

QCP Candidate Handbook



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AAPACN certifications and educational courses were developed to serve as programs and references for long-term care. To the best of our knowledge, they reflect current federal regulations and practices. However, they cannot be considered absolute and universal. The information in these courses must be considered in light of the individual organization and state regulations.

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This handbook reflects the policies and procedures as of March 2026. All policies and procedures are subject to change. If you have any questions or require further information, visit www.AAPACN.org or contact AAPACN staff toll-free at (800) 768-1880.

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Accreditation

American Association of Post-Acute Care Nursing (AAPACN) is accredited as a provider of nursing continuing professional development by the American Nurses Credentialing Center's Commission on Accreditation.

QAPI Certified Professional (QCP) Candidate Handbook

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Welcome

Congratulations on taking the first step toward earning the QAPI Certified Professional (QCP) credential. The American Association of Post-Acute Care Nursing (AAPACN) established the QCP certification exam and educational courses to promote the highest standards for QAPI program implementation in the long-term care profession. Reviewing this handbook is the first step toward joining long-term care professionals who have distinguished themselves with certified knowledge of the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services' (CMS) Quality Assurance and Performance Improvement (QAPI) program.

About AAPACN

The American Association of Post-Acute Care Nursing (AAPACN) represents more than 18,000 post-acute care nurses and professionals working in more than 6,100 facilities. Dedicated to supporting LTPAC nurses and healthcare professionals in providing quality care, AAPACN offers members best-in-class education, certification, resources, and strong collaborative communities.

Whether you're looking to earn one of our respected certifications or just want to brush up your knowledge by taking a course or two, AAPACN keeps you up to date and makes the complexities of long-term care easy to understand.

How to use this Candidate Handbook

This handbook is intended to help you understand the policies and procedures for QCP certification and the steps required to earn and maintain your credential. This handbook is also intended to help you learn about the QCP prep courses.

Once you decide to pursue the QCP credential, this Candidate Handbook will be a useful reference for you to:

- Review the QCP Body of Knowledge
- Assess your knowledge and professional experience of the content
- Identify gaps in knowledge and develop a personal course of study
- Register for the educational courses including the QCP certification examination
- Study, prepare, and register for the QCP certification examination
- Maintain your credential through recertification

AAPACN's educational materials are reviewed and updated by a team of experts to ensure you receive the most up-to-date information related to this complex body of knowledge. No document can address the full list of potential questions, policy details, or future program changes. You are encouraged to use this handbook as a supplement to the information listed on the [AAPACN website](#) as well as information provided by AAPACN staff, whom you can contact toll-free at (800) 768-1880.

Overview

What is the purpose of QCP certification?

The QCP designation is setting the national standard in certification and education for CMS’s QAPI program. AAPACN serves the public interest by developing, administering, and reviewing a certification process that reflects current standards of competent performance regarding the QAPI program and process. Whereas the fundamental concept of the CMS QAPI program is to promote quality of care and quality of life for residents in skilled nursing facilities, the goal of QCP certification is to establish that professionals have the knowledge and skills necessary to demonstrate competence in this area. The educational courses support achievement of the certification credential.

What are the benefits of certification?

Upon completion of your personal course of study and after passing the certification exam with a score of 80% or better, you will be allowed to use the initials QCP to designate your status. This designation indicates you have met a nationally recognized standard of expertise in QAPI for long-term care.

Both individuals and employers can benefit from an individual receiving QCP certification:

<p>Individual professional benefits can include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Verification by an independent organization of your mastery of the knowledge required to perform your job • Professional growth and development • Enhanced job opportunities 	<p>Organizational benefits can include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved quality of care and quality of life for residents as the QAPI process is properly implemented • Less training time needed to educate employees on the complex QAPI regulations and procedures • Improved financial outcomes
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To design the educational path that is right for you, AAPACN has developed the Learning Timeline for AAPACN Education and Resources (Learning Ladder) and AAPACN education Guide: Where Should I Start? Quiz (Where to start quiz) to guide you. You can find these resources on the AAPACN website on the main [Education page](#).

What are the certification requirements?

- Have the equivalent of two years of full-time healthcare experience, preferably in long-term or post-acute care leadership or quality improvement.
- Actively participate in a QAPI program or serve as a member of a QAA committee.
- Pass the QCP certification exam with a score of 80% or better.

How do I register for certification?

To purchase the QCP educational courses and examination in the format most beneficial to you, visit the [AAPACN website](#).

How much does education, certification, and recertification cost?

The QCP program consists of five educational courses, offered in two formats that support various learning styles. The program is available as a five-course bundle in online plus PDF format, or as a live workshop. Recertification requires a recertification fee and proof of continuing education (CE) hours earned over the term of the certification. Pricing varies by format. AAPACN members receive substantial discounts.

