

AAPACN

AMERICAN ASSOCIATION OF
POST-ACUTE CARE NURSING



NHA-CT Candidate Handbook

Your Reference for Details on Achieving the Nursing
Home Administrator—Certified (NHA-CT) Credential

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Nursing Home Administrator—Certified (NHA-CT) Candidate Handbook

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Welcome

Congratulations on taking the first step toward earning the Nursing Home Administrator—Certified (NHA-CT) credential. The American Association of Post-Acute Care Nursing (AAPACN) established the NHA-CT certification educational courses, exams, and workshops, to promote the highest standards for nursing home administrators. Reviewing this handbook is the first step toward joining long-term care professionals who have distinguished themselves with the certification credential.

About AAPACN

The American Association of Post-Acute Care Nursing (AAPACN) represents more than 20,000 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 NHA-CT certification and the steps required to earn and maintain your credential. This handbook is also intended to help you learn about the NHA-CT courses.

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

- Review the NHA-CT 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 courses
- Study, prepare, and take the NHA-CT 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 NHA-CT certification courses?

The NHA-CT designation is setting the national standard in certification and education for nursing home administrators. AAPACN serves the public interest by developing, administering, and reviewing a certification process that reflects current NHA competencies. The goal of NHA-CT certification is to establish that professionals have the knowledge necessary to demonstrate competence in this area. The 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 NHA-CT to designate your status. This designation indicates you have met a nationally recognized standard of expertise for nursing home administrators in long-term care.

Both individuals and employers can benefit from an individual receiving NHA-CT 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 • Decreased employee turnover • 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 to guide you. You can find these resources on the AAPACN website on the main [Education page](#).

What are the certification requirements?

- Be a licensed nursing home administrator
- Have the equivalent of two years of full-time post-acute care experience, with a minimum of one year of experience either as a nursing home administrator or relevant leadership experience
- Take the 10 NHA-CT courses and pass the final exam with a score of 80% or better

How do I register for certification?

To purchase the NHA-CT courses and exam, visit the [AAPACN website](#).

How much does education, certification, and recertification cost?

The NHA-CT program consists of 10 on-demand modules and interactive assessments. The associated certification exam is included with the purchase of the course. Recertification requires a recertification fee and proof of continuing education hours (CEs) earned over the term of the certification. AAPACN members receive substantial discounts.

Getting Ready for the Exam

NHA-CT Body of Knowledge and Educational Courses

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

The individual courses are listed below according to their affiliated domains.

NHA-CT Body of Knowledge

Domain 1: Principles of Leadership (Domain Emphasis: 5%) – Building the foundation for quality care throughout the nursing department requires effective integration of leadership and management concepts. Managing and developing staff, developing teams, promoting organizational values, and creating evidence-based systems of care are essential to leading nursing services.

- Tasks
 - Promotes organizational vision, mission, and values
 - Applies management principles and skills
 - Effectively uses different types of leadership styles to impact team function
 - Models leadership effectively
 - Develops and fosters activities and functions of the management team
 - Leads the department heads in interdisciplinary team collaboration

Domain 2: Resident Care and Services (Domain Emphasis: 10%) – A facility must have a comprehensive framework for delivering high-quality, resident-centered care within the skilled nursing facility. Effective care delivery requires a coordinated, resident-focused approach that balances clinical excellence, regulatory compliance, and quality-of-life considerations. All departments such as nursing care, rehabilitation, dietary services, social services, and activities contribute to resident outcomes. Emphasis should be placed on care coordination, documentation accuracy, and adherence to regulatory standards to support both quality outcomes and compliance.

