Application and Client Acquisition Guide

Becoming an Independent Nurse Contractor in Oregon's Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (I/DD) Sector

Application and Client Acquisition Guide:

Navigating Nursing in I/DD: your pathway
to a nursing career in Oregon's intellectual
and developmental disabilities sector.

DISCOVER **UNDERSTAND** **THRIVE**

Contents

Introduction

Congratulations on choosing to serve people with intellectual/ developmental disabilities as an independent contractor nurse in Private Duty Nursing (PDN), Direct Nursing Services (DNS), or Long-Term Care Community Nursing (LTCCN). We are confident you will find fulfillment, meaning, and independence in this new phase of your nursing career.

It's time to get down to business! This guide will help you complete an application to the Oregon Department of Human Services (ODHS), and provides expectations on how and when you will get your first client and start work.

To be approved as an independent contractor nurse by ODHS, you will need to follow several key steps and ensure that you have all the necessary documentation and qualifications in place. Some of the specific steps vary, depending on the nursing service area you choose to work in.

Let's get started!

Application Process

STEP 1: Obtain Documentation of Nursing Experience

To be approved as a PDN or DNS nurse, you'll need at least two years of nursing experience. In addition, at least one year of experience working with those with I/DD is preferred, but not a requirement.

LTCCN nurses are required to have a minimum of two years full-time or equivalent verifiable experience practicing as an RN in an in-home, home health, skilled nursing, hospital, or Department licensed community setting; at least one of these two years must have occurred within three years of the date the RN enrolls. LTCCN nurses will need one year of experience with providing RN delegation service in the last two years, or a pass score on the LTCCN delegation test to demonstrate satisfactory experience and skills.

Gather records that verify your work history and qualifications in nursing. Acceptable forms of documentation may include employment records such as pay stubs, job contracts, or official letters from your employer confirming your role and duration of employment. Additionally, reference letters from supervisors or colleagues who can vouch for your professional experience and expertise are valuable.

Certifications, particularly those tied to specific nursing skills or specializations, can further demonstrate your qualifications and help meet the requirement of nursing experience.

It is important to ensure all documentation is properly signed, dated, and on official letterhead, where applicable, to guarantee legitimacy.

Template: Email to Request Documentation from a Former Employer

Subject: Request for Work History Statement for Independent Contractor Application

Dear [Former Employer's Name],

I hope this message finds you well. I am in the process of applying to become an independent contractor for the Oregon Department of Human Services (ODHS) and need to provide documentation verifying my nursing experience. As part of the application requirements, I am seeking a formal statement that outlines my work history during my time at [Former Employer's Organization Name].

Please provide a signed statement on company letterhead that includes the following details:

- My job title(s)
- Dates of employment (start and end dates)
- A brief description of my duties and responsibilities
- Confirmation of my experience as a licensed nurse

If possible, please send the statement via email or by mail to the address below:

[Your Email Address]
[Your Mailing Address]

I appreciate your time and assistance in my preparation of this application. Please let me know if you need any additional information or clarification.

Thank you for your support.

Best regards,
[Your Full Name]
[Your Contact Information]

STEP 2: Decide Your Business Structure

As a self-employed, independent contractor nurse, you will need to establish a business structure. You can choose between a sole proprietorship, or a business entity as either a limited liability company (LLC) or an S-Corporation.

A sole proprietorship is easier to set up and manage initially, but lacks liability protection and certain tax benefits. Forming a business entity, such as an LLC or S-Corporation, offers more legal and tax advantages, especially for independent contractors in the I/DD sector looking for long-term growth and protection.

The box below lists some things to consider when making your decision on business structure. Remember, ODHS is not and does not act as your employer as an independent contractor nurse. This information is not intended to replace professional advice on business formation or operations. Consult a tax advisor to determine which structure best aligns with your personal financial goals and risk tolerance.

Some Considerations: Choosing Sole Proprietorship, LLC, or S-Corporation

1. Liability Protection

- **LLC and S-Corporation**: Provide personal liability protection. If your business faces legal action or debts, your personal assets (e.g., house, car) are shielded.

- **Sole Proprietorship**: No liability protection. You are personally responsible for any business-related debts or legal claims. Your personal assets could be at risk.

2. Taxation

- **LLC**: Offers the choice to be taxed as a sole proprietorship, partnership, or S-Corp. It offers flexibility, allowing you to minimize taxes based on your business's needs.

