



## APPROVED PROVIDER INFORMATION

### INTRODUCTION

This document includes the requirements and criteria of the American Nurses Credentialing Center's (ANCC) Commission on Accreditation and the Montana Nurses' Association's Council on Continuing Education Approver Unit.

The information in this section describes the process for becoming and remaining an "approved provider" of continuing nursing education in Montana. The criteria for "approved providers" and for organizations / facilities that offer continuing nursing education are essentially the same, and all providers of continuing nursing education should find the content relevant to their operation.

The information included is designed to help the applicant be successful in attaining and maintaining approved provider status. As you proceed through this approval process, help is available. Phone calls or email to the MNA staff are encouraged. Consultation can be arranged. The goal is for you to be successful at providing quality continuing education.

Topics include:

- Reasons to Become an Approved Provider
- Requirements To Be an "Approved Provider"
- Montana's Approved Providers
- Application Process
- Review Process
- Actions Taken on Applications
- Withdrawal of an Application
- Length Of Approval Period
- Awarding Of Contact Hours
- Providers May Not...
- Reporting Requirements & Annual Report Requirements
- Appeal Process
- Revocation Of Approval
- Notes For Currently Approved Providers

### WHY BECOME AN "APPROVED PROVIDER"?

➤ MNA was first accredited by ANA (now ANCC) as an approver & provider of continuing nursing education in 1983, and began approving individual offerings under the former "Continuing Education Approval and Recognition

Program" (CEARP). In 1989, MNA began approving providers of continuing nursing education.

- MNA provides a cost-effective approval process, using ANCC criteria.
- ANCC understands the value and needs of nursing CE approvers and providers.
- The nursing and health care community recognizes ANCC.

### WHAT IS AN "APPROVED PROVIDER"?

A provider is an individual, institution, organization, or agency responsible for the development, implementation, evaluation, financing, record keeping, and quality of continuing nursing education activities.

Provider status is the recognition of an organization's capacity to award contact hours for continuing education activities, planned, implemented, and evaluated by the provider.

The provider may offer an unlimited number of educational activities during the period of approval. Providers can only provide activities in which the provider unit nurse planner(s) assume(s) an active role in the entire process, from planning through evaluation. Providers can never approve activities.

The approval period for providers is three years.

### HOW TO BECOME AN APPROVED PROVIDER IN MONTANA

To become an "Approved Provider" of Continuing Nursing Education in Montana, initial requirements are:

1. Be an individual, group, or organization that is qualified to submit individual continuing nursing education activities for approval by MNA;
2. Have at least three different activities totaling five contact hours or more approved by MNA and presented in the 24 months prior to submitting a provider application. These activities may not be co-provided.



3. The Provider Unit must be administratively and operationally responsible for coordinating all aspects of the CE activities provided by the organization. A Provider Unit may be either:

- (a) A single-focused organization devoted to offering CE, or
- (b) A distinct, separately identified unit within a complex, multi-focused organization; for example the Provider Unit may be a CE division, a staff development department, or
- (c) a nursing education committee within a larger organization.

4. Provider Units within complex organizations must demonstrate their autonomy for providing CE in the written documentation they submit.

5. At least one person must be designated as a nurse planner. The nurse planner must be a registered nurse with a minimum of a baccalaureate degree in nursing.

In organizations with more than one designated nurse planner, one nurse planner should be identified as the *primary nurse planner*. All nurse planners must meet the same educational criteria of a minimum of a baccalaureate degree in nursing. The nurse planner is responsible for adhering to ANCC criteria and MNA guidelines. Nurse planners may work for the Provider Unit as staff members, consultants or volunteers.

- The nurse planner requirement ensures that: :
  - (a) the nurse planner is involved in all aspects of the operation of the Provider Unit.

- (b) a qualified registered nurse is involved in the entire process of continuing nursing education, from inception of an idea through delivery, evaluation, and follow-up of a learning activity, and assures adherence to ANCC criteria for every CE activity offered by the Provider Unit.

