

National Emergency Nurses Association-Alberta Chapter



NENA-AB Position Statement	Role of the Triage Nurse
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Past Revision Dates:	

Issue: Triage is a dynamic and complex aspect of emergency nursing that requires rapid, focused patient assessment to accurately prioritize care (Canadian Triage and Acuity Scale, n.d.). The National Emergency Nurses Association (NENA) asserts that triage is a critical sorting process comprising the use of clinical assessment, critical thinking, clinical experience and standardized guidelines to assess patients' needs upon arrival at the Emergency Department (ED) and Urgent Care Clinic (UCC) settings. The national position statement excludes the recommendation for the Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN) to triage patients. In many Alberta hospitals, the triage nurse is a Registered Nurse (RN) and/or a Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN) who works within the ED or UCC. To support patient safety and effective triage outcomes, all triage nurses should complete formal Canadian Triage and Acuity Scale (CTAS) education from a NENA instructor, to perform triage assessment.

NENA-AB Position:

Many nurses in Alberta possess the training, knowledge, skills, and abilities to perform triage competently. NENA believes that the triage process is best performed by nurses with specialized training, demonstrated competence in emergency nursing practice, and ideally two years recent emergency nursing practice (National Emergency Nurses Association, 2019). The nurse is responsible for performing a triage assessment, rapidly evaluating the patient's presenting complaints, assigning an acuity level, providing immediate care, and directing the patient to the appropriate care location based on organizational requirements. The triage nurse ensures patient reassessments occur based on acuity and understands that patients' condition may evolve over time. NENA suggests that employers have a responsibility to ensure competency training and appropriate site-specific clinical training and experience prior to nurses being placed at triage. Specifically, each site should ensure that competency training is regularly obtained and managed to establish proper transition to the role of triage and that there is ongoing quality assurance and improvement while in the triage role.

Rationale

NENA believes that the triage process is best performed by nurses with specialized training (National Emergency Nurses Association, 2019). As patient volume and acuity rise in emergency settings, an accurate and efficient triage decision-making process supports safe, appropriate care (Ouellet et al, 2022). Formal triage education and ongoing validation of triage competencies are essential for maintaining high standards of care and decreasing errors in this high-risk skill (Ouellet et al, 2022). Regular education, self- reflection, triage feedback, along with quality assurance measures, support the triage nurse to deliver safe and competent

patient care (College of Licensed Practical Nurses of Alberta, 2023; College of Registered Nurses of Alberta, 2023; Nova Scotia College of Nursing, 2025). All nurses are accountable for their own practice and engage in interprofessional collaboration with team members for support as needed (College of Licensed Practical Nurses of Alberta, 2023; College of Registered Nurses of Alberta, 2023; Nova Scotia College of Nursing, 2025).

The triage nurse possesses the following competencies (National Emergency Nurses Association, 2018):

- Proficiency in accurately assessing patients' conditions and assigning appropriate triage categories based on established CTAS guidelines.
- Strong analytical and critical thinking skills, as well as sound clinical judgement, to identify emergent situations, anticipate patient needs, and make timely decisions.
- Effective verbal and written communication to interact with patients, families, and the healthcare team to gather information, provide instructions, and ensure proper documentation.
- A solid foundation in emergency nursing, specific to the unit where performing the triage role, anatomy and physiology, pharmacology knowledge, along with proficiency in performing necessary medical procedures and interventions. Understanding the pertinent patient assessment will help determine the acuity based on stated complaint.
- The ability to offer emotional support, demonstrate empathy, and maintain a calm and reassuring demeanor in high-stress, urgent situations.

It is important to note that while the qualifications, requirements, and responsibilities for triage nursing may vary slightly across provinces and healthcare facilities in Canada, the core principles and competencies outlined here are vital to the success and safety of the triage process.

Developed by NENA-AB board members, 2025. Approved by membership at AGM, 2025.

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