



Practice Guidelines for Registered Psychiatric Nurses in Self-Employed Practice

Approved by CRPNM Council
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Adapted from the original to reflect Manitoba's legislation and regulatory framework.

This document was developed through a collaboration of the Regulated Psychiatric Nurse Regulators of Canada (RPNRC), an umbrella organization representing the Registered Psychiatric Nurses regulators in British Columbia (BCCNM), Alberta (CRPNA), Saskatchewan (CRPNS), Manitoba (CRPNM), Yukon, the Northwest Territories, Nunavut (CANNN), and Prince Edward Island (CRNMPEI).

The RPNRC is a collaborative, interjurisdictional network that promotes consistency and harmonization among provincial regulators.

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Introduction and Background

This practice guideline is a collaborative document developed by the Registered Psychiatric Nurse (RPN) regulators across Canada. It reflects ongoing national collaboration and incorporates findings from an environmental scan of self-employed practice guidelines from other regulated professions. This updated guideline is intended to provide specific guidance to RPNs in Manitoba who are in or considering self-employed practice.

The College of Registered Psychiatric Nurses of Manitoba (CRPNM) recognizes that self-employed practice is a legitimate practice option for Registered Psychiatric Nurses (RPNs). However, there are unique policy, practice, business, and liability issues that arise for RPNs who are self-employed. Consistent with the mandate to ensure public protection, CRPNM is responsible for ensuring safe, competent and ethical practice. With the growing number of RPNs choosing to enter self-employed practice it is critical to ensure that RPNs understand the full extent of their professional responsibility.

RPNs in self-employed practice are responsible to ensure that all aspects of professional practice, liability, and risk management are properly addressed.

This document provides guidelines for Registered Psychiatric Nurses in self-employed practice for that purpose.

Definition of Self-Employed Practice

Self-employed practice is the application of psychiatric nursing knowledge and principles in an unsupervised, self-employment setting in psychiatric nursing practice and/or psychiatric nursing services. RPNs in self-employed practice must conform to the CRPNM's **Standards of Psychiatric Nursing Practice** (the "Standards") and **Code of Ethics**.

The Registered Psychiatric Nurse in self-employed practice:

- is a graduate from an approved psychiatric nursing program with additional education and/or experience in their area of practice.
- must have an active certificate of practice and be registered in good standing in the province(s) where they practice; and,
- is legally responsible for their practice.

Is this Practice Considered Self-Employed Practice?

Determining whether you are self-employed as a Registered Psychiatric Nurse (RPN) involves evaluating several key aspects of your professional life, including control over your work, financial responsibilities, business operations, and legal obligations. Unlike traditional employment where an employer dictates your schedule, duties, and compensation, self-employment as an RPN offers autonomy but also requires you to manage various administrative, financial, and regulatory tasks independently. Review the below checklist to help you assess whether you are functioning as a self-employed RPN by reflecting on your control over practice decisions, client management, business structure, and personal accountability. By answering the following questions, you can gain a clearer understanding of your employment status and whether your practice aligns with the characteristics of self-employment.

- Do I have control over my hours of work?
- Do I have control over the services I provide?
- Do I make decisions about my business policies and procedures?
- Am I responsible for the financial aspect of my business (handling own billing, taxes, business expenses).
- Do I receive income based on the services I provide?
- Have I established my own business identity or registered as a business?
- Do I manage my own client base?
- Do I handle my own marketing?
- Do I work independently without supervision or oversight of an employer?
- Am I the custodian of the health record?

If you answer yes to most or all of these questions it is likely you are self-employed and in self-employed practice, meaning you are an independent contractor or a business owner responsible for managing your practice, clients, financial matters and legal obligations.

Self-employed psychiatric nursing practice may occur in the domains of direct clinical practice, education, research and administration.

