



RAC-CTA CANDIDATE HANDBOOK

Your Reference for Details on Achieving the Resident Assessment
Coordinator — Certified Advanced (RAC-CTA) Credential

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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.

Resident Assessment Coordinator–Certified Advanced (RAC-CTA) Candidate Handbook

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Welcome

Congratulations on taking the first step toward earning the Resident Assessment Coordinator—Certified Advanced (RAC-CTA) credential. The American Association of Post-Acute Care Nursing (AAPACN) established the RAC-CT certification program in 1999 to promote the highest standards for clinical assessment and care planning in the long-term care profession. The RAC-CTA certification program, established in 2019, is designed to take your experience and knowledge to a higher level. Reviewing this handbook will help you to understand, as a RAC-CTA professional, what is needed to be better prepared for the challenging industry that you work in. RAC-CTA was created to provide more advanced information on principles of clinical reimbursement, Medicare program compliance and integrity, RAI/MDS program integrity, leadership, ethical practice, managing medical review, accurate ICD-10 diagnosis coding, advanced strategies for payment oversight, and improving your facility's quality measurement in all CMS quality programs.

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 RAC-CTA certification and the steps required to earn and maintain your credential. This handbook is also intended to help you learn about RAC-CTA education. Once you decide to pursue the RAC-CTA credential, this Candidate Handbook will be a useful reference as you:

- Review the RAC-CTA Body of Knowledge
- Assess your knowledge and professional experience of the content
- Identify gaps in knowledge and develop a personal course of study
- Study, prepare for, and take the RAC-CTA examinations
- 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 RAC-CTA certification courses?

The RAC-CTA program provides advanced principles of clinical reimbursement, Medicare program compliance and integrity, RAI/MDS program integrity, leadership, ethical practice, managing medical review, accurate ICD-10 diagnosis coding, advanced strategies for payment oversight, and improving a facility’s quality measurement in all CMS quality programs. By achieving the RAC-CTA certification, you will demonstrate an advanced insight and expertise in these areas.

What are the benefits of certification?

Upon completion of the 10 RAC-CTA courses, and after passing the associated exams with a score of 80% or better, you will be allowed to use the initials RAC-CTA to designate your status. This designation indicates you have met a nationally recognized standard of advanced principles of clinical reimbursement, Medicare program compliance and integrity, RAI/MDS program integrity, leadership, ethical practice, managing medical review, accurate ICD-10 diagnosis coding, advanced strategies for payment oversight, and improving a facility’s quality measurement in all CMS quality programs.

Both individuals and employers can benefit from an individual’s receiving RAC-CTA 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"> • Increased productivity, as the RAI/MDS process is properly implemented • Less training time needed to educate employees on the complex Medicare regulations and procedures • Accurate billing, leading to full receipt of Medicare funds for services provided <p>Learn more about the value of AAPACN certification and how certified staff benefit organizations.</p>
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Who is eligible to take the exams?

AAPACN encourages members of the interdisciplinary team with extensive experience in the RAI/MDS process to seek RAC-CTA certification: registered nurses (RNs), licensed practical nurses (LPNs), licensed vocational nurses (LVNs), nurse assessment coordinators (NACs), physical therapists (PTs), occupational therapists (OTs), speech therapists, social workers, health information professionals, dietitians, and administrators.

AAPACN recommends that individuals have at least two years of experience with the Medicare regulations and clinical reimbursement before beginning the RAC-CTA certification process. If you have less than two years of experience, consider the [RAC-CT certification](#) and also gaining practical experience in your long-term care facility.

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](#).

How do I register for certification?

To purchase the RAC-CTA courses and exams in the format most beneficial to you, visit the [AAPACN website](#).

How much does education, certification, and recertification cost?

The RAC-CTA program consists of 10 courses, offered in different formats to support various learning styles. The associated certification exams are included with the purchase of each educational course. Recertification requires purchasing and taking a 10-part, on-demand recertification workshop and passing the associated exam with a score of 80% or higher. Alternatively, you can complete the 10-course RAC-CTA program again.

If you choose to recertify by taking the 10-course program again, please notify AAPACN with an email or a phone call so that they can make sure that your certification updates correctly.

Pricing is based on cost per course and varies by format. AAPACN members receive substantial discounts.

