBSPECIALTY CERTIFICATIONS

The CMC (cardiac medicine) certification program, launched in 2005, is for nurses who hold a nationally accredited clinical nursing specialty certification (such as CCRN via the Direct Care or Tele-critical Care Pathway, PCCN via the Direct Care Pathway, ACNPC, ACNPC-AG, CCNS, ACCNS-AG, CEN, etc.) and specialize in the direct care of adult cardiac patients. These patients are often found in CCU, medical ICU, telemetry, progressive care, heart failure clinics/home care, interventional cardiology, cardiac cath labs and/or electrophysiology units.

CMC certification must be renewed every 3 years.

CSC®

The CSC (cardiac surgery) certification program, launched in 2005, is for nurses who hold a nationally accredited clinical nursing specialty certification (such as CCRN via the Direct Care or Tele-critical Care Pathway, PCCN via the Direct Care Pathway, ACNPC, ACNPC-AG, CCNS, ACCNS-AG, CNOR, CRNFA, CPAN, etc.) and specialize in the direct care of adult cardiac surgery patients within the first 48 hours postoperatively. These patients are often found in cardiac surgery, cardiothoracic surgery, cardiovascular surgery and post-anesthesia recovery units.

CSC certification must be renewed every 3 years.

ADVANCED PRACTICE CERTIFICATIONS

ACCNS-AG® ACCNS-P® ACCNS-N®

The ACCNS credentials are entry-level advanced practice certifications for clinical nurse specialists educated at the graduate level to provide advanced nursing care across the continuum of healthcare services, from *wellness through acute care*:

The ACCNS-AG certification program, launched in 2013, addresses the specialized needs of the adult-gerontology patient population (young adults, older adults and frail elderly).

The ACCNS-P certification program, launched in 2013, addresses the specialized needs of the pediatric patient population.

The ACCNS-N certification program, launched in 2014, addresses the specialized needs of the neonatal patient population.

ACCNS certifications must be renewed every 5 years.

ACNPC-AG®

The ACNPC-AG certification program, launched in 2013, is an entry-level advanced practice certification for acute care nurse practitioners educated at the graduate level to provide continuous and comprehensive advanced nursing care to acutely ill adult-gerontology patients (young adults, older adults and frail elderly) experiencing episodic illness, exacerbation of chronic illness or terminal illness.

ACNPC-AG certification must be renewed every 5 years.

ADVANCED PRACTICE PROGRAMS – RENEWAL ONLY

CCNS®

The CCNS certification program, launched in 1999, is for nurses who were educated at the graduate level as clinical nurse specialists to provide advanced nursing care to acutely and/or critically ill adult, pediatric or neonatal patients.

CCNS certification must be renewed every 5 years.

ACNPC®

The ACNPC certification program, launched in 2007, is for nurses who were educated at the graduate level as acute care nurse practitioners to provide advanced nursing care across the continuum of healthcare services to meet the specialized physiologic and psychologic needs of adult patients with complex acute, critical and/or chronic health conditions.

ACNPC certification must be renewed every 5 years.

With implementation of the Consensus Model in 2015, the CCNS and ACNPC exams are no longer available for initial certification but remain as renewal options.

**COVID-19
Pulmonary
and Ventilator
Care®**

ECMO

MICRO-CREDENTIALS

In response to COVID-19 and its associated pulmonary complications, AACN created a micro-credential to help employers and their employees validate their knowledge in caring for mechanically ventilated patients. Launched in 2020, this micro-credential is available to all medical professionals with completion of the online exam.

The *COVID-19 Pulmonary and Ventilator Care* micro-credential is based on the free course *COVID-19 Pulmonary, ARDS and Ventilator Resources*.

Launched in 2023, this extracorporeal membrane oxygenation (ECMO) micro-credential supports the clinical practice of critical care nurses and APRNs who are directly involved in caring for patients receiving ECMO therapy. Since ECMO is performed in a variety of emergency scenarios, nurses pursuing this micro-credential are not limited to any particular unit or setting. The only eligibility requirement is that applicants must hold a current, unencumbered U.S. healthcare professional license.