Operating a self-employed practice has the potential to include activities that extend beyond the traditional roles and responsibilities of an RPN, which may increase the risk of practicing outside your professional and personal scope. To ensure your practice aligns with recognized RPN practice hours and remains within scope, consult the CRPNM's resource [Is My Practice Considered Psychiatric Nursing Practice?](#)

Preparation for Self-Employed Practice

The public expects the Registered Psychiatric Nurse (RPN) in self-employed practice has the requisite knowledge, experience, skills and competencies and that the RPN has made provisions for continued education and continued competence in their area(s) of practice. Although this is not unlike the expectations for any RPN in any practice area, the self-employed nature of this practice puts a greater responsibility on the Registered Psychiatric Nurse.

The identified area(s) of practice, or clinical focus of self-employed practice, is where the RPN has their primary area(s) of competence and is the basis of their practice.

The RPN in self-employed practice is required to identify their own area(s) of practice or primary clinical focus of practice based on the education and experience the RPN has in a particular domain of practice or with a specific population, practice setting or range of services they can provide.

Some examples of identified areas of psychiatric nursing practice may include, but are not limited to:

- Child and adolescent
- Adult
- Geriatric
- Forensic
- Trauma
- Rehabilitation
- Education
- Vocational counseling
- Addictions

Prior to initiating self-employed practice, the RPN is required to complete a *Self-Employed Practice Form*. This form communicates the details of the RPN's self-directed practice to the College and serves as a reflective tool to identify the populations served and the competencies developed within their area of practice. The form must be kept up to date and resubmitted to the College if any details of the self-employed practice change.

General guideline for Registered Psychiatric Nurses who are in, or are considering, self-employed practice:

Registered Psychiatric Nursing practice involves complex responsibilities that require sound clinical judgment, emotional intelligence, and the ability to make autonomous decisions in dynamic mental health environments. Research indicates that it takes approximately **2 to 3 years of clinical practice** for nurses to consolidate theoretical knowledge into competent, real-world decision-making (Benner, 1984; Missen et al., 2016; Kaihlanen et al., 2020). During this period, new graduates transition from novice to competent practitioners through direct experience, mentorship, and critical reflection.

Self-employed practice requires more than foundational competence; it demands a high level of professional autonomy—the ability to apply one's expertise independently and confidently in complex situations. Autonomy in nursing is a multidimensional concept that extends beyond routine care to include independent decision-making, role clarity, and professional accountability (Pursio et al., 2021). As Pursio et al. note, professional autonomy is realized not only in collaboration with other disciplines but also in the nurse's ability to manage their own clinical responsibilities and apply judgment rooted in experience.

An additional 1-2 years beyond the consolidation of knowledge phase allows RPNs to deepen their reflective practice, critically evaluate interventions, exposure to varied psychiatric conditions and apply evidenced based frameworks with more nuance to promote safe, effective and ethical care.

It is recommended that RPNs have **3 to 5 years of experience** before assuming full self-employed RPN practice roles to support safe, competent, and effective practice. An additional 1-2 years beyond the consolidation of knowledge phase allows RPNs to deepen their reflective practice, critically evaluate interventions, exposure to varied psychiatric conditions and apply evidenced based frameworks with more nuance to promote safe, effective and ethical care.

In addition to having **3-5 years' experience** an RPN in self-employed practice has successfully completed an approved psychiatric nursing education program and one of the following options:

- 1) A **Baccalaureate Degree in Psychiatric Nursing** approved or recognized by the College.
- 2) Post basic education that the CRPNM considers to be **substantially equivalent** to a Degree in Psychiatric Nursing.

Responsibilities of the Registered Psychiatric Nurse in Self-Employed Practice

1. The RPN must hold an active registration and valid certificate of practice to use the protected title of Registered Psychiatric Nurse or RPN in their course of business; and
2. The RPN must obtain and maintain professional liability protection for a minimum of \$5 million for each occurrence or claim with a minimum aggregate amount for each year of \$5 million as a beneficiary of the Canadian Nurses Protective Society (CNPS).

3. The RPN must provide written notice to the College if there is a change or addition to their location of practice or a change in the focus of their practice. They are responsible for offering only those services for which they are competent, or for which they have obtained additional education or supervision when extending their area(s) of competence; and
4. The RPN must practice within the boundaries of legislative, regulatory, business, ethical and professional standards.