Other nurses may serve on an individual activity planning committee along with one of the designated nurse planners. These other nurses do not have the same responsibilities, accountabilities or educational requirements as the designated nurse planners. They are only responsible for participating in the planning of one particular educational event.

6. Submit two (2) typed, bound copies of the complete application that address the requirements of the American Nurses' Credentialing Center's (ANCC) Commission on Accreditation (COA) and the Montana Nurses' Association Council on Continuing Education – Approver Unit, including assurance that internal processes exist for the development and evaluation of continuing nursing education.

7. Pay the required fee and provide opportunity for a site visit by MNA Continuing Education staff and volunteers, if needed.

Approval of Individual Activities during the Initial Application Process

If an applicant wishes to offer approved continuing nursing education while the initial provider application is in process, individual CE applications must be submitted to MNA following the appropriate criteria and accompanied by the required application fee.

**WHO ARE MONTANA'S APPROVED PROVIDERS?**

Typically, "Approved Providers" are hospitals and other agencies that provide many educational activities in a year, and have staff and resources in place to assure that ANCC criteria can be met on an ongoing basis.

Approved Providers include:

- St. Vincent Healthcare, Billings
- Kalispell Regional Medical Center, Kalispell
- Benefis Health Care, Great Falls
- St Peter's Hospital, Helena
- Community Medical Center, Missoula
- Bozeman Deaconess Hospital, Bozeman
- St. Patrick Hospital & Health Sciences Center, Missoula
- Billings Clinic, Billings
- Montana Geriatric Education Center, Missoula

**HOW TO APPLY**

A. Contact the MNA Continuing Education Director (406/442-6710) for materials and instructions. Only serious applicants who expect



to complete the application within 3 to 4 months should apply.

B. Compile documentation of how your facility meets the ANCC criteria, complete the necessary application forms, and organize information as indicated in the directions.

C. First time Provider Unit application: Submit a composite list of the educational activities that have been approved by MNA and presented during the previous 24 months. This composite list needs to include:

1. Title of the activity.
2. Date of presentation.
3. Number of contact hours awarded.
4. Assigned MNA number.
5. Date approved by MNA.

Currently approved Provider Units do not need to submit a composite list.

D. Submit three (3) completed, typed, and bound copies of the entire Provider Application. All pages must be numbered in sequential order, and a table of contents with identifying page numbers should be included. Dividers that identify sections of the application should be clearly marked and visible. *Expensive or heavy binders are not required.*

*We are unable to accept electronic transmissions of completed applications at this time.*

E. Information should be concise and presented in a straightforward manner. Applicants must use current provider requirements and criteria provided by ANCC COA and MNA when submitting materials. To be accepted for review, all applications MUST be submitted on MNA forms and completed in the format defined in this manual.

F. Applications not submitted in the proper format will be returned with directions about the changes needed before the review can take place. Extraneous material is not necessary, nor welcomed.

G. Acceptable evidence described by the ANCC Commission on Accreditation and the Montana Nurses' Association to document adherence to criteria and rules must be submitted by all Provider Units of continuing education to achieve approval.

**WHAT TAKES PLACE IN THE REVIEW PROCESS?**

A. The MNA CE Director notifies the applicant of receipt of the application after a quantitative review is completed. This letter or email indicates if more information is needed, or if the application appears to be complete. An application number is assigned and must be used on all correspondence.

**The application number is VERY important and MUST be included on all correspondence and calls concerning the application.**

B. Qualified reviewers carefully consider the application and identify strengths and weaknesses, areas requiring clarification, or missing information. They may request additional or clarifying information that is then reviewed upon receipt.

C. The Reviewers recommend the appropriate action for the application, and prepare a draft letter of strengths, weaknesses, and other comments.

