

# Startup Guide

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



## Startup guide:

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

DISCOVER

UNDERSTAND

THRIVE

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## Introduction

So—you've decided to explore becoming an independent contractor nurse in Oregon's Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (I/DD) sector. That is wonderful! Welcome!

Nursing as an independent contractor offers Registered Nurses (RN) and Licensed Practical Nurses (LPN) flexibility, autonomy, and the potential for strong earnings. It also comes with greater responsibilities for managing finances, liability, and professional development.

There are several different nursing services you can choose from in Oregon's I/DD sector.

This guide will help you understand the various services you can provide, the required qualifications, and what you need to get started as an independent contractor nurse.

## Which nursing service fits best?

In Oregon, the Office of Developmental Disabilities Services (ODDS), within the Oregon Department of Human Services (ODHS), works with partners and the Developmental Disabilities community to provide services, support, and advocacy to empower Oregonians with I/DD to live full lives in their communities. Services include support to assist an individual to live in their own home, or in a variety of other ODDS-funded service settings, including foster homes and group homes.

For some individuals with I/DD, varying levels of nursing services are required. ODDS offers nursing services intended to support individuals with long-term ongoing or intermittent medical support needs.

Who do you want to care for, and how? You have three nursing service options: Private Duty Nursing, Direct Nursing Services, and Long-Term Care Community Nursing.

### 1. Private Duty Nursing (PDN)

Children, from infants to age 20 with complex medical needs (usually technology-dependent) frequently require continual assessment and reassessment, supervision, nursing treatments, therapies, and interventions. This area is called Private Duty Nursing (PDN).

#### Case study - PDN:



**Lucas, 5, was born with a congenital heart defect.** He has very intense medical needs and relies on specialized technology for his health. Lucas requires a ventilator to breathe. He also has a feeding tube for nutrition. His parents were overwhelmed when he came home from the hospital, but with the help of a specialized

nurse, they have been able to maintain his health at home. His nurse, Angelica, performs various nursing tasks, including monitoring his vital signs, managing his ventilator, and ensuring his feeding tube functions properly. Angelica also helps with his activities of daily living. Without this round-the-clock care, Lucas would likely need to stay in a hospital, which would significantly impact his quality of life.



**Angelica is Lucas's nurse.** She is known for her gentle demeanor, unwavering patience, and deep empathy, which make her perfectly suited for her role as a PDN nurse. Her calm and steady nature provides a sense of security for Lucas and his family, especially in moments of stress or uncertainty. Angelica believes in forming strong, personal connections with the families she works with, understanding that her presence is not only about medical care, but also about fostering trust with the family, and comfort in the home. Angelica thrives in the complexity of this area because the work challenges her both intellectually and emotionally, which is exactly what she loves about the job. She enjoys the technical aspects of managing Lucas's medical equipment, like the ventilator and feeding tube, finding satisfaction in the precision and skill required to ensure everything runs smoothly. By carefully monitoring Lucas's condition daily, Angelica works to prevent medical emergencies before they arise. Through consistent care plan updates and vigilant observation, she'll help ensure stability and long-term health for him.

For Angelica, each day brings new opportunities to apply her critical thinking and problem-solving skills, which keeps her engaged and constantly learning.

## Is PDN right for me?

If you're considering a career in the PDN role, here are some key factors to help you decide if it's the right fit for you:

- **Comfort with medical complexity:** PDN nurses manage advanced medical technology like ventilators and feeding tubes, requiring technical skill and confidence.
- **Critical thinking and problem-solving:** PDN care involves troubleshooting and adapting care plans based on a child's health needs, offering regular intellectual challenges.
- **Attention to detail:** Monitoring vital signs, adjusting equipment, and following precise care plans demand a high level of accuracy and detail.
- **Emotional resilience:** The role requires emotional strength to handle complex cases with unpredictable conditions and long-term care.
- **Patience:** Working with children with intensive medical needs means progress can be slow, so patience is crucial.
- **Collaborative mindset:** While often working independently, PDN nurses coordinate with doctors, therapists, and family members to ensure comprehensive care.
- **Love of learning:** The complexity of the cases means PDN nurses continuously learn new medical techniques, therapies, and patient care strategies.
- **Passion for pediatrics:** Caring for children with complex medical conditions brings unique challenges and rewards, attracting those with a deep compassion for children.