Service Delivery Plan

There are two distinct components to self-employed psychiatric nursing practice: service delivery and business management. Service delivery includes such aspects as law, ethics and risk management. Business management includes the organization and operation of a business and the financial structures which support the delivery of the psychiatric nursing services. It is recommended that RPNs in self-employed practice consult a business lawyer and/or accountant regarding business and financial structures.

The RPN in self-employed practice is responsible and advised to develop a Service Delivery Plan. The Service Delivery Plan may include:

- an outline of the clinical focus and the scope of services or self-employed practice
- the purpose, goals and expected outcomes of the services or practice
- location of the business, telephone number and hours of operation
- fees and payment schedules
- qualifications of the self-employed RPN - education, experience and specialization
- expectations of the nurse/client relationship
- developing referral sources
- accountability for service including scheduling of clients
- purchasing equipment and supplies
- paying bills and taxes
- writing reports
- informed consent
- confidentiality
- conflict of interest
- ensuring that the minimum requirement for professional liability protection (CNPS) is sufficient for self-employed practice
- documentation and records, including electronic files
- continuous quality improvement
- continuing competency
- contractual agreements with established agencies for third party reimbursement
- termination of practice

RPNs in self-employed practice are encouraged to keep a copy of all their documentation.

Registered Psychiatric Nursing Corporations

Self-employed RPNs in Manitoba may choose to operate as a Health Professions Corporation, provided they meet the requirements set out in [The Regulated Health Professions Act](#) (the “Act”) and the [College of Registered Psychiatric Nurses of Manitoba General Regulation](#) (the “General Regulation”).

RPNs who wish to practice as a Health Professions Corporation must be registered in good standing and hold a valid certificate of practice. An application and a Permit to practice as a Registered Psychiatric Nursing Corporation is required. Application steps can be found [here](#).

Critical Considerations for Self-Employed Practice Service Delivery

There are several critical considerations for RPNs in self-employed practice. RPNs are strongly encouraged to explore the following considerations and to develop a plan to address them. It is also recommended to keep a record of this plan.

Accountability

The RPN in self-employed practice demonstrates accountability to the client, the public and the CRPNM by:

- recognizing personal and professional boundaries and limitations
- making appropriate referrals
- seeking out appropriate personal and professional resources
- assuming responsibility for continually maintaining and upgrading skills and education in clinical areas of focus
- applying the concepts of accountability, responsibility and continuing competence
- knowing professional issues in psychiatric nursing practice
- knowing and applying the *Standards of Psychiatric Nursing Practice* and *Code of Ethics*
- identifying and incorporating best practices

Informed Consent

The RPN in self-employed practice demonstrates knowledge and understanding that the issues of competency, capacity and consent arise in numerous contexts including, but not limited to:

- consent and competency/capacity to consent to admission/entry to a hospital/facility, agency/service or psychiatric nursing care, treatment, psychiatric nursing interventions, tests and procedures, research and release of information

The RPN in self-employed practice demonstrates an understanding that the legal principles governing competence/capacity to consent vary depending on the context:

- age of consent identified under Manitoba legislation
- client's ability to understand the nature of the treatment or procedure, the benefits and risks
- client's intellectual capacity to understand what is proposed
- client's cognitive capacity to understand and comprehend what is being proposed
- client's mental status

The RPN in self-employed practice demonstrates knowledge of and effective application of the principles of consent as it applies to psychiatric nursing practice including, but not limited to:

- implicit or explicit consent
- consent is considered valid only when given "voluntarily" (client's decision is the product of the conscious mind) and not coerced in any way
- consent is considered to be valid only if the client is competent

- consent of next-of-kin is only relevant if the client is not capable of consenting and if the next-of-kin is duly appointed as the substitute decision-maker
- consent is to be obtained in advance of the initiation of any test, procedure or psychiatric nursing intervention
- consent must relate to specific treatment or psychiatric nursing intervention(s) undertaken
- record keeping, reporting and other disclosures of information
- full and frank disclosure of the nature of the intervention(s), the risks and alternatives
- the scope of consent
- withdrawal of consent
- emergency treatment under Manitoba or federal law, risk of serious harm to the health or safety of the individual the information is about or another individual, or of the public health or public safety

Informed consent must be obtained at the beginning and is an ongoing process in the professional relationship. If the conditions that the client imposes would render the intervention(s) futile or harmful, the RPN should withdraw from the relationship.