- **S-Corporation**: Provides more potential tax benefits, such as avoiding self-employment tax on some income. However, S-Corps are more complex to manage and require additional compliance.

- **Sole Proprietorship**: All business profits are reported as personal income, and you are subject to self-employment taxes. While simpler, it may not offer the same tax-saving opportunities as a business entity.

3. Setup and Administration

- **LLC/S-Corporation**: Requires formal registration with the state, filing of Articles of Organization, and paying a registration fee (e.g., $100 in Oregon). There are ongoing filing and reporting requirements, but these structures offer more credibility to clients and partners.

- **Sole Proprietorship**: Easier and faster to set up—no need to register with the state, though you may need a business license. However, it lacks the formal structure that some clients might prefer for contractual relationships.

4. Credibility

- **Business Entity**: Often seen as more professional and established, which could be beneficial when securing contracts or strategic partnerships.

- **Sole Proprietorship**: While acceptable for many clients, some larger organizations might prefer working with registered business entities for contractual reasons.

5. Scalability and Future Growth

- **LLC/S-Corporation**: Easier to grow and bring on partners, employees, or investors. As your business expands, these entities provide a structure for more complex operations.

- **Sole Proprietorship**: Limited in terms of scalability, and transitioning to another structure later can be more complicated than starting as a business entity from the outset.

6. Control and Flexibility

- **LLC**: Offers flexibility in management, allowing you to be the sole owner or have multiple members.

- **Sole Proprietorship**: You maintain complete control but with full responsibility.

Consult a tax advisor to determine which structure best aligns with your personal financial goals and risk tolerance.

STEP 3: Develop a Business Plan

As a self-employed, independent contractor nurse, you will also need to develop a business plan to ensure your venture succeeds. ODHS cannot direct you on this; it's a good idea to consult an accountant or business or tax advisor who can help with this process. Here are some things to take into consideration:

(Note: Hourly rates quoted here are accurate as of February 2025).

1. Estimate Your Earnings

To start your budget, calculate your anticipated weekly, monthly, and annual income. For example, a PDN or DNS RN will make $61.96 per hour; if they work 35 hours per week, their income will be:

- Weekly: $61.96/hour x 35 hours = $2,168.60

- Monthly: $2,168.60/week x 4 weeks = $8,674.40

- Annually: $8,674.40/month x 12 months = $104,092.80

2. Budget for Taxes

As an independent contractor, you'll need to handle your own taxes, including self-employment taxes (Social Security and Medicare). It's good practice to set aside 25–30% of your earnings for federal and state taxes:

- For example, for $104,092 in annual earnings, the plan is to save around $26,000 to $31,200 annually for taxes.

Speak with a tax professional to explore tax deductions for independent contractors, like home office expenses, travel, supplies, etc.

3. Include Expenses for Insurance and Benefits

- Liability Insurance: Budget around $100–$150 per year for professional liability insurance.

- Health Insurance: You'll need to purchase your own health insurance. Depending on your coverage, this could cost anywhere from $300–$600+ per month.

- Retirement Savings: Consider opening a SEP IRA or Solo 401(k). You may wish to contribute 10–20% of your income towards retirement savings.

- Other Benefits: Since you won't have paid leave, plan for personal savings or an emergency fund to cover periods of illness or vacation.

4. Manage Your Business Expenses

- Licensing and Continuing Education: Don't forget the costs of maintaining your RN license and completing any necessary continuing education.

- Supplies and Equipment: You may need to purchase supplies, software, and technology for documentation or client care.

- Transportation: If you're traveling between client locations, consider fuel, car maintenance, and mileage. These costs, alongside time spent driving, are not directly reimbursed. Keep records for potential tax deductions. Ensuring you have dependable transportation and factoring in the time and costs associated with traveling between clients are key aspects of running your independent nursing practice efficiently.

5. Plan for Fluctuating Income

As an independent contractor, your income can fluctuate. It's wise to create a savings buffer—aim to set aside 3–6 months of living expenses to cover times when work may slow down or you need to take time off.

