

Choosing a Nursing Education Program

9 Things to Consider



Nursing is a rewarding and challenging career with a variety of employment opportunities. As a prospective nursing student, it is in your best interest to be a proactive consumer by choosing the nursing program that fits your needs and one that will prepare you to achieve your career goals. As you compare different nursing programs, we encourage you ask questions and find the answers before enrolling in any program.

The Virginia Board of Nursing regulates pre-licensure nursing education programs. The regulations are available on the [Board of Nursing website](#).

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What kind of program are you looking for?

Are you looking for a baccalaureate degree registered nursing program, an associate degree nursing program or a practical nursing program? Make sure the program you choose is the program that will prepare you for your career goals as a registered nurse or a licensed practical nurse.

**Registered Nurse
(RN)**

**Practical Nurse
(LPN)**

A [comprehensive list](#) of state-approved nursing education programs and their current status is also available. If you are considering practical nursing, call the public school systems; many of them offer their practical nursing program to the adult learner.

Additionally, a [comprehensive list](#) of state approved nurse aide education programs and medication aide programs are available on the Board of Nursing website.

Is my desired program accredited?



The Virginia Board of Nursing **approves** nursing education programs to operate in the Commonwealth.

Nursing program **accreditation** is a volunteer and peer review process.

Lack of accreditation may affect your ability to further your education.



Approval and accreditation are not the same. Visit the [National Council of State Boards of Nursing](#) online to learn more about nursing approval and nursing accreditation.

What are the NCLEX pass rates for the program?

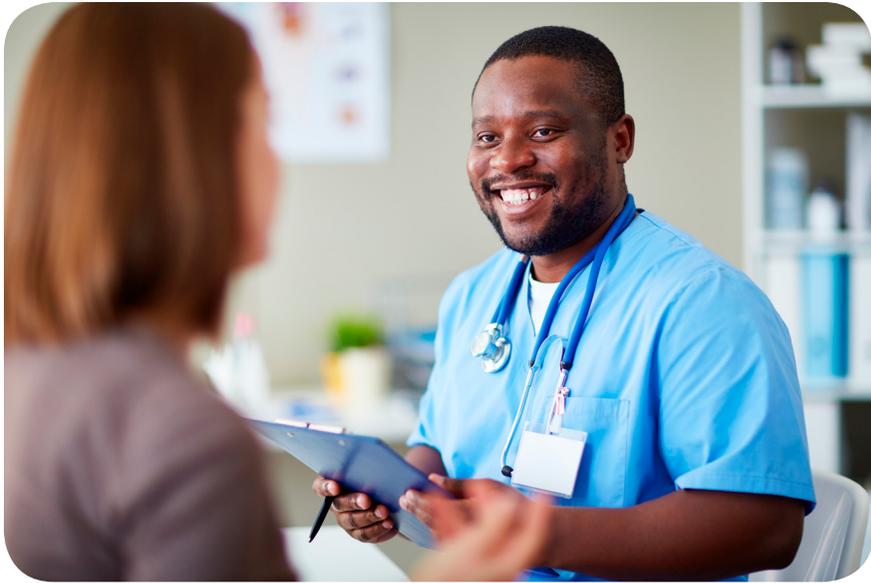


The National Council Licensure Exam (NCLEX) is the licensure exam that demonstrates entry into practice competence. **Passing the NCLEX is a requirement for licensure in all 50 States and the District of Columbia.**

The [NCLEX pass rates](#) for the current year and the past 5 years are available on the Board of Nursing website for all nursing programs approved to operate in Virginia. Nursing programs with an NCLEX pass rate of 80% or above meet the Board's requirements for the NCLEX exam. The program's overall pass rate is one indication of overall program success.

More information about NCLEX testing can be found on the [National Council of State Boards of Nursing website](#).

What kinds of professional experiences will my education require?



Nursing is a practice profession and your education will require classroom, skills lab, and clinical experiences. While there are no completely online nursing programs, some online general education classes may be available.

Knowing what types of clinical experiences you will need is an important piece of your education. So before making your decision, ask yourself “Do the experiences prepare me for my work place employment goal?” Don’t forget to consider travel time. Think about the distance you will have to travel to the various sites.