The RPN must clearly identify processes to be followed to address issues of consent in their practice.

Confidentiality

Professionally acquired information must be treated as confidential communication. The obligation of confidentiality begins in any situation in which there would be a reasonable expectation of privacy.

The RPN in self-employed practice demonstrates knowledge and application of confidentiality principles in the therapeutic relationship and manages and stores all information about clients in ways that maintain and safeguard confidentiality.

The RPN in self-employed practice remains up to date on *The Personal Health Information Act*- [PHIA](#) and ethical guidelines concerning confidentiality and demonstrates knowledge and ability to define those circumstances where confidentiality can be breached.

These include:

- a risk of harm to the health and safety of a minor, or
- risk of serious harm to the health or safety of the individual the information is about or another individual, or to the public health or public safety:
- court subpoena or when required by law
- where the RPN is a defendant in a civil, criminal or disciplinary action arising from the professional relationship

Every disclosure must be limited to the minimum amount of information necessary to accomplish the purpose for which the information is disclosed.

Conflict of Interest

The RPN in self-employed practice adheres to and abides by the *Code of Ethics*. Conflict of interest issues include, but are not limited to:

- directly or indirectly recruiting clients from one's employer

- providing services to a client personally known to the RPN on a social basis
- a dual relationship of any form
- recognition of conflict-of-interest situations

Being self-employed creates an increased risk for a conflict of interest.
The need to establish a business base as a way of creating an income can influence behavior that might be considered a conflict of interest.

If you are unsure if a situation is a conflict of interest, ask yourself the following self-reflective questions:

- Do I ensure my referrals are made based on the client’s best interest, not personal or financial gain?
- Do I market my services in a way that is truthful, and does not mislead the potential clients?
- Do I provide clients with full information to make informed decisions without pressure or conflict of interest?
- Do I regularly review and assess my practice to identify and address any potential conflicts of interest?
- Do I seek guidance from peers, mentors or professional organizations on managing conflicts of interests?
- Do I follow the *Code of Ethics* and regulations to avoid conflicts of interest and maintain professional integrity?

Any “no” responses to the above self-reflective questions may indicate a potential conflict of interest or highlight areas of your practice that could benefit from self-reflection and clinical support and/or consultation to ensure that client care is being prioritized over competing business interests. It is essential to implement proactive plans that prioritize client care and uphold professional integrity.

It is advised to seek professional assistance and/or consultation with a CRPNM Practice Consultant if it is unclear whether a specific situation constitutes a conflict of interest.

Professional Liability Protection

The [General Regulation](#) requires that a member who holds a valid certificate of practice must obtain and maintain professional liability protection (PLP) or liability insurance as a beneficiary of the Canadian Nurses Protective Society (CNPS).

Being self-employed introduces additional liability protection needs. It is recommended that PRNs consult the CNPS to review their current professional liability protection and determine any additional requirements based on their specific practice.

Documentation and Records

RPNs in self-employed practice must be familiar with *The Personal Health Information Act* -[PHIA](#) and the implications of being a custodian or trustee of a health record.

Records refer to documentation kept about clients, whether on paper, on computer, or by any other means and include appropriate storage, retention and authorized release of client information.

It is recommended that the health record documentation includes:

- a general client information form
- a voluntary consent form signed and dated by the client or by a duly appointed substitute decision-maker
- documentation of services provided, and any organizational/operational policies used in practice
- times and dates of contacts with clients
- referral forms for consultation with other professionals in situations requiring additional expertise
- a signed release of information in the event of referral to other health care professionals or agencies

At all times the client files (electronic or hard copy) and pertinent documentation must be properly secured and maintained to ensure confidentiality. The files and documentation must be maintained in accordance with privacy legislation in Manitoba. For further support, it is recommended that self-employed RPNs contact the Manitoba Ombudsman to ensure understanding and compliance with *The Personal Health Information Act (PHIA)* and *The Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FIPPA)*. Self-employed RPNs will be held accountable for the proper handling, protection, use and disclosure of personal and personal health information.