Types of Action

- 1) Approved – Occurs when the application materials meet all criteria. A written progress report may or may not be required. Approval is granted for three years.
- 2) Deferred – Occurs when insufficient information is available to complete the review process.
- 3) Denied – Occurs when application materials indicate that the provider
  - a. Is not in compliance with the ANCC COA and MNA CE criteria, and will not be able to meet criteria within a specified time period; or
  - b. Has not indicated compliance on a required progress report.
- 4) Provisionally approved – Occurs when the application materials indicate limitations in meeting criteria that can be reached within six months or less. The applicant is required to submit progress report(s). After review of the progress report, the CCE Approver Unit can confer approval for the remainder of the three year approval period or deny approval.



D. After receipt of a favorable decision, the CE Director prepares correspondence to recognize the Applicant as an APPROVED PROVIDER for a three (3) year period.

E. The following statement must appear on all documents and certificates:

***[ Name of Approved Provider ] is an approved provider of continuing nursing education by the Montana Nurses' Association, an accredited approver by the American Nurses Credentialing Center's Commission on Accreditation. Expiration February 2009***

Please call the MNA Continuing Education Director with any questions as you complete the application process.

**WITHDRAWAL OF AN APPLICATION**

Although it happens infrequently, an application may be withdrawn by the applicant provider. Written notice to MNA is required. If the application is withdrawn prior to the review process, the review fee will be refunded minus an administrative fee. No refund will be made after materials have been forwarded to the MNA review team. Applications that have been withdrawn may be submitted later without prejudice.

If the applicant changes his/her mind due to whatever circumstance, s/he has up to six months from initial submission to resume the approval process. If the fee was returned, then a new fee must accompany the request to continue with the application process.

After six months have passed, all eligibility criteria must be met again as a new applicant.

**HOW LONG IS THE APPROVAL PERIOD?**

When all criteria are met, MNA grants approval as a provider of continuing nursing education for a three (3) year period.

During the approval period, each individual continuing nursing education activity that is

awarded contact hours and presented by the provider must meet ANCC COA and MNA criteria.

Documentation of how the provider unit is meeting criteria must be on the documentation forms.

Remember that educational activities are approved for two (2) years.

**AWARDING OF CONTACT HOURS**

Contact hours may NOT be awarded prior to the scheduled educational activity, nor can they be awarded RETROACTIVELY. The Planning Documentation form and internal peer review must be completed PRIOR to the presentation of an educational activity and awarding of contact hours.

Reminder: A contact hour now equals 60 minutes of organized learning activity that is either a didactic or a clinical experience.

1 CH = 60 minutes  
MNA and its approved providers offer **CONTACT HOURS**,  
**NOT**  
CEUs or continuing education credit.

Attendance, testing, evaluating, or other activity requirements must be met before contact hours can be awarded. Retroactive awarding of contact hours is not authorized or recognized by ANCC COA or the Montana Nurses' Association.

Awarding Contact Hours to Faculty

In activities with multiple topics and presenters, the faculty may be awarded contact hours for the parts of the program presented by others and in which they participate as learners.

A faculty person who presents an activity for the first time may receive faculty contact hours for that presentation, based on the amount of contact hours participants in the activity receive for that course or portion of the course, not for the time spent developing the activity.



**PROVIDERS MAY NOT APPROVE....**

Providers Do Not Approve Activities.

As noted above, providers are granted approval by MNA to plan, implement, and evaluate activities that meet criteria and rules. Providers have the ability to award contact hours.

Providers never have the authority to approve their own or anyone else’s activities. The words “approved,” “application” or “applicant” should never be used in connection with any activity planned and presented by the provider.

**WHAT ARE THE REPORTING REQUIREMENTS?**

Approved providers are required to notify MNA within 30 days of any changes in the organization that occur after provider approval is awarded. These include:

1. Changes in personnel directly responsible for the provider unit’s continuing nursing education activities (contact person, nurse planner)
2. Changes in ownership or location,
3. Information regarding termination of approved provider activities, and /or
4. Any other changes affecting the provision of continuing nursing education by the approved provider.