Getting Ready for the Exam

QCP Body of Knowledge

AAPACN undertook a rigorous process with numerous experts in the profession to determine the domains and tasks within the QCP Body of Knowledge, in terms of both criticality and importance. The five QCP educational courses are designed for long-term care professionals with a recommended six months of QAPI experience.

The domain emphasis reflects the percentage of exam questions that come from each domain.

QCP Body of Knowledge:

- Domain 1: QAPI Design and Scope for Skilled Nursing Facilities (Domain Emphasis: 14%)
 - A QAPI program must be ongoing and comprehensive, dealing with the full range of services offered by the facility and including all departments. When fully implemented, the QAPI program should address all systems of care and management practices and should always include clinical care, quality of life, and resident choice.
 - Tasks:
 - Understand the regulatory background and requirements for QAPI
 - Infuse QAPI into the operations of care delivery and all services provided by the facility
 - Develop a comprehensive QAPI plan that includes all required components
 - Evaluate effectiveness of the QAPI program
 - Implement methods to routinely seek and use the feedback of residents in QAPI
- Domain 2: QAPI Governance and Leadership for Skilled Nursing Facilities (Domain Emphasis: 13%)
 - The governing body and/or administration of the nursing facility develops a culture that involves leadership seeking input from facility staff, residents, and residents' families and/or representatives. The governing body ensures adequate resources exist to conduct QAPI efforts. This includes designating one or more people to be accountable for QAPI; developing leadership and facility-wide training on QAPI; and ensuring staff time, equipment, and technical training as needed.
 - Tasks:
 - Lead a culture that values QAPI by exhibiting leadership behaviors that foster performance improvement
 - Assess needs and ensure adequate resources to support QAPI
 - Develop a deliberate approach to teamwork
 - Establish an organizational environment of accountability
 - Establish a Just Culture with measurements of safety and quality linked together
 - Honor resident choice and autonomy while enhancing safety
- Domain 3: QAPI Feedback, Data Systems, and Monitoring for Skilled Nursing Facilities (Domain Emphasis: 21%)

- Facility leadership puts in place systems to monitor care and services, drawing data from multiple sources. Feedback systems incorporate input from staff, residents, families, and others as appropriate. This includes using performance indicators to monitor a wide range of care processes and outcomes and reviewing findings against benchmarks and/or targets the facility has established for performance.
- Tasks:
 - Implement a data management system with processes that monitor, analyze, synthesize, and evaluate data
 - Establish organizational and departmental goals with associated key performance indicators (KPIs)
 - Use a data-driven approach that combines the use of real-time and delayed data to achieve improvement
 - Use tools and techniques such as a run chart to help translate data into information
 - Implement a process to monitor for adverse events and gather data from the adverse event that can be used to prevent reoccurrence
- Domain 4: QAPI Performance Improvement Projects for Skilled Nursing Facilities (Domain Emphasis: 24%)
 - A performance improvement project (PIP) is a concentrated effort on a particular problem, either in one area of the facility or facility-wide. It involves gathering information systematically to clarify issues or problems and intervening for improvements. Facility staff conduct PIPs to examine and improve care or services in areas that leaders identify as needing attention.
 - Tasks:
 - Differentiate a PIP from other types of corrective action
 - Understand the components and purpose of PIPs
 - Identify and prioritize PIPs
 - Implement a PIP by using the Plan-Do-Study-Act (PDSA) cycle
 - Apply Root Cause Analysis (RCA) when problems or opportunities for improvement are present
- Domain 5: QAPI Systematic Analysis and Systemic Action for Skilled Nursing Facilities (Domain Emphasis: 24%)
 - Facility leaders use a systematic approach to determine when in-depth analysis is needed to fully understand the problem, its causes, and implications of a change. A thorough, highly organized, and structured approach is used to determine whether and how identified problems may be caused or exacerbated by the way care and services are organized or delivered.
 - Tasks:
 - Develop and implement a plan or corrective action in which solutions eliminate the root causes
 - Use systems thinking to enhance patient safety
 - Understand how poor system design leads to poor outcomes
 - Use the hierarchy of actions when developing the plan for a PIP or taking other corrective actions
 - Encourage and facilitate opportunities for staff to be involved in finding solutions
 - Use a variety of leadership tactics to sustain change and overcome resistance

What is the format of the exam?

The certification exam is completed online, accessed through your Learner Dashboard on the AAPACN website. The certification exam is in an objective, multiple-choice question format. The questions are designed to test your recall of specific knowledge, as well as your ability to analyze and apply that knowledge to example situations. It is not a timed test. The questions test knowledge of the domains and tasks in the QCP Body of Knowledge. You will be asked to select the correct or best answer from four options. Only one answer is correct for every question.

