Date: May 1, 2014

To: AHS Seniors Health and Contracted Continuing Care Operators

From: Lenora Carriere, Director, Workforce Development and Business Continuity, Community and Seniors Health, Alberta Health Services
Cheryl Knight, Executive Director, Community and Seniors Health, Alberta Health Services

cc: Bernard Anderson, Executive Director, Workforce Strategy, Alberta Health
Sharon McCaughan, Executive Director, Workforce Design, Alberta Health

RE: Competency Requirements for Health Care Aides to meet current Continuing Care Health Services Standards

There have been recent questions from operators and unions related to Health Care Aide (HCA)¹ competencies. This memo provides clarification on HCA competency to employers in continuing care; it was developed in collaboration with the Ministry of Health.

As an unregulated workforce in Alberta, there is no regulating body defining roles and responsibilities for HCAs, nor is there any legislation outlining expected competency. However, Alberta Health is responsible for setting directional policy and health service standards, including the competency requirements for HCAs. Continuing care operations are regulated under the current Alberta Health mandated Continuing Care Health Services Standards (2008; amended March 2013), which indicate:

**Standard 1.13:** Continuing care health services are delivered by educated and qualified health care providers working within their scope of practice or competencies (p18):

- 1.13 (a) Regulated health care providers shall work within their practice statement, competencies and conduct, as defined by the Health Professions Act or other relevant legislation, and governing professional organizations.
- 1.13 (b) Policies and processes shall be established that define the appropriate competencies and scope of work for unregulated health care providers. Unregulated health care providers shall work within those policies and processes.
- 1.13 (c) Unregulated health care providers shall work under the supervision of a regulated health care provider.

¹ The Health Care Aide (HCA) Title: HCA is the generic term used to describe workers who perform tasks identified in the HCA competency profile ([http://www.health.alberta.ca/documents/HC-Aides-Competency-2001.pdf](http://www.health.alberta.ca/documents/HC-Aides-Competency-2001.pdf)). The title is not licensed or protected therefore position titles used by employers may vary (e.g., Nursing Attendant, Personal Care Aide, etc.) and may be determined by labour relations. Becoming certified does not require a change in position title.
1.13 (d) Ongoing in-service training shall be provided for continuing care health service staff based on the changing needs of clients and current evidence based best practices.

Therefore, to be employed in continuing care a HCA is not required to be certified, but rather to be competent2. Competency status can be established through three different pathways. Employers are expected to verify competency status of all HCAs employed within continuing care. A HCA has the necessary competencies if he/she is: (1) certified; (2) has substantially equivalent education; or (3) is deemed competent. The Continuing Care HCA Competency Reference Chart (Appendix) outlines the HCA competency status information in continuing care.

Continuing care employers can choose to establish their own hiring conditions and hire HCAs in any one or more of the three competency status areas (e.g. choosing to hire only certified HCAs).

Assignment of Care

Employers are responsible and accountable to ensure that HCAs have the competencies required for their role and to provide clear and ongoing communication of this information to all staff. Employers are also responsible for ensuring organizational governance documents (e.g., job descriptions, policies, and guidelines) are maintained and communicated to all staff concerning the tasks and activities that may be assigned and to whom.

Organizational job descriptions for HCA staff must reflect the competencies outlined in the HCA Competency Profile available at: http://www.health.alberta.ca/documents/HC-Aides-Competency-2001.pdf. Employers are responsible for determining which tasks are within the expected job description of their HCAs.

Prior to assigning a task to a HCA, regulated health professionals have a responsibility to know the task being assigned is within the HCA role, as defined by organizational policy and procedure, and the individual HCA has the competency to perform the task for the individual client/resident. Considerations of assigning tasks must therefore take into account: the client/resident, the HCA, and the environment.

The individual health professional directing the HCA to carry out the task is accountable for the assignment of the work. The HCA is accountable for the tasks assigned to them and shall only provide care within the boundaries of their knowledge and competency, and ask for assistance from their supervisor and/or a regulated health professional if they are unsure.

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2 Competency: the specific knowledge, skills and attributes required by workers to effectively and successfully fulfill the requirements of a specific job description. (Perry S. Just What is Competency and Why Should You Care (1998). Pg. 58-62).
For more information on the Assignment of Care and Restricted Activities please refer to the following websites:

- Decision-Making Standards for Nurses in the Supervision of Health Care Aides.  