## What else should I know?

- PDN shifts may be from 4 to 12 hours.
- For independent contractor nurses, the ODDS hourly rate is \$61.96 for RNs, and \$39.08 for LPNs. Remember, you will have to pay your own taxes and operating costs, including mileage, from this amount.
- For nurses employed by agencies, the hourly rates may vary from those noted above for independent contractors; each agency can advise you on their rates.
- Nurse fees are billed in 15-minute increments.
- (Note: Hourly rates quoted here are accurate as of February 2025).
- LPNs are responsible for obtaining their own RN oversight.

## 2. Direct Nursing Services (DNS)

Adults aged 21 years or older with complex medical and nursing needs (usually technology-dependent) often require continual assessment and reassessment, supervision, nursing treatments, therapies, and interventions. This area is called Direct Nursing Services (DNS).

### Case study - DNS:



**John, 42, has intellectual disabilities and requires specialized medical care due to complex health conditions.** He has a tracheostomy from a chronic airway condition, diabetes, and a seizure disorder. A nurse performs suctioning to keep his airways clear and administers oxygen therapy throughout the day. For his

diabetes, the nurse checks his blood sugars through his continuous blood sugar monitor and administers insulin accordingly. John occasionally has tonic-clonic seizures, so the nurse monitors his neurological symptoms and administers emergency Versed as needed. The nurse also helps with John's showering, toileting, and eating. This consistent nursing care helps John maintain his overall health, allowing him to stay in his home safely. Thanks to this daily care, John's blood sugars and airway are stable, and he hasn't had to go to the emergency room for his seizures in several years.



**Gloria is John's nurse. She chose Direct Nursing Services (DNS) because of her personal connection to adult care.**

Two years ago, Gloria cared for her own father at home, managing his complex medical needs, including respiratory support and chronic illness management. That experience inspired her to pursue a career in DNS, where she could offer the same

compassionate, long-term care to adults with serious health conditions. Working in a home setting, just as she did with her father, DNS felt like a natural fit for Gloria, allowing her to make a meaningful impact in her clients' lives.

Each day, she performs tracheostomy suctioning, monitors John's blood sugar using a continuous glucose monitor, administers insulin, and ensures his oxygen therapy runs smoothly. She is also prepared to act quickly in the event of a seizure, administering emergency medication as needed. For Gloria, the hands-on nature of DNS nursing allows her to create stability and safety for John, in an attempt to keep him out of the hospital and maintain his health at home. Gloria's work in DNS focuses exclusively on adults, providing long-term care in home settings. Her shifts range from 4 to 16 hours, during which she assists with ADL/IADL (Activities of Daily Living/Instrumental Activities of Daily Living).



## Is DNS right for me?

DNS involves providing specialized, long-term care to adults with complex medical needs in a home setting. If you're considering a career in DNS nursing, here are some key factors to help you decide if it's the right fit for you:

- **Passion for working with adults:** DNS nurses focus on caring for adults with chronic, complex medical conditions. If you enjoy building relationships with adult clients and addressing their unique healthcare needs, DNS could be a perfect fit.
- **Comfort with long-term, ongoing care:** DNS nurses provide long-term care that often spans months or years, building deep connections with their clients. If you find fulfillment in long-term outcomes and stability, DNS is ideal.
- **Managing chronic conditions:** DNS nursing involves managing ongoing medical conditions. Nurses must monitor health trends over time, adjusting care to maintain stability.
- **Experience with medical equipment:** DNS nurses often manage complex medical equipment, such as tracheostomies, oxygen therapy, and blood sugar monitors, making technical skills essential.
- **Autonomy and decision-making:** While you work closely with a healthcare team, DNS nurses often work independently in the client's home, making decisions based on client needs in real-time and often autonomously.
- **Hands-on care:** DNS can be highly hands-on, involving personal care (ADL/IADL) such as helping with dressing, showering, eating, and mobility. Clients need varying levels of ADL/