How do I prepare for the exam?

Content for the examination is not obtained from any one particular source. The QCP Body of Knowledge should be a guideline for study preparation. The educational materials from the online curriculum, as well as the in-person or virtual workshops, provide a basis of knowledge for exam preparation. You should also utilize current journals, textbooks, CMS documents such as the [CMS QAPI Resources webpage](#), and other reference material related to the subjects listed in the QCP Body of Knowledge as supplemental preparatory materials for the exam.

After reviewing the QCP Body of Knowledge, you can plan your exam preparation based on your general understanding and working knowledge of the subject areas. For example, because of daily use at your current job, you may have a good understanding and working knowledge of some of the domain areas—these areas may need only a quick review as you prepare for the test. For areas with which you are less familiar, you may decide you need more in-depth study or training before completing the certification exam; you can allocate your study time appropriately.

You should also consider what percentage of the test questions will cover each major content area; this information is listed as the domain emphasis percentage in the QCP Body of Knowledge section of this handbook. By focusing your studies, you can spend extra time as needed to thoroughly understand the most significant sources of content area on the exam.

How are reasonable accommodations made?

If you require reasonable accommodations to complete the certification exam for the program, please contact AAPACN toll-free at (800) 768-1880, or by email at memberexperience@AAPACN.org.

Taking the Exam**What are the requirements during the exam?**

AAPACN assigns you a username as a key control in monitoring and verifying user identity in the Learner Dashboard area of the AAPACN website. You create the password for this username. This login information helps ensure that each user's information is available only to the authorized user. As a user of the Learner Dashboard, it is important that you do not share this username, or the password you create for your login, with anyone. You should be the only one to access and complete your exam and course material in your Learner Dashboard.

Once you begin the certification exam, you may complete it either in one sitting or in sections. It is an open-book format, so you may use reference materials when you take the exam. However, you cannot seek assistance from other individuals while completing the exam. The exam is offered on an honor-system basis that assumes you will act in good faith to ensure your performance is an accurate representation of your own personal knowledge and skills related to the subject matter.

AAPACN does not tolerate cheating or any breach of academic or professional ethics that may compromise the security or integrity of its certification exams. All incidents of reported cheating will be investigated. Discussing content found on the certification exams is strictly prohibited; any such posts on Community discussion boards will be removed. Anyone found compromising the security of the exams by attempting to copy, record, or distribute questions in any manner will be permanently excluded from the certification process.

How long do I have to complete a course/exam?

- **Online course(s) and certification examination** – The educational courses and certification exam are completed through your Learner Dashboard. The courses are offered in a self-paced, interactive online format. The exam is not timed, and you may exit the exam and return at a later time to complete it. Your courses and exam expire one year after purchase. After the one-year expiration date, you will lose access to the course and exam content.
- **Workshop and certification examination** – The educational content is presented during the in-person or virtual workshop dates. You will take the certification exam separately through your Learner Dashboard. The exam is not timed, and you may exit the exam and return at a later time to complete it. Your courses and exam expire one year after the start date of the event. After the one-year expiration date, you will lose access to the course and exam content.
- **Exam attempts** – You have three attempts to pass the certification exam with a score of 80% or better. The exam itself is not timed, and you do not have to complete it in one sitting. If you have exhausted all exam attempts, you may request additional attempts one time. If your request is approved, you will receive an additional three exam attempts. If you do not pass after six attempts, you must wait one year before taking the certification exam again.

In the case of an extenuating circumstance, you can submit a formal, written appeal to request an exception to the policy. To begin the appeals process, log in to your Learner Dashboard and click on the “Apply for Appeal” link in the menu on the left-hand side of the site.

After the Test

How is my information kept confidential?

Information about candidates and their examination results is confidential. AAPACN carefully protects your data from loss, misuse, unauthorized access or disclosure, alteration, or destruction. Within the company, data is stored in password-controlled servers with limited access. Your personal information is never shared outside the company without your permission, unless required by law to comply with a current judicial proceeding, court order, or legal process. If AAPACN is required by law to release your confidential information, you will be notified by email, unless prohibited by law.

How is the exam scored?

The QCP certification exam, as well as the educational courses and workshops, sets a standard for basic levels of knowledge that can reasonably be expected of long-term care professionals involved in the QAPI process. Your performance on the certification exam will be measured against this predetermined standard to assess your competency in these subject matters. Your performance will not be measured against other candidates taking the certification exam; your individual performance will determine whether you meet the knowledge standards required to pass.

What information will I receive about my score?

Once you have completed the examination, you will be presented with the percentage of questions correctly answered. Based on the percentage, your exam results will indicate “pass” or “fail.” You must achieve a score of 80% or better to pass the exam.