- Tasks
 - Implements principles of resident rights and safety
 - Conducts a thorough facility assessment
 - Promotes cultural competence and diversity and inclusion awareness
 - Describes principles and processes for surveillance of systems
 - Utilizes and shares knowledge for oversight of departments to ensure positive resident outcomes

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Domain 3: Employee Services and Success (Domain Emphasis: 10%) – The administrator must focus on building and sustaining a competent, engaged, and accountable workforce to support high-quality resident care and organizational performance. Key concepts include effective recruitment and onboarding practices, ongoing staff education and competency validation, and the importance of leadership in shaping workplace culture. By aligning employee success with organizational goals, the administrator reinforces that workforce stability and satisfaction are essential drivers of quality outcomes, regulatory compliance, and overall facility success.

- Tasks

- Employs effective interpersonal communication skills
- Understands the horizontal and vertical organizational hierarchies
- Implements an effective recruitment and retention plan
- Ensures safe staffing patterns
- Implements effective employee services management
- Understands how to manage conflict

Domain 4: Quality Improvement (Domain Emphasis: 10%) – Governance and leadership for skilled nursing facilities require data systems, monitoring systems, systematic analysis, systemic action, and systemic evaluation for improving organizational performance. Administrators utilize quality measures and prioritized monitoring activities while applying the PDSA cycle to determine and establish thresholds for compliance and improvement.

- Tasks
 - Applies principles of systems thinking for quality outcomes
 - Applies the components of quality assurance and performance improvement (QAPI)
 - Describes how Quality Measures are used as outcome measures
 - Understands the Five-Star Quality Rating System and can evaluate nursing department performance based on the findings

Domain 5: Operations and Environment (Domain Emphasis: 17%) – Well-managed systems and a safe, supportive physical environment are foundational to delivering consistent, compliant, and resident-centered care. Safe, efficient, and compliant facility operations require effective systems, infrastructure, and processes to be in place. Key areas include environmental safety, emergency preparedness, infection prevention, and facility maintenance, all of which are essential to protecting residents, staff, and visitors. Administrators are expected to proactively identify risks, implement corrective actions, and maintain a survey-ready environment.

- Tasks
 - Promotes a person-centered care environment
 - Develops and maintains a disaster and emergency plan
 - Applies principles of informatics and technology management to long-term care (LTC)
 - Interacts with the organization’s governing body
 - Engages in marketing and public relations for the facility
 - Implements effective strategic planning processes

Domain 6: The RAI Process and Medicare Requirements (Domain Emphasis: 10%) – The Nursing home administrator must ensure regulatory compliance, support interdisciplinary team (IDT) processes, and maintain systems that verify eligibility prior to admission. Accurate application of these requirements is essential not only for reimbursement but also for audit readiness and risk mitigation. Success in the RAI process depends on combining regulatory knowledge, clinical accuracy, and operational oversight to ensure that residents meet coverage criteria while the facility maintains compliance and financial integrity.

- Tasks
 - Understands the RAI process
 - Ensures facility is meeting payment and insurance requirements
 - Understands Medicare skilling criteria
 - Manages medical reviews

- Manages consolidated billing and contracts with outside entities

Domain 7: Finance (Domain Emphasis: 16%) – To lead effectively, the administrator must have a comprehensive foundation for understanding, managing, and analyzing the financial operations of a post-acute care facility, with a strong emphasis on the administrator’s role as a financial steward. This requires an integrated approach—linking planning, analysis, and reimbursement oversight—to support sustainable operations and high-quality resident care.

- Tasks

- Understands budgeting and forecasting
- Conducts financial analysis (profitability, debt, revenue, operating margin, cash flow, spend downs)
- Applies principles of fiscal management (billing, accounts receivable, payables, collections)
- Understands revenue and reimbursement (MCR {VBP, QRP}, MCD, ACO, VA, Hospice, private pay)
- Demonstrates ability to discuss budget with department heads
- Understands and manages cost reports
- Ensures facility meets Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) Department of Labor rules

Domain 8: Regulatory Compliance (Domain Emphasis 10%) – Regulatory management is integral to all nursing facility clinical and operational functions. Administrators must have special knowledge about multiple regulatory components, including various types of survey readiness, their management and their enforcement, the Quality Indicator Survey system, risk management, compliance, and ethics.

