

Arizona Board of Nursing Scope of Practice APRN Questions & Answers
SCOPE OF PRACTICE
Clinical Nurse Specialist (CNS)

1. What is the definition of a clinical nurse specialist (CNS)?

As defined in [A.R.S. 32-1601 \(9\)](http://www.azleg.gov/viewdocument/?docName=http://www.azleg.gov/ars/32/01601.htm)
(<https://www.azleg.gov/viewdocument/?docName=http://www.azleg.gov/ars/32/01601.htm>)

"Clinical Nurse Specialist" means a registered nurse who:

- (a) Is certified by the board as a clinical nurse specialist.
- (b) Holds a graduate degree with a major in nursing and completes educational requirements as prescribed by the board by rule.
- (c) Is nationally certified as a clinical nurse specialist or, if certification is not available, provides proof of competence to the board.
- (d) Has an expanded scope of practice based on advanced education in a clinical nursing specialty that includes:
 - (i) Assessing clients, synthesizing and analyzing data and understanding and applying nursing principles at an advanced level.
 - (ii) Managing directly and indirectly a client's physical and psychosocial health status.
 - (iii) Analyzing multiple sources of data, identifying alternative possibilities as to the nature of a health care problem and selecting appropriate nursing interventions.
 - (iv) Developing, planning and guiding programs of care for populations of patients.
 - (v) Making independent nursing decisions to solve complex client care problems.
 - (vi) Using research skills and acquiring and applying critical new knowledge and technologies to nursing practice.
 - (vii) Prescribing and dispensing durable medical equipment.
 - (viii) Consulting with or referring a client to other health care providers based on assessment of the client's health status and needs.
 - (ix) Facilitating collaboration with other disciplines to attain the desired client outcome across the continuum of care.

(x) Performing additional acts that require education and training as prescribed by the board and that are recognized by the nursing profession as proper to be performed by a clinical nurse specialist.

(xi) Prescribing, ordering and dispensing pharmacological agents subject to the requirements and limits specified in section [A.R.S. 32-1651](https://www.azleg.gov/viewdocument/?docName=https://www.azleg.gov/ars/32/01651.htm)
(<https://www.azleg.gov/viewdocument/?docName=https://www.azleg.gov/ars/32/01651.htm>)

2. What is the **clinical nurse specialist (CNS)** scope of practice?

The Nurse Practice Act defines the scope of practice for the CNS in rule [R4-19-514](https://www.azbn.gov/sites/default/files/2020-03/RULES.Effective.June3_.2019.pdf) (https://www.azbn.gov/sites/default/files/2020-03/RULES.Effective.June3_.2019.pdf), specifically:

In addition to the functions of a registered nurse, a CNS, under A.R.S. § 32-1601(9), may perform one or more of the following for an individual, family, or group within the population focus of certification and for which competency has been maintained:

1. Conduct an advanced assessment, analysis, and evaluation of a patient's complex health needs;
2. Establish primary and differential health status diagnoses;
3. Direct health care as an advanced clinician;
4. Develop, implement, and evaluate a treatment plan according to a patient's need for specialized nursing care;
5. Establish nursing standing orders, algorithms, and practice guidelines related to interventions and specific plans of care;
6. Manage health care according to written protocols;
7. Facilitate system changes on a multidisciplinary level to assist a health care facility and improve patient outcomes cost- effectively;
8. Consult with the public and professionals in health care, business, and industry in the areas of research, case management, education, and administration;
9. Perform psychotherapy if certified as a clinical nurse specialist in psychiatric and mental health nursing;
10. Prescribe and dispense durable medical equipment; or
11. Perform additional acts that the clinical nurse specialist is qualified to perform.

3. What is the role and population focus of a **clinical nurse specialist (CNS)**?

The Nurse Practice Act recognizes the CNS as an Advanced Practice Registered Nurse (APRN). According to the Nurse Practice Act rule [R4-19-501 \(A. 2.\)](https://www.azbn.gov/sites/default/files/2020-03/RULES.Effective.June3_.2019.pdf) (https://www.azbn.gov/sites/default/files/2020-03/RULES.Effective.June3_.2019.pdf), CNSs practice within one or more population foci, consistent with their education and certification. Population foci include:

1. Family-individual across the life span;
2. Adult-gerontology primary or acute care;
3. Neonatal;
4. Pediatric primary or acute care;
5. Women's health-gender related;
6. Psychiatric-mental health;
7. For Certified Nurse Midwives, women's health gender related including childbirth and neonatal care;
8. Other foci that have been recognized by the Board previously and new foci that meet the following conditions as specified in the rules.

4. Can a **clinical nurse specialist (CNS)** prescribe and dispense medications?

Yes, according to [A.R.S. 32-1651 \(A. 1.-2.\) \(B 1. -2.\) \(C.\) \(D.\)](#)

(<https://www.azleg.gov/viewdocument/?docName=https://www.azleg.gov/ars/32/01651.htm>) the CNS may prescribe and dispense pharmacological agents if the clinical nurse specialist has both of the following:

1. The education and training equivalent to the requirements to prescribe and dispense pharmacological agents of a registered nurse practitioner, including successful completion of a nationally accredited advanced practice nursing program.
2. Certification as a clinical nurse specialist by a nationally recognized certification entity approved by the state board of nursing.

A clinical nurse specialist may prescribe only for patients of a licensed health care institution that uses the services of the clinical nurse specialist as follows:

1. In a licensed hospital or hospital-affiliated outpatient treatment center, a behavioral health inpatient facility, a nursing care institution, a recovery care center, a behavioral health residential facility or a hospice, the clinical nurse specialist may prescribe or dispense only pursuant to the protocols or standards applicable to clinical nurse specialists of the health care institution and may not prescribe a schedule II controlled substance that is an opioid except pursuant to protocols or standing orders of the health care institution. The prescribing and dispensing of opioid or benzodiazepine prescriptions by a clinical nurse specialist shall be limited to the treatment of patients while at the licensed health care institution and shall not be for patients to use or fill outside of the licensed health care institution except pursuant to discharge protocols of the institution.
2. In a licensed outpatient treatment center that provides behavioral health services or qualifies pursuant to federal law as a community health center, the clinical nurse specialist may prescribe or dispense only pursuant to the protocols or standards applicable to clinical nurse specialists of the health care institution. The clinical nurse specialist may not prescribe a schedule II controlled substance that is an opioid except for an opioid that is for medication-assisted treatment for substance use disorders.

A clinical nurse specialist shall report any required information relating to dispensing or prescribing medication pursuant to the health care institution's protocols.

A health care institution's protocols relating to the dispensing and prescribing authority of a clinical nurse specialist shall be developed with the input of the institution's medical director.