



# Position Statement

## Nursing regulation

### ICN Position:

The International Council of Nurses (ICN) believes that profession-led nursing regulation contributes to public protection and quality patient outcomes through establishing, promoting and enforcing standards of practice.

Legislation governing nursing practice requires regulatory bodies to set standards of practice along with codes of ethics and conduct in order to protect the public. The regulatory body implements and monitors these standards and, by doing so, demonstrates to the public, government, employers and other stakeholders that the profession is committed to retaining the public's trust and delivering quality services. <sup>1</sup>

ICN reaffirms its commitment to promoting viable and appropriate regulatory systems which support the provision of safe, competent and ethical nursing care for all members of society and which engender strength and integrity within the profession. <sup>2</sup>

ICN revises and updates its previous principles<sup>3</sup> in the following which represent a proposal for a fundamental code regarding regulation of the profession. Policy objectives derived from these principles offer guidance in developing and evaluating regulatory systems.

### Principles of Professional Regulation<sup>4</sup>

- 1. Principle of purposefulness**  
Regulation should be directed toward an explicit purpose that reflects a focus on initial and on-going safe, competent and ethical practice.
- 2. Principle of definition**  
Regulatory standards should be based upon clear definitions of professional scope and accountability.
- 3. Principle of professional ultimacy**  
Regulatory definitions and standards should promote the fullest development of the profession commensurate with its potential social contribution.

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**4. Principle of collaboration**

Regulatory systems should recognise the legitimate roles and responsibilities of interested parties - public, profession and its members, government, employers and other professions - consult with these parties, and incorporate their perspectives in aspects of standard-setting and administration.

**5. Principle of representational balance**

The design of the regulatory system should acknowledge and appropriately balance interdependent interests.

**6. Principle of optimacy**

Regulatory systems should provide and be limited to those proportionate controls and restrictions necessary to achieve their objectives.

**7. Principle of flexibility**

Standards and processes of regulation should be sufficiently broad, flexible and permissive to achieve their objectives while at the same time permitting freedom for innovation, growth, and change.

**8. Principle of efficiency**

Regulatory systems should operate in the most efficient manner ensuring coherence and coordination among their parts so as to be sustainable and optimise resources used to achieve the stated explicit purpose.

**9. Principle of universality**

Regulatory systems should promote universal standards of performance and foster professional identity and mobility to the fullest extent compatible with local needs and circumstances.

**10. Principle of natural justice**

Regulatory processes should provide just and honest treatment for all parties involved.

**11. Principle of transparency**

Regulatory agencies must be open and transparent in their processes and communicate using clear language, support lay involvement and make the maximum amount of information publicly available so all interested parties can make informed choices.

**12. Principle of accountability**

Regulatory agencies and those they regulate must be accountable for their actions and be open to scrutiny and challenge.

**13. Principle of effectiveness**

In order to maintain public, governmental and professional trust regulatory systems must be effective.

## **Background**

Systems of professional regulation are influenced and shaped by the legislative, political, environmental, social and professional context in which they are developed. Over time, regulators have developed more sophisticated processes to enable them to discharge their duties. For example: setting practice standards, accrediting education programmes and providers, and ensuring the initial and ongoing competence of registrants.

Regulatory models evolve over time and are impacted by changing demographics, patterns of disease, socio-political issues, education, workforce dynamics, technology and economics. Globalisation and international trade agreements are also impacting regulation at the local, national, regional and international level.

Currently, regulatory models reflect great diversity in approach globally in terms of terminology and standards, as well as the nature and extent of control of the profession by government. The characteristics of each model are dependent upon and reflective of the cultural context, jurisdictional model, role of government, the influence of the profession involved and the impact that historic negotiations may have had.<sup>5</sup>

Regulatory bodies must ensure that their core functions are carried out in an open, transparent, efficient, effective, proportionate and fair manner. Only through such achievements will the confidence of the public, the profession and politicians be secured.<sup>6</sup>

Effective communication and collaboration between regulatory bodies globally facilitates the sharing of relevant and critical information about nurses moving between jurisdictions, sharing of regulatory best practice, together with increased congruence and coherence in the development of local, national and international regulatory systems. Increasing the dialogue between regulators strengthens coordinated responses to regulatory challenges and emerging issues in the wider international regulatory arena.

**Adopted in 1985**  
**Reviewed and revised in 2013**

**Related ICN Positions:**

- Career development in nursing
- Scope of nursing practice
- Protection of the title “Nurse”

**ICN Publications:**

- **The Report on Regulation of Nursing**, Geneva, ICN, 1986
- Affara F.A., Madden Styles M., **Nursing Regulation Guidebook: From Principle to Power**, Geneva, ICN, 1992
- **Development of Standards for Nursing Education and Practice: A Guide for National Nurses' Associations**, Geneva, ICN, 1989

The International Council of Nurses is a federation of more than 130 national nurses associations representing the millions of nurses worldwide. Operated by nurses and leading nursing internationally, ICN works to ensure quality nursing care for all and sound health policies globally.

<sup>1</sup> International Council of Nurses (2009) *Regulation 2020: Exploration of the Present, Vision for the Future*, Geneva, p.38

<sup>2</sup> International Council of Nurses (2009) *Regulation 2020: Exploration of the Present, Vision for the Future*, Geneva, p.51

<sup>3</sup> International Council of Nurses (1986) *The Report on the Regulation of Nursing*, Geneva, Chapter 7,

<sup>4</sup> Benton, D.C, González-Jurado, M.A, Beneit-Montesinos, J.V. (2013). A structured policy review of the principles of professional self-regulation. *International Nursing Review* 60, 13-22

<sup>5</sup> International Council of Nurses (2009) *Regulation 2020: Exploration of the Present, Vision for the Future*, Geneva, p.33

<sup>6</sup> International Council of Nurses (2009) *Regulation 2020: Exploration of the Present, Vision for the Future*, Geneva, p.46