- Guidelines for the Assignment of Care  

For more information about HCA competency you can email the HCA Directory at hcadirectory@albertahealthservices.ca. As well, please look on the Continuing Care Desktop at [www.ccdweb.ca](http://www.ccdweb.ca). You will find information and resources available within the HCA folder. If you are not currently set up with a password, you can self register by going to [www.ccdweb.ca](http://www.ccdweb.ca).

Kind Regards,

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### Continuing Care HCA Competency - Reference Chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HCA Competency Status</th>
<th>Employer Action</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Certified:</strong> &lt;br&gt; Certificate obtained from a licensed Alberta educational institution offering the <em>Health Care Aide Government of Alberta Provincial Curriculum.</em></td>
<td>The employee provides evidence of a HCA Certificate obtained from a licensed Alberta educational institution offering the <em>Health Care Aide Government of Alberta Provincial Curriculum.</em>&lt;br&gt;&lt;br&gt;<strong>Steps to complete:</strong>&lt;br&gt;Keep a copy of the employee’s educational credentials on file. Submit employee name and certification information (name of institution, date obtained, and name of certificate) to the HCA Directory at: <a href="mailto:hcadirectory@albertahealthservices.ca">hcadirectory@albertahealthservices.ca</a> as part of the quarterly submission.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Substantially Equivalent:</strong> &lt;br&gt; The employer determines the employee has education that meets and/or exceeds the <em>Health Care Aide Government of Alberta Provincial Curriculum</em> which includes 500 hours of theory and supervised practice.</td>
<td>To support determination of substantially equivalent status, the employer can choose to follow the process below OR choose to move to the “Deemed Competent” option.&lt;br&gt;&lt;br&gt;<strong>Steps to complete:</strong>&lt;br&gt;The employer determines the employee’s education is substantially equivalent if the employee has education that meets and/or exceeds the <em>Health Care Aide Government of Alberta Provincial Curriculum</em> which includes 500 hours of theory and supervised practice through their educational program.&lt;br&gt;&lt;br&gt;The employer is responsible for reviewing the employees completed courses against the <em>Health Care Aide Government of Alberta Provincial Curriculum</em> for alignment and validation. If the employer is unsure of equivalencies, the employer must complete a <em>Competency Assessment Profile</em> (CAP) tool.&lt;br&gt;&lt;br&gt;Please report substantially equivalent programs to <a href="mailto:hcadirectory@albertahealthservices.ca">hcadirectory@albertahealthservices.ca</a>.&lt;br&gt;&lt;br&gt;<strong>Note on Nursing Programs and Equivalency:</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>Degree Nurses:</strong> Domestic or foreign trained Nurses may be considered substantially equivalent. Completion of a CAP is recommended if an employer has any concerns about the individual’s competency. <strong>Nursing students:</strong> who have completed a minimum of 100 hours of practicum is considered substantially equivalent.</td>
</tr>
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Therefore:

- **LPN students** who have completed the **first year** of a Licensed Practical Nursing program are considered to be substantially equivalent.
- **RN students** who have completed the **second year** of a Bachelor of Nursing program are considered to be substantially equivalent.

If there are any questions regarding this process, please contact the HCA Directory at [hcadirectory@albertahealthservices.ca](mailto:hcadirectory@albertahealthservices.ca).

| Deemed Competent: | If the employee is not certified as a HCA from the *Health Care Aide Government of Alberta Provincial Curriculum* and doesn’t have education deemed as substantially equivalent, employers must assess competency by completing the *Competency Assessment Profile* tool (CAP).

**Steps to complete:**
A CAP is to be completed within 3 months of hire and the identified Learning Plan must be completed within 1 year of hire to support any competency deficits. The CAP must be completed by a regulated health professional.

Employers should complete CAP for:
- Non-nurse health care staff (e.g., EMS); and,
- Any HCA employee regardless of education and/or work experience if not certified or substantially equivalent.
- Any concerns regarding an employee’s competency.

Submit employee name and competent status to the HCA Directory at: [hcadirectory@albertahealthservices.ca](mailto:hcadirectory@albertahealthservices.ca) as part of the quarterly submission.

| Revised Status: | Should any HCA subsequently obtain an Alberta HCA certificate, the ‘revised status’ is to be submitted to the HCA Directory as part of the quarterly update. |