

Achieving and Maintaining RACGP Accreditation Healthy Practices

APNA has produced a suite of resources to help general practices employ nurses and optimise their role in the general practice setting. Fulfilling these aims will help build Healthy Practices that deliver positive outcomes for their communities through nursing skills and expertise.

RACGP Standards for General Practices

The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) sets Standards for general practices. The Standards provide a framework for quality care and risk management in Australian general practice.

Successful accreditation against these Standards is a requirement for practices to access funding through the Practice Incentives Program (PIP) and the Practice Nurse Incentive Program (PNIP), which help practices to employ and retain nurses.

Defining general practice

In order to qualify for accreditation, practices need to demonstrate that they operate as a 'general practice'. The RACGP defines general practice as the provision of person-centred, continuing, comprehensive and coordinated whole-person healthcare to individuals and families in their communities¹. More specifically, the characteristics include:

- Person-centred: patients' needs, values and desired health outcomes always remain central to care
- Whole-person care: there is an appreciation of the complexity of different contributors to health (biological, social and psychological)
- Continuity of care through long term relationships supported by planned coordination of clinical teamwork
- Comprehensive care that is not limited by patient age, gender, body system, disease process, or service site
- Continuing quality improvement
- Adherence to professional, clinical and ethical standards.

Practices must fulfil all criteria to meet the RACGP's definition of general practice. For example, a clinic that is solely focused on providing 'skin checks' is a specialist clinic and would not be defined as a general practice.

Benefits of accreditation

One of the key benefits of accreditation is that it addresses and reduces risk in all areas of practice activity through best practice processes and continuous improvement. There are also financial benefits, including access to significant government funding through the PIP and PNIP programs that help to offset the costs of accreditation and the employment or retention of nurses. In addition, accreditation brings the professional satisfaction that comes with knowing the practice is a high quality practice. Accreditation also provides a guarantee of quality to patients who are also your customers. This can be communicated to them by the use of the accreditation logo within the practice and on practice stationery.

Incentives for accreditation

For practices that have not been previously accredited, Medicare provides \$5,000 funding to help offset the cost of becoming accredited if the practice applies for the PNIP. (Current February 2015)

Who will accredit our practice?

Assessment of a practice's performance against the RACGP Standards can be currently provided by one of two accrediting agencies – AGPAL/QIP or GPA Accreditation. The practice is free to choose its preferred agency for registration. Following registrations, both organisations provide substantial support for practices looking to become accredited.

Achieving and Maintaining RACGP Accreditation

Maintaining accreditation

Accredited practices must undergo a reassessment process every three years to maintain accreditation.

More about the Standards

The RACGP Standards for General Practices are divided into five broad categories of assessment and are supported by additional standards, which provide detail in key areas such as infection control and information technology (computer systems). The five broad categories are:

- Practice Services
- Rights and needs of patients
- Safety, quality improvement and education
- Practice management
- Physical factors

Revision of the Standards occurs every five to six years to ensure they reflect best practice and support continuous quality improvement in general practice.

Accreditation – what needs to be done

(Current February 2015)

A number of activities need to be undertaken by the practice to achieve accreditation:

STEP 1: Register for accreditation (up to 18 months before accreditation assessment)

STEP 2: Practice self-assessment against the Standards (the accrediting agency will provide online or paper-based tools on which practices can record their self-assessment), which includes:

- reviewing policies and procedures (template documents are available to customise)
- reviewing documents such as the practice information sheet, website, fee information, contingency plan for unexpected events, staff position descriptions, evidence of training, professional registration, computer and information security, patient reminders and recall, clinical handover processes, vaccine management and infection control
- reviewing patient health records, including health summaries, referral information, preventive activities and use of clinical coding
- undertaking a validated patient feedback activity (usually a survey)

- undertaking cardiopulmonary resuscitation training for all staff
- assessing physical facilities, including clinical equipment
- providing information to staff to ensure the team is aware of any changes.

STEP 3: Provide the self-assessment to the accrediting agency who will arrange for a team of surveyors to visit the practice. The team is usually comprised of a GP surveyor and a non-GP surveyor.

STEP 4: Undergo the accreditation assessment.

The assessment will involve a review of all areas of the self-assessment. The visit takes approximately four hours for small practices, and a full day for large practices. At the end of the survey visit, the practice will be provided with information about the assessment, including any areas that need to be addressed. Practices will be provided with an opportunity to address areas that fall short of the accreditation Standards by providing further evidence to the accrediting body. Once the accrediting body is satisfied that the practice meets all Standards, the practice will have achieved accreditation. The practice will be provided with a detailed report of performance against Standards and a certificate of accreditation.