The RPN in self-employed practice is required to keep accurate and adequate records. Failure to do so could be considered to be professional misconduct.

Continuous Quality Improvement

The RPN in self-employed practice ensures mechanisms to evaluate psychiatric nursing practice and services. Working as a self-employed RPN may increase practice isolation. It is the responsibility of the RPN to ensure they have processes and policies in place for enhancing patient care and maintaining high standards of professional practice. This includes but is not limited to:

- integrating the latest research and clinical guidance into daily practice to ensure care is evidenced based
- establish and set measurable and clear goals to improve client outcomes
- ongoing professional development and adherence with the Continuing Competency Program
- community of practice for ongoing professional development, clinical accountability, reflective practice and ethical-decision making

Advertising

The RPN in self-employed practice must ensure that all advertising complies with the advertising provision outlined in section 76 of Act:

Prohibition re false advertising

76

No member or health profession corporation shall engage in advertising that is untruthful, inaccurate or otherwise capable of misleading or misinforming the public.

This requires the public to be provided with accurate information that will not exaggerate the benefits of the services provided, mislead the public, or detract from the public image of the psychiatric nursing profession.

When advertising to the public you are responsible for:

- Including a description of your services to the public to help clients make informed decisions
- Include your name and protected title
- Include only accurate, factual and verifiable information

The RPN is prohibited from including testimonials. This restriction is designed to maintain the integrity of psychiatric nursing practice, protect the public from misleading information, and ensure that all claims about psychiatric nursing services are evidence-based. Financial incentives or discounts for services are not permitted and may contribute to the appearance of impropriety potentially undermining the trust in the therapeutic relationship. Endorsements are not appropriate in advertising material. Private for profit services are to be structured to reflect the true costs of providing care, ensuring that all clients receive equitable services.

Registered Psychiatric Nurses are also required to comply with the CRPNM [Social Media and Social Networking](#) guidelines. Social media use that undermines the public's confidence in the profession may be subject to review. Use of the CRPNM logo is prohibited, as are any communications that imply speaking on behalf of, or as representing the CRPNM.

Risk Management

Working in self-employed practice presents a unique set of challenges that can create a higher risk environment compared to traditional healthcare settings. Unlike working within a hospital or clinic, self-employed RPNs are highly autonomous, without the immediate support of a larger team or supervision. This isolation can lead to increased responsibility for clinical decision-making, client safety, and business operations. Additionally, self-employed RPNs are tasked with managing both the clinical and administrative aspects of their practice, including financial management, legal compliance, and marketing.

The absence of built-in support systems, such as other RPNs to transfer client care, peer consultation, and readily available resources, heightens the risks of burnout, legal liability, environmental and operational disruptions. A robust risk management plan is essential.

These factors make it essential for self-employed RPNs to have a robust risk management plan in place to ensure they can mitigate potential hazards while maintaining a high standard of care for their clients.

Areas of Risk:

- Client safety
- Crisis management
- Boundary violations
- Environmental risk (uncontrolled settings, working alone)
- Confidentiality breaches
- Scope of practice violations
- Workplace safety
- Business continuity

- Financial management
- Legal compliance
- Public perception
- Lack of support
- Burnout

Termination of Practice

Self-employed RPNs must have a plan for the termination of practice as it relates to:

- clients of the service
- referral sources
- professional colleagues
- transfer of clients
- transfer of client files when appropriate written permission has been obtained from the client
- maintaining or destroying client files in a confidential manner in accordance with provincial legislation
- arrange for a transfer of client files to a trustee under provincial legislation
- closure of business accounts and payment of fees
- catastrophic events such as death or unforeseen circumstance

When a self-employed practice is terminated, the RPN must inform the College and complete the *Termination of Self-Employed Practice* document. The [General Regulation](#) has specific provisions for Self-Employed Practice and for Closing, Leaving or Moving a Self-Employed Practice.