- Tasks

- Understands the survey process, enforcements, and remediations
- Demonstrates skills for continuous regulatory survey readiness
- Applies principles of regulatory survey management
- Ensures all departments implement a system for ongoing compliance and ethics
- Writes an effective plan of correction
- Understands other regulatory requirements (OSHA, Life Safety Code)
- Ensures compliance with HIPAA

Domain 9: Risk Management (Domain emphasis 10%) – Risk management encompasses a search to find new and better ways to reduce the organization’s risks and the risks of those the organization serves, including residents, families, staff members, visitors, consultants, vendors, and other customers. The purpose of a risk-management program is to effectively manage risks throughout the life cycle of each of the facility’s systems and processes—from development and implementation through practice and service. Risk-management decisions should be supported by evidence-based information that assists the organization in weighing the benefits and risks of these systems and processes and directs the facility staff in implementing strategies designed to minimize risk and reduce adverse effects when incidents do occur.

- Tasks

- Creates systems to address risk management
- Ensures the facility implements the system for ongoing compliance and ethics
- Understands the process for incident management and reportables
- Ensures there is a process for grievances
- Understands how to communicate with the public
- Implements strategies to prevent fraud and abuse

Domain 10: Professional Development (Domain emphasis 2%) – To lead effectively, nursing home administrators must identify mechanisms for the evaluation of professional practice, enhance characteristics

of personal professionalism, implement strategies for creating a professional work environment, and demonstrate personal responsibility for sustaining and improving professional competencies. Administrators must stay abreast of regulatory and practice changes, network with colleagues, and advocate for the profession to help move the nursing profession forward.

- Tasks
 - Task 1: Develops one’s personal and professional competencies
 - Task 2: Engages in advocacy to enhance post-acute care
 - Task 3: Provides resources to staff, empowering professional development and professional competencies

What is the format of the exam?

A certification exam accompanies this course and is completed online and accessed through your Learner Dashboard on the AAPACN website. The certification exam is 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 NHA-CT 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 NHA-CT Body of Knowledge should be a guideline for study preparation. The educational materials from the online curriculum provide a basis of knowledge for exam preparation. You should also utilize current journals, textbooks, government documents (see the Government Resources section at the end of this handbook), and other reference material related to the subjects listed in the NHA-CT Body of Knowledge as supplemental preparatory materials for the exam.

After reviewing the NHA-CT 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 NHA-CT 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 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 exam is strictly prohibited; any such posts on Community discussion boards will be removed. Anyone found compromising the security of the exam 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.
- **Exam attempts** – You have three attempts to pass the final 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 NHA-CT certification exam, as well as educational courses, set a standard for basic levels of knowledge that can reasonably be expected of long-term care professionals. 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 final certification exam, you may begin using the initials NHA-CT to designate your status as a certified nursing home administrator. 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. 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, 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 NHA-CT 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 area 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?

- Hold a current nursing home administrator license.
- Hold a current NHA-CT certification.
- Submit a renewal application and pay the renewal fee.
- Complete at least 50 hours of continuing education within the two years preceding the renewal application submission or complete an approved professional development activity equivalent (see below), or a combination of the two.
 - At least 25 hours must be related to the NHA-CT domains.
 - The remaining 25 hours can be for any healthcare-approved continuing education that meets licensure requirements (for a total of 50 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 two-year certification period in order to satisfy any audit requests.

How much does NHA-CT 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.

Resources

Government resources

In addition to the educational courses and workshops described in the NHA-CT 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.

- [*State Operations Manual*](#)
- [*MDS 3.0 for Nursing Homes and Swing Bed Providers*](#)
- [*MDS 3.0 QM User's Manual*](#)
- [*Five-Star Technical User's Guide*](#)
- [QAPI](#)