This is an example of the monthly budget of a PDN independent contractor nurse. Note that actual gross pay, tax, and business operating costs may differ from this example:

Category (examples)	Amount (examples)
Gross Income	$8,674.40
Taxes (e.g. 30%)	-$2,602.32
Health Insurance	-$500
Liability Insurance	-$13
Retirement Savings (e.g. 20%)	-$1,734.88
Miscellaneous (supplies, transport)	-$300
Vacation and sick leave (e.g. 6 hours per month)	-$371.76
Net Income	**$3,152.44**

6. Track Expenses and Income

Invest in accounting software or consider hiring a bookkeeper to help you manage your ongoing income and expenses. Keep detailed records to stay organized and prepared for tax time.

7. Evaluate Long-Term Goals

- Growth Potential: Think about how much you want to grow your client base and increase your working hours, which can impact your overall income and career trajectory.

- Career Advancement: Plan for any additional training or certifications that may enhance your skills and increase your earning potential.

STEP 4: Acquire Liability Insurance

(Note: The minimum coverage requirements quoted here are accurate as of February 2025).

For every nurse, obtaining liability insurance is a must. This insurance will help protect nurses from legal costs and damages that may arise from any actions or omissions while providing client care. The minimum coverage requirements are:

- Commercial Liability Insurance: $1 million per occurrence and a minimum of $2 million minimum aggregate.

- Professional Liability Insurance: $1 million per occurrence and a minimum of $3 million minimum aggregate.

There are several factors to consider when obtaining your nursing liability insurance; be sure to research your options and find a trustworthy company and compare and contrast your choices to find the one that is best for you.

STEP 5: Acquire a National Provider Identifier (NPI) Number

The National Provider Identifier (NPI) number is a unique identification number for health care providers in the United States. It does not expire or change.

You MUST have an NPI number in order to be paid, and you are required to apply for one as part of your application.

- Cost: Applying for an NPI number is free of charge.

- Processing time: It may take anywhere from 1 to 20 days to receive the number.

- The NPI is administered by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS). Apply for your NPI at the National Plan and Provider Enumeration System (NPPES) website https://nppes.cms.hhs.gov/#/. You may also call the NPI Enumerator at 1-800-465-3203 and request a paper NPI application form.

- Once you have received your NPI number, notify the ODHS coordinator processing your application.

STEP 6: Complete the Relevant Enrollment Packet

Contact ODHS to request the current application enrollment packet:

- For clients up to age 20, contact Children's Intensive In-Home Services (CIIS) in the Office of Developmental Disabilities Services (ODDS):

    E-mail: CIIS.providers@odhsoha.oregon.gov

    Via secure link here.

    Fax: 503-378-5756

- For clients aged 21 and older, contact ODDS:

    E-mail: ODDS.RNsupport@odhsoha.oregon.gov

- For LTCCN, contact the Aging and People with Disabilities (APD) program:

    E-mail: ltc.nsg@odhsoha.oregon.gov

    The application can also be found here.

For all of the enrollment processes, have available clear and legible scans or photos of the following:

- Proof of Insurance

- Photo ID

- Front and back of Oregon Driver's License and Social Security card

- Proof of current unencumbered Oregon State Board Nursing License number

STEP 7: Complete a Background Check

- You'll need to undergo a criminal background check. When you fill out your enrollment paperwork through ODDS/CIIS, or APD/LTCCN the program administrator will provide you with the required forms and help you submit and process these documents. Be sure to have handy your addresses, where you have lived over the past five years.

- Cost: There is a fee of approximately $65 to process this background check, so be prepared to cover this as part of your application process.

STEP 8: Prepare an Administration Plan

As an independent contractor nurse with ODHS, navigating administrative tasks might seem daunting. However, ODHS offers a range of guides and tools to ensure you are well-equipped to handle the administrative side of your independent practice. You can access these guides [here](#).

STEP 9: Get Accepted

- ODDS/CIIS, or APD/LTCCN approves your application.

- Complete enrollment process: finalize all contractual agreements. You can't start working until all paperwork and enrollment processes are complete.

- Attend required training required by ODDS/CIIS, or APD/LTCCN. This may include training regarding department specifics such as policies and procedures, billing, documentation guidance, and introduction to key people in your department.

- Receive a letter of authorization: this letter allows you to begin seeing clients.

Acquiring Clients

After completing all enrollment and registration steps, you are ready to begin accepting clients!

LTCCN:

Once you are approved and available to accept new clients, the relevant ODDS departments will be notified.

