



**NURSES RECOMMENDING MEDICAL SUPPLIES AND EQUIPMENT  
UNDER THE NON-INSURED HEALTH BENEFITS PROGRAM**  
**QUESTIONS & ANSWERS**

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This is a collaborative document between Indigenous Services Canada and the Nova Scotia College of Nursing to help nurses<sup>1</sup> understand their accountabilities as they relate to this policy change made by the Non-Insured Health Benefits (NIHB) Program. The Nova Scotia College of Nursing is the regulatory body for licensed practical nurses (LPNs), registered nurses (RNs) and nurse practitioners (NPs) in Nova Scotia. Our mandate is to protect the public by promoting the provision of safe, competent, ethical and compassionate nursing services by its registrants.

The department of Indigenous Services Canada's NIHB Program provides eligible First Nations and Inuit people with a range of medically necessary health related items and services that are not covered by other insurance plans.

The NIHB Program provides coverage for prescription drugs, over-the-counter medication, medical supplies and equipment (MSE), mental health counselling, dental care, vision care and medical transportation.

In order to improve access to benefits, the NIHB Program announced on December 17, 2018, that a recommendation from an RN will be accepted for a defined list of medical supplies and equipment. This includes items in the following categories: bathing and toileting aids, dressing aids, feeding aids, transfer aids, walking aids, incontinence, ostomy and catheter supplies, wound care supplies and breast prostheses.

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### Indigenous Services Canada refers to 'prescribing' or 'recommending' in their communication about this program. What is the difference?

Indigenous Services Canada often uses the terms interchangeably; however, they are very different actions. The major differences are around context and risk. Prescribing is a higher function set out in legislation that enables authorized prescribers<sup>2</sup> to direct a pharmacist or certified dispenser to release medication or products to clients. Recommending is not governed by legislation and it is where a tightly defined range of products or medications may be suggested to manage or address lower risk issues.

Currently in Nova Scotia, RNs are not authorized to prescribe; however, they may recommend in appropriate contexts. For clarity and consistency, the College will always refer to the action as 'recommending'.

### Is recommending MSE within the scope of practice of an RN?

Yes. RNs with the appropriate knowledge, skills and judgment (competence) can recommend MSE as long as there is an employer policy, guideline or process in place.

### Can LPNs recommend MSE?

No. At this time, recommending MSE is not within the professional scope of an LPN<sup>3</sup>. However, LPNs may identify clients that may benefit from the program and collaborate with an RN to ensure appropriate recommendations are made.

### Can an RN recommend MSE if there is no policy or guideline in place?

The employer must have a policy, guideline or process to enable RNs to recommend MSE. Without this recommending MSE is not part of the RN scope of employment. If the nursing assessment indicates that clients will benefit from RNs recommending MSE, nursing should work with their employer to implement a policy or guideline to enable this.

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1 The term nurse in this document refers to LPNs, NPs, and RNs unless otherwise stated.

2 In Nova Scotia authorized prescribers include NPs, physicians, midwives, dentists, optometrists and pharmacists

3 NSCN determines the scope of practice of the LPN based on interpretation of current legislation

## What is the accountability of the nurse?

Nurses are accountable to meet their standards of practice and for their decisions, actions and their outcomes at all times. When recommending MSE the RN must:

- follow employer policies;
- perform a nursing assessment to determine if the client's condition warrants MSE;
- use current evidence (e.g., research, other credible sources) to support the decision to recommend MSE;
- be knowledgeable about MSE;
- educate clients on all aspects of MSE;
- document their recommendation for the MSE according to employer policy;
- complete any insurance or program forms as required;
- use regulatory and other related documents to support safe practice; and,
- collaborate or consult with an appropriate care provider if the client's needs change

## I understand RN prescribing is on the horizon in Nova Scotia. Is recommending MSE part of this?

No. NSCN along with a provincial steering committee is currently working on an initiative to enable RN prescribing for specific clients with specific health needs in specific contexts. The NIHB Program is not associated with RN Prescribing and nurses and employers should be careful not to confuse the two. For further information on this initiative refer to the [NSCN website](#).

## What information is an RN required to provide when recommending MSE under the NIHB Program?

An RN must provide the following information:

- the client's full given name and surname, date of birth, the height and weight of the client if applicable, and client identification number;
- the item being recommended, including applicable details such as make/model, quantity, frequency and size);
- as well as their
  - full name and professional designation (printed);
  - phone number and email;
  - registration number; and,
  - hand-written signature.

Recommendations must be documented in the client's record according to policy and must be signed and dated within the previous 12 months to be considered valid.

For further information on anything contained within this resource, please contact a NSCN practice consultant at [practice@nscn.ca](mailto:practice@nscn.ca).

For further information related to the NIHB Program at Indigenous Services Canada contact:

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