STEP 5: Maintain quality standards.

Practices are expected to continue to meet the Standards in day-to-day operation after achieving accreditation. Re-assessment against the Standards will occur every three years, if the practice wishes to maintain accreditation.

Is it difficult to achieve accreditation?

Achieving accreditation is a significant event for all general practices. It takes time to complete all of the activities and sometimes requires investment in new systems or equipment. While the process of applying for accreditation can seem daunting, a lot of help is available from the RACGP, accrediting agencies, Medicare Locals, Primary Health Networks, APNA and advisory/consulting agencies. Most practices will say that accreditation is not easy, but it is worthwhile and rewarding. It is also important to remember that accrediting agencies will provide resources, document templates and advice over the telephone or in writing during the process of preparing for accreditation.

Achieving and Maintaining RACGP Accreditation

How can nurses contribute to practice accreditation?

Ideally activities that help a practice prepare for accreditation are shared among the practice team.

Nurses can provide significant help in preparing for accreditation, especially in the areas of quality and safety, policy and procedure development, systems development and maintenance, occupational health and safety, resource management, infection control, vaccine and cold chain management, and patient services.

Further information can be found in **Resource 21 The nursing role in general practice accreditation.**

What are the costs?

Accrediting agency fees vary. They are dependent on how many full-time equivalent GPs work at the practice, as well as any investments the practice may need to make to improve systems or purchase equipment to meet the Standards.

Cost can be offset through Medicare funded income reserved for practices that are accredited or registered for accreditation – the PIP and PNIP.

How long will it take to achieve accreditation?

Once registered for accreditation, practices have 12 months to become fully accredited. This means the survey visit should take place no later than nine months after registration to allow three months for revision and refinement of practice systems if required to meet the Standards.

Once the practice is accredited, reassessment occurs every three years. Practices need to be aware that the RACGP reviews and updates the Standards from time to time. It is recommended that practices start preparing for accreditation 12–18 months ahead of the reassessment due date.

Accreditation PIP and PNIP Checklist

Contact one of the accrediting agencies – AGPAL/QIP or GPA Accreditation:

- Request a quotation for the service
- Register with one of the accrediting agencies
- Register for PIP
- Register for PNIP

What happens next?

- Allocate staff who will assist in accreditation preparation
- Commence self-assessment (allow at least six months)
- Submit self-assessment when complete
- Arrange date for survey visit
- Practice survey assessment (accreditation day)
- Rectification of non-compliance
- Accreditation achieved/maintained
- Advise Medicare of accreditation status to ensure ongoing payment of PIP and PNIP

Achieving and Maintaining RACGP Accreditation



Resources

RACGP Standards	For information
RACGP 4th Edition Standards for General Practices	www.racgp.org.au/your-practice/standards/standards4thedition
Resources for the Standards	www.racgp.org.au/your-practice/standards/resources
RACGP Infection Prevention and Control Standards	www.racgp.org.au/your-practice/standards/infectioncontrol
RACGP Computer and Information Security Standards	www.racgp.org.au/your-practice/standards/computer-and-information-security-standards
Strive for Five – Vaccine Management	www.immunise.health.gov.au/internet/immunise/publishing.nsf/Content/59F63C79DAFAFB38CA257B020002C371/\$File/strive-for-5-guidelines.pdf
RACGP – What is a General Practice?	www.racgp.org.au/becomingagp/what-is-a-gp/what-is-general-practice

Practice Incentives Program (PIP)

Medicare Australia Practice Incentives Program	www.medicareaustralia.gov.au/provider/incentives/pip
PIP Forms	www.medicareaustralia.gov.au/provider/incentives/pip/forms-guides.jsp
Practice Nurse Incentive Program (PNIP)	www.medicareaustralia.gov.au/provider/incentives/pnip.jsp
PNIP Application Form	www.humanservices.gov.au/health-professionals/forms/4515

Contact references

Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP)	Phone: 1800 472 247	racgp.org.au
Australian General Practice Accreditation Ltd (AGPAL)	Phone: 1300 362 111	agpal.com.au
General Practice Australia (GPA) Accreditation <i>plus</i>	Phone: 1800 188 088	gpa.net.au
Australian Primary Health Care Nurses Association (APNA)	Phone: 1300 303 184	apna.asn.au

Reference:

¹ racgp.org.au/becomingagp/what-is-a-gp/what-is-general-practice

www.apna.asn.au www.healthypractices.apna.asn.au

Australian Primary Health Care Nurses Association (APNA)
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