**ANNUAL REPORTING REQUIREMENTS**

By **January 31** of each year, a written report must be sent to the MNA CE Director, and include:

- the date and title of each educational activity provided;
- the number of RNs in attendance;
- the number of non-RNs in attendance
- the total number of contact hours awarded to RNs;
- any changes that have occurred in the Provider Unit since the last update; plus
- other information that may be requested.

Approved Provider Units are asked to submit annual data in order to help evaluate and monitor the MNA approval system and meet

ANCC Commission on Accreditation requirements. Failure to complete the annual report may result in suspension of approval as a Provider Unit.

Approved providers may submit the annual report electronically to [info@mntnurses.org](mailto:info@mntnurses.org).

**APPEAL PROCESS**

The provider may appeal the decision of the review process. The request to appeal must be received in the MNA office within thirty (30) days of receipt of the decision of the review process.

If you have been denied approval, you may revise the application and submit the revised version for approval. It will be reviewed and evaluated as a new application. A new application fee would be required.

The appeal process is available to any applicant who does not agree with the decision of the CCE Approver Unit.

One copy of the entire application, all correspondence to and from the applicant, review forms, and meeting minutes with discussion of the application will be kept on file at MNA for six years. Only authorized personnel and Council members have access to the files.

Accreditation bodies who review MNA’s continuing education program, such as the Ohio Nurses’ Association and ANCC, may review files.

**REVOCAION OF APPROVAL**

Approval may be revoked from an Approved Provider Unit as a result of ANY one of the following:

1. Failure to remain in adherence with relevant criteria, rules and requirements defined in this manual;
2. Investigation and verification by MNA of written complaints or charges by consumers or others;
3. Refusal to comply with an investigation by MNA;
4. Misrepresentation.



Revocation is effective on the date the certified letter of notification is received by the organization. All statements regarding Provider Unit approval status must be removed from publicity material and certificates of attendance printed or distributed after that date. If provider unit status is revoked, the Provider Unit may not award contact hours through the MNA system.

**NOTES FOR CURRENTLY APPROVED PROVIDERS**

Currently approved providers need to be mindful of the expiration date and prepare to request continued approval. The process to maintain approval requires an update of information and evidence of continued adherence to ANCC COA and MNA criteria.

Provider Units with current approval are asked to submit applications three months before the three-year approval ends to assure continuity. All criteria must be met with each application and before approval is granted. If approval expires, the Provider Unit may not award contact hours through the MNA system.

Continued approval could be in jeopardy if information requested from a previously approved provider is not received in time for a decision prior to their expiration date. Should that happen, the provider will be required to discontinue awarding continuing nursing education contact hours until approval is awarded.

**Is your organization experiencing any of these 'warning signs'?<sup>1</sup>**

The following list identifies instances when MNA might provide particularly close watch and care of Montana's approved providers. These "warning signs" are based on evidence collected by the Accreditation Program and have been validated by other continuing nursing education accreditation bodies.

The presence of:

1. a major change in the organizational structure (includes change in ownership,

mergers, acquisitions, significant change in job responsibilities, etc.).

2. significant staff turnover (either in numbers of staff, e.g. 50%, or in key personnel, e.g. nurse planner).

3. changes in key personnel (nurse planner, in some cases this may include the administrator and/or the administrative assistant).

4. presence of conflict of interest (including commercial support).

5. presence of complaints lodged against the accredited organization.

6. incomplete or unacceptable interim, annual, or other reports or updated self-study.

7. lack of appropriate actions toward CNE unit goals.

The items listed above are not necessarily definitive—but have been found useful and valid in identifying possible problematic times. They assist the accredited organization, MNA, to do its job properly.

Sources for this document: ANCC, MNA, and Ohio Nurses' Association approved provider materials.  
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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from the ANCC website