Virginia Board of Nursing Experience Requirements

- At least 400 hours of direct client care clinical experience for practical nursing programs
- At least 500 hours of direct client care experience for RN programs
- Clinical experiences must include the attainment and maintenance of physical and mental health and the prevention of illness for individuals and groups throughout the life cycle and in a variety of acute, non-acute, community-based, and long-term care clinical settings
- Experiences must include adult medical/surgical nursing, geriatric nursing, maternal/infant nursing, mental health nursing, nursing fundamentals, and pediatric nursing

What personal costs should I expect?



Cost may vary depending on the institution you choose. Make sure to research tuition, fees and other expenses before making your selection.

Keep in mind that nursing education will most likely require the purchase of additional equipment, uniforms, and other resources, so be sure to ask!

Prospective students may inquire about financial aid opportunities through their individual nursing program.

Admitted students looking for financial aid might consider the [Mary Marshall Scholarship Fund](#). This page on the Virginia Department of Health website provides details about the application process and available funds.

Will I be required to take a comprehensive exam?

****The Virginia Board of Nursing does not regulate the use of a comprehensive exam.****



Make sure to ask about the requirements for taking a comprehensive/high stakes exam (also known as a “Predictor Exam”), which requires you to obtain a minimum passing score to graduate and become eligible to take the NCLEX licensure exam. “Predictor Exams” help anticipate your level of success on the NCLEX licensure exam.

Some programs are implementing policies that require a high stakes/predictor exam at the completion of the program, which may prevent you from graduating and taking the NCLEX licensure exam. The passing standard varies by school. You will still be responsible for your school debt without the benefit of a license. Be sure to understand the policy before investing time and money.

Additional information- including the National League for Nursing’s position statement and Fair Testing Guidelines regarding the use of a high stakes exam- can be found [online](#).

How should I research programs?



Being proactive about your search for a nursing education program is an integral step in the selection process.

When researching to find the right school for you, consider the following aspects of the various programs you're looking at:

- Know the policies of the nursing program as well as the parent institution.
- For example, nursing programs will frequently have a different attendance policy than the parent institution, or may have a higher passing standard.
- Be sure to read the nursing program handbook as well as the college catalog.

Do I qualify for advanced placement?



Many nursing programs offer advanced placement. A program may give you credit for previous courses, clinical experiences you had in your LPN program, or military experience. Ask if these options are available at your school of interest.

Virginia Board of Nursing Approved Programs

[Approved Registered Nurse Education Programs](#)

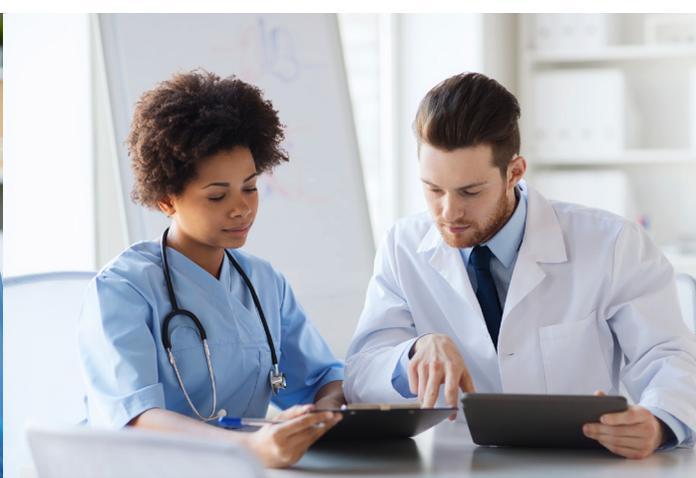
[Approved Practical Nurse Education Programs](#)

Do I qualify for an accelerated program?



If you already have a baccalaureate college degree, ask about an accelerated or second degree program. Several nursing education programs in Virginia offer second degree programs, so it might not take as long as you think!

A complete listed of programs approved to operate in Virginia can be found on the [Virginia Board of Nursing website](#).



We hope this information is helpful. Best wishes as you embark on your nursing career.

If you have any questions, you can contact the Virginia Board of Nursing by phone, fax or email.

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