To protect the confidentiality of the exam content, and to maintain the value and integrity of the certification, AAPACN does not provide the correct answers to missed questions on the exam results. The certification exam is intended to measure proficiency in the subject and to determine whether an individual has the knowledge necessary for certification.

When will I receive my score?

The certification exam is self-scoring and provides immediate feedback. Upon completion of the exam, your computer screen will display the percentage of correctly answered questions and indicate “pass” or “fail.” You may access this information at a later date by logging into your Learner Dashboard.

Once you pass the certification exam, you may begin using the initials QCP to designate your status as a QAPI Certified Professional. Credentials are awarded for a four-year period.

Can I retake the exam if I don't pass?

You have three attempts to pass the certification exam with a score of 80% or better. If you have exhausted all exam attempts, you may request additional attempts one time. If your request is approved, you will receive an additional three exam attempts. If you do not pass after six attempts, you must wait one year before taking the certification exam again.

In the case of an extenuating circumstance, you can submit a formal, written appeal to request an exception to the policy. To begin the appeals process, log in to your Learner Dashboard and click on the “Apply for Appeal” link in the menu on the left-hand side of the site.

Is there an appeals provision?

AAPACN works diligently to provide top-quality course materials and exams using a standardized process of question development and validation. AAPACN also affords candidates a high level of flexibility in completing the exam. Due to these policies and procedures, an appeal will be heard only in the case of an extenuating circumstance. In this case, you may submit a formal, written appeal to AAPACN to request an exception to the policy. To begin the appeals process, log in to your Learner Dashboard and click on the “Apply for Appeal” link in the menu on the left-hand side of the site.

Recertification: Certification Maintenance

When do I need to recertify?

The QCP certification is valid for four years from your certification completion date. Your credential expires four years from when you completed your exam requirements. Your certification expiration date can be found in the My Certifications areas of your Learner Dashboard. You must complete your recertification requirements before the expiration date of your credential. If you do not complete the recertification requirements before your certification expiration date, you will be required to restart the full program to regain your certification at a later date.

What are the recertification requirements?

You have two options for completing the requirements for recertification.

Option 1:

Pass the exam for QCP Recertification

Option 2:

- Hold a current QCP certification
- Submit a recertification application
- Complete a minimum of 1,000 practice hours in long-term care or post-acute care within the four years preceding the recertification application submission
- Complete at least 80 hours of continuing education within the four years preceding the renewal application submission or complete an approved professional development activity equivalent (see below), or a combination of the two. AAPACN offers CE courses, but they are not mandatory.
 - At least 15 hours must be in QAPI or quality improvement areas related to the QCP domains
 - The remaining 65 hours can be for any healthcare-approved continuing education that meets licensure requirements (for a total of 80 hours)

What are approved professional development activity equivalents?

- In-Service Education
 - 1 hour of education = 1 continuing education hour
- Academic Credits
 - 1 semester credit = 15 continuing education hours
 - 1 quarter credit = 12.5 continuing education hours
- Presentations
 - 1 hour of presentation = 3 continuing education hours (can only be used one time per presentation)
- Articles (non-peer-reviewed), book chapters, or e-learning equivalent
 - 1 of the above as the author, co-author = 4 continuing education hours
 - 1 of the above as editor, co-editor, reviewer = 3 continuing education hours
- Research, grant writing, peer-reviewed articles, preceptor
 - Contact AAPACN

Keep the documentation to support your continuing education credits. **AAPACN conducts random audits of renewal applications. If your application is selected for audit, you will be required to submit all supporting documents.** Please maintain a copy of your renewal application and the supporting certificates and other documents for the entire four-year certification period in order to satisfy any audit requests.

How much does QCP recertification cost?

Recertification pricing can be found on the [AAPACN website](#).

What if I let my certification lapse?

If you do not meet the recertification requirements before the expiration date of your certification, you will no longer be entitled to use the QCP credential. If you choose to recertify after your certification has lapsed, you will be required to retake and pass the QCP certification exam.

Resources

Government resources

In addition to the educational courses and workshops described in the QCP Body of Knowledge section, the following list of government resources may be helpful in preparing for the exam. This list does not attempt to include all acceptable or valuable references available. The exam questions are not based solely on any of these resources.

- [QAPI Resources](#)
- [QAPI at a Glance: A Step-by-Step Guide to Implementing Quality Assurance and Performance Improvement in Your Nursing Home](#)
 - [Guide for Developing a QAPI Plan](#)
 - [Guide for Developing Purpose, Guiding Principles, and Scope for QAPI](#)
- [State Operations Manual, Appendix PP, "Guidance to Surveyors for Long-Term Care Facilities"](#)
- [QAPI Written Plan How-To Guide](#)