Getting Ready for the Exam

RAC-CTA Body of Knowledge

AAPACN undertook a rigorous process with numerous experts in the profession to determine the domains and tasks within the RAC-CTA Body of Knowledge, in terms of both criticality and importance. The domain emphasis reflects the percentage of questions that come from each domain.

The 10 RAC-CTA examinations, and associated education, are designed for long-term care professionals with extensive experience in the RAI/MDS process.

RAC-CTA Body of Knowledge

- Domain 1 – Original Part A Program Requirements in a Skilled Nursing Facility for the Advanced Medicare Specialist (Domain Emphasis: 15%)
 - Tasks:
 - Define the four parts of the original Medicare benefit, eligibility, and enrollment requirements
 - Delineate the technical requirements for Medicare SNF coverage
 - Describe the physician certification and recertification requirements for SNF services
 - Demonstrate the ability to recognize skilled nursing and skilled rehabilitation services and the daily skilled need

- Domain 2 – Documentation Requirements in a Skilled Nursing Facility for the Advanced Medicare Specialist (Domain Emphasis: 8%)
 - Tasks:
 - Explain the most common problems with SNF documentation upon medical review
 - Describe technical problems with submitted records
 - Review qualitative documentation errors in nursing and therapy charting
 - Discuss critical thinking in the documentation process
 - Examine and discuss strengths and weaknesses in examples of SNF documentation
 - Describe supportive documentation by other members of the interdisciplinary team

- Domain 3 – ICD-10-CM Coding in a Skilled Nursing Facility for the Advanced Medicare Specialist (Domain Emphasis: 14%)
 - Tasks:
 - Summarize ICD-10-CM coding conventions and general guidelines relevant to the long-term care setting
 - Explain ICD-10-CM chapter-specific coding guidelines relevant to the long-term care setting
 - Accurately assign ICD-10-CM codes
 - Understand documentation required for ICD-10-CM assignment
 - Demonstrate appropriate assignment of admission and principal diagnoses in the medical record
 - Understand the use of ICD-10-CM on claims and how to avoid denials
 - Describe common missteps of ICD-10-CM coding and auditing strategies

- Domain 4 – Managing the Patient-Driven Payment Model in a Skilled Nursing Facility for the Advanced Medicare Specialist (Domain Emphasis: 15%)
 - Tasks:
 - Describe the methodology and philosophy of the SNF Prospective Payment System (PPS) and the general framework of PDPM
 - Understand the six components of PDPM
 - Calculate the daily per diem under PDPM
 - Explain the changes to the PPS assessment schedule
 - Delineate administrative presumption of skilled level of care
 - Identify the connection between the MDS and PDPM
 - Recognize the ongoing monitoring and oversight of therapy provisions by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS)

- Domain 5 – Beneficiary Notices in a Skilled Nursing Facility for the Advanced Medicare Specialist (Domain Emphasis: 8%)
 - Tasks:
 - Identify the required beneficiary notices for Medicare Part A
 - Describe the timely delivery of the SNF Advance Beneficiary Notice of Non-Coverage (SNF ABN)
 - Explain the expedited determination process
 - Understand the provider responsibility of Part C (Medicare Advantage plans) beneficiary notices
 - Demonstrate knowledge of the beneficiary notices for Medicare Part B in a SNF