You can also connect with the local I/DD community by introducing yourself to local group homes and I/DD groups and hubs. This includes Community Developmental Disabilities Programs (CDDP), Support Services Brokerages, and CIIS. For example, for the counties you want to work with, you can arrange to meet the managers and team members of your local CDDPs. Among many benefits, developing a working relationship with your local programs will allow you to understand who you will be working with, and how the referral process works within each program. Furthermore, the introduction is one of the first steps in having the case managers know who you are, and to then consider you for available referrals.

Once you connect with the programs, case managers will start sending you referrals for clients who need LTCCN services in your area. This referral information will have the main delegation needs and a summary of client information. You can accept or decline referrals as you receive them. If needed, you can request more information to determine if you can accept a case as well. Once you accept a referral, the complete, signed referral form provides authorization to begin initial services with the client.

DNS/PDN:

For PDN, your name and availability will be added to an internal departmental list of available nurses. With this information, case managers will reach out to you if they have any clients who are looking for nursing and seem like a good fit. You can also reach out to administration staff anytime, and they will ask case managers to check with their clients to see if any cases are available.

For DNS, your contact will be posted on the ODHS Nursing Services Resource web page. Local ODDS case management entities check this information when they are looking for a nurse and will contact you about potential clients and shifts available. When you have identified what counties you want to work in, you can also contact the local case management entities to introduce yourself and let them know you are available to work in those areas. Lastly, if you know of a specific client you want to work with, you should contact the ODDS case management office in the county where the client lives.

Once a nurse and client mutually agree to work together, the Prior Authorization process will begin. Qualified Medicaid providers must have a Prior Authorization each month to be paid for services.

FAQs:

1. **How long does the application review and approval process take?**

   - PDN and DNS: The entire application process generally takes from two to six weeks. The background check is the part of the process that takes the longest. To ensure the fastest processing time, have all the needed paperwork and documentation ready to complete your application and follow the application instructions carefully.

   - LTCCN: The process takes approximately six weeks for applicants starting from scratch. The process can be faster if you already have an NPI number and/or valid background check.

2. **How long does it take to start receiving clients once my application is approved?**

   It depends on the needs of your area. There has frequently been a shortage of nurses in the I/DD sector and a high demand for nurses throughout most areas of the state.

3. **Should I meet my potential clients before working with them?**

   Yes, you can arrange a meet and greet through the case manager once a potential client has been identified for you. The family and/or client will also want to ensure you're a good fit for them.

4. **Can I work with both adults and children? Do I need to fill a separate application for each age group?**

Yes, you can work with clients who are adults and children. For DNS and PDN, you need to fill out separate application packages to work with each program. The LTCCN application is through a separate program, and thus a separate application is needed; when you fill out this application, just indicate you want to work with both adults and children. Check with each program administrator to see what documents must be submitted.

5. **Is there a limit to how many different clients I can work with?**

Generally, for DNS and PDN, it's recommended you work with a client at least twice a month to maintain continuity of care, but there is no limit to how many PDN or DNS clients you have. Overall, families and clients want to have the same nurses consistently throughout the week, for ease, quality of care, and to develop a therapeutic relationship. These factors will limit how many clients you have.

For LTCCN, there is no recommended or minimum caseload requirement. An LTCCN nurse's caseload is completely dependent on how many referrals they choose to accept.

6. **Can I be an LTCCN nurse and a PDN or DNS nurse at the same time?**

While you can be enrolled as both an LTCCN *and* a PDN/DNS provider, it is best practice for the individual to have two separate nurses to avoid concerns of duplication.

7. **Can I be an LTCCN nurse in my own foster home?**

No, you can't be an LTCCN nurse in your own foster home. However, you can be an LTCCN nurse in other homes.

8. **What should I get from the case manager to ensure I understand my client's IDD needs?**

The case manager should provide a copy of the Individual Support Plan (ISP), any existing risk protocols, or other specific information that is pertinent to the care of the client. A professional Positive Behavior Support Plan (PBSP), if in place, can be helpful in understanding the client's behaviors related to your care plan. The Oregon Needs Assessment (ONA) outlines all Activities of Daily Living (ADL) and the care required for those activities, along with a summary of medical conditions, therapies, and treatments. Additionally, any other person-centered information the case manager can offer you is always helpful so you know the individual's preferences and understand what is important to them.

Additional Resources

ODHS offers a range of guides and tools to help you understand potential career paths in Oregon's IDD sector and to guide you through the process of applying for and getting started as an independent contractor nurse in Oregon's I/DD sector. You can access these guides here.