Conclusion

Self-employed practice as a Registered Psychiatric Nurse demands advanced clinical competence but also requires a strong commitment to the Standards and Code of Ethics, professional practice, accountability and risk management. The increased autonomy and reduced oversight inherent in self-employed practice increases the potential for risk to clients and the RPN.

It is recommended that RPNs review this document regularly. It is also recommended that RPNs stay up to date on changes to legislation, trends and evidenced based practice and self-employment legal liability. As new information becomes available from the CRPNM, it is the responsibility of the RPN to stay informed and up to date.

The final section of this document (Appendix A) includes a [Self-Employed Practice Checklist](#) to help RPNs assess their readiness to engage in self-employed practice. This checklist is not exhaustive and is intended as a guiding tool.

Self-Employed Practice Check list

1. Practice Guidelines and Scope of Practice

- Have you reviewed the *Practice Guidelines for Registered Psychiatric Nurses in Self-Employed Practice*?
- Is your self-employed practice business within the scope of Registered Psychiatric Nursing?
- Does the service you provide fall within the defined scope of registered psychiatric nursing practice?
- Is the service evidence-based and aligned with current best practices?
- Are the services you provide effective and beneficial for your clients?
- Who is the target client for your services (individuals, families, groups, communities, populations)?
- Do you utilize the steps of the nursing process (assessment, diagnosis, planning, implementation, and evaluation) as an integral part of your practice?
- Do the services you offer require the specialized knowledge, skills, and judgment of a Registered Psychiatric Nurse?

2. Competence in Your Chosen Practice Area

- Are you competent in the specific area of practice you've chosen for self-employed practice?
- Do you have the necessary knowledge, skills, judgment, and experience to meet the standards of psychiatric nursing practice?
- Are you capable of performing any reserved acts within the psychiatric nursing scope that require additional education or training?
- Do you have a process in place for referral and peer support when your clients need services beyond your own competence or capacity?
- Do you have mechanisms in place to evaluate and improve your practice regularly?
- Can you meet the expectations for responsibility and accountability as outlined in the Standards of Practice, Code of Ethics, Practice Directions and Guidelines, Entry-level Competencies, and relevant legislation?

3. Addressing Limitations

- Are there any practice expectations or requirements that cannot be met in the services you are providing? If so, how will you address these limitations?

4. Policies, Procedures, and Professional Standards

- Do you have policies and procedures in place to support your practice and maintain professional standards?
- Is there a plan in place for regularly reviewing and updating these policies and procedures?

Key policies and procedures to establish in self-employed practice:

- Client Assessment:** Ensuring proper assessment processes are followed.
- Reporting Adverse Effects:** Mechanisms for tracking and reporting any negative outcomes or side effects related to your interventions.

- Consent Forms:** Ensuring you have valid, informed consent from all clients before providing services.
- Infection and Prevention Control:** Protocols to prevent infection and ensure client safety.
- Documentation:** Maintaining proper and accurate documentation for all client interactions and services provided.
- Personal Health Information Act (PHIA):** Adhering to privacy regulations for managing clients' health information.
- Client Record Management/Storage:** Proper systems for storing and managing client records securely.
- Conflict of Interest:** Clear policies to identify and manage any potential conflicts of interest.
- Client Relationships:** Clear processes for accepting, refusing, or terminating client relationships.
- Notice of Required Payment:** Clear communication regarding fees, payment schedules, and any financial policies.
- Request by Client to View Health Information:** Procedures for providing clients with access to their health information upon request.
- Advertising:** Ensuring advertising practices are ethical and compliant with relevant regulations.

Additional Resources

- [Canadian Nurses Protective Society](#)
- [College of Registered Psychiatric Nurses of Manitoba General Regulation](#)
- [Health Professions Corporation](#)
- [Is My Practice Considered Psychiatric Nursing Practice?](#)
- [Manitoba Ombudsman](#)
- [Social Media and Social Networking](#)
- [The Practice of Registered Psychiatric Nursing Regulation](#)
- [The Regulated Health Professions Act](#)

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