- Audit the beneficiary notice process for compliance
 - Understand survey deficiencies related to beneficiary notices
- Domain 6 – Consolidated Billing in a Skilled Nursing Facility for the Advanced Medicare Specialist (Domain Emphasis: 8%)
 - Tasks:
 - Understand the Medicare claims processing system
 - Describe the form locators pertaining to a SNF
 - Ensure “clean claim” submission and timely payment
 - Understand the basics of consolidated billing
 - Apply the SNF responsibilities to consolidated billing
 - Identify the five major categories for SNF consolidated billing
 - Navigate the annual update files
 - Employ strategies for controlling costs under consolidated billing
- Domain 7 – Medicare Part B Therapy in a Skilled Nursing Facility for the Advanced Medicare Specialist (Domain Emphasis: 8%)
 - Tasks:
 - Examine and discuss the requirements for qualified therapy under Medicare Part B
 - Explain the requirements for therapy documentation under Medicare Part B
 - Describe the basics of Part B therapy billing and how it differs from Part A
 - Detail the basics of the Part B therapy review process
 - Discuss how Part B therapy affects resident outcomes
- Domain 8 – Medical Reviews and Oversight in a Skilled Nursing Facility for the Advanced Medicare Specialist (Domain Emphasis: 8%)
 - Tasks:
 - Describe the Medicare claim review process, including types of review, overpayment risk areas, and possible outcomes
 - Discuss Additional Documentation Requests and best practices for responding, to reduce error rates
 - Understand provider appeal rights and the Medicare appeals process
 - Explain operational strategies to improve claim compliance and preparedness for success under Medicare medical review
- Domain 9 – Federal Quality Initiatives in a Skilled Nursing Facility for the Advanced Medicare Specialist (Domain Emphasis: 8%)
 - Tasks:
 - Identify the role of the Medicare specialist in overseeing and managing the facility’s Nursing Home Quality Initiatives
 - Recognize strategies to improve the Five-Star Quality Measure outcomes
 - Describe the process for gathering and implementing improvement strategies for SNF Quality Reporting Program (QRP) measures
 - Detail the process for gathering and implementing strategies for improving readmission rates and SNF Value-Based Purchasing (VBP) publicly reported scores

- Domain 10 – Leadership and Management of Clinical Reimbursement in a Skilled Nursing Facility for the Advanced Medicare Specialist (Domain Emphasis: 8%)
 - Tasks:
 - Describe the leadership role of the Medicare specialist
 - Detail the various systems that the Medicare specialist must monitor for accuracy
 - Understand the skill requirements needed when hiring for open nurse assessment coordinator (NAC) positions
 - Identify the various areas of training and education needed to onboard new and experienced NACs
 - Describe care coordination components
 - Detail how the MDS impacts survey outcomes and describe operational strategies needed for survey compliance
 - Describe CMS payment initiatives and their impact on the NAC role

What is the format of the exam?

A certification exam accompanies each course and is completed online and accessed through your Learner Dashboard on the AAPACN website. The certification exams are 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 RAC-CTA Body of Knowledge. The domain emphasis reflects the percentage of questions that comes from each domain. 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 examinations is not obtained from any one particular source. The RAC-CTA 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, source documents like the [MDS 3.0 RAI User's Manual](#), and other reference material related to the subjects listed in the Body of Knowledge as supplemental preparatory materials for the exam.

After reviewing the 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 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 exams 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 each 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 exams are 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 examinations** – The educational courses and certification exams are completed through your Learner Dashboard. The courses are offered in a self-paced interactive online format. The exams are not timed, and you may exit the exam and return at a later time to complete it. Your courses and exams expire one year after purchase. After the one-year expiration date, you will lose access to the course and exam content.
- **Workshop and certification examinations** – The educational content is presented during the in-person or virtual workshop dates. You will take the certification exams separately through your Learner Dashboard. These are not timed, and you may exit the exam and return at a later time to complete it. Your courses and exams expire one year 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 per course 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 per course. 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 exams 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, login 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 RAC-CTA exams, as well as RAC-CTA courses and workshops, set an advanced level of knowledge that can reasonably be expected of long-term care professionals involved in the RAI/MDS process. Your performance on the exams 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 exams; 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 exams are self-scoring and provide 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 10 certification exams, you may begin using the initials RAC-CTA to designate your status as a certified Advanced Resident Assessment Coordinator. Credentials are awarded for a two-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 per course. 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 exams 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, login 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, login 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 RAC-CTA certification is valid for two years from your certification completion date. Your credential expires two 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?

To maintain your RAC-CTA certification, you must recertify every two years. To recertify, you must take a 10-part on-demand recertification workshop and pass the associated exam with 80% or higher. Alternatively, you can complete the 10-course RAC-CTA program again, along with the associated exams.

Purchasing the recertification course does not extend the expiration date of your credential. You must complete the recertification requirements before your certification expiration date to maintain your credential.

How much does RAC-CTA recertification cost?

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

What if I let my certification lapse?

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.

If you have any questions, please contact AAPACN toll-free at (800) 768-1880, or by email at memberexperience@AAPACN.org.