

# What to Look for When Choosing a Nursing Program

When deciding to become a nurse, there are many things to consider. There are important steps to follow to find the right program to fit your professional goals. The discussion below provides information to augment your decision, as you venture into a new educational adventure or are thinking about gaining a more advanced nursing degree.

- **Program Focus and Educational Timeline:** Preparing to find a nursing program that will result in work within a healthcare setting involves planning. Factors such as your learning style, future goals, and other commitments, may all play a part in defining your needs. Various programs will have differing program outcomes and timetables for completion. This information may be found on the specific nursing program's website.
  - **Practical nurse role:** in approximately 1 year, you can earn a certificate or diploma from a community or technical college as a practical nurse. After passing the National Council Licensure Examination (NCLEX-PN®) licensure exam and attaining licensure, your title would be a licensed practical nurse (LPN).
  - **A Professional nurse role provides two different paths that are available for licensure:**
    - In approximately 2 years, you can earn an associate degree in nursing (ADN) and after passing the NCLEX-RN® licensure exam and attaining licensure, your title would be a registered nurse (RN).
    - In approximately 4 years, you can earn a bachelor's degree in nursing (BSN) and after passing the NCLEX-RN® licensure exam and attaining licensure, your title would be a registered nurse (RN).
    - There are some accelerated options available to complete this education in less than 4 years. The post baccalaureate programs are for those individuals who already have a baccalaureate degree in a field other than nursing. This student can earn a master's degree in nursing (MSN) and thereby, qualify to take the NCLEX exam. This program is typically 2 years in length.
- **Program Accreditation:** Noted in Minnesota Board of Nursing 6301.2350, Subp. 1. **Program accreditation for practical and professional programs.** *All Board of Nursing -approved practical and professional nursing education programs must provide evidence of current accreditation by a national accrediting body recognized by the United States Department of Education or the Council for Higher Education Accreditation.* The link below reveals criteria for Minnesota practical and professional nursing program accreditation requirements: <https://www.revisor.mn.gov/rules/6301.2350/>
- **Program Outcome Data:** Program outcome data must be posted by the nursing program. This information includes licensure examination pass rates, program completion, and job placement. These end-of-program indicators provide insight into the quality of the nursing program.
- **Classroom Structure:** The classroom structure of your program can have an important impact on your learning. Some students find they learn best in large lecture settings, while others prefer the individual attention of small classes or the self-pacing ability of online courses. As this varies from institution to institution, you may want to inquire about the practices in the program you are considering.
- **Clinical Rotations:** You will need to complete clinical rotations in both practical and registered nursing programs. Clinical schedules vary greatly so be certain to inquire about the program's arrangements to ensure you can participate in all the experiences. The purpose of clinical hours is to apply acquired knowledge and develop competence that ensures safe and competent practice.

- **(Clinical Rotations cont.)** It is required in Minnesota Board of Nursing Rules 6301.2340 Subp. 3. **Nursing Education Program:** (a) *have learning activities with faculty oversight to acquire and demonstrate competence in clinical settings with patients across the life span and with patients throughout the whole wellness, acute, and chronic continuum.* The link below reveals criteria for Minnesota nursing education program requirements: <https://www.revisor.mn.gov/rules/6301.2340/>
- **PN and RN Faculty Licensing Requirements:** All PN and RN faculty teaching in the clinical setting for Minnesota based practical or registered nursing programs, must hold an unencumbered licensure as a registered nurse with current registration in MN. Professional nursing faculty must also have a graduate degree and practical nursing faculty a baccalaureate degree in nursing.
- **Verify Board of Nursing Program Approval:** the program you choose must be approved by the state's Board of Nursing. The links for approved MN nursing programs are listed below.
  1. **Minnesota PN Programs:** MN Board of Nursing has approved the following in-state practical nursing programs which can be found on the board's website at: <https://mn.gov/boards/nursing/education/approved-practical-nursing-programs/>
  2. **Minnesota RN Programs:** MN Board of Nursing has approved the following in-state professional nursing programs which can be found on the board's website at: <https://mn.gov/boards/nursing/education/approved-professional-nursing-programs/>
- **Approval of out- of -state PN and RN Programs:** The Minnesota Board of Nursing does not currently have jurisdiction over out- of -state or out-of-state online nursing programs. Out of state programs must comply with that state's requirements. Consult the program's website to be certain completion of that program will qualify you for licensure.
- **Online programs:** These programs must register with the Minnesota Department of Education or the program must be at a State Authorization Reciprocity Agreement (SARA) institution in a SARA state.
- **RN-BSN programs:** There are many opportunities to earn a BSN after completing an ADN program. The Minnesota Board of Nursing does not have jurisdiction over RN-BSN programs as they are not pre-licensure programs. Be certain the program you consider is nationally accredited by ACEN or CCNE and includes clinical experiences. If you consider an online completion program, be aware that some programs will not accept Minnesota students as the Nurse Practice Act requires that all clinical faculty must have a Minnesota license, even though the faculty is not physically in the state. This is particularly true in Nurse Licensure Compact states. If you are planning to apply for registration as a public health nurse, be mindful, the course work must include theory and clinical practice in public health nursing. Review the requirements at this link: <https://www.revisor.mn.gov/rules/6316.0100/>

**Please contact the Board of Nursing Education Department with questions:**

Email: [nursing.education@state.mn.us](mailto:nursing.education@state.mn.us) or review the MN Board of Nursing website at: <https://mn.gov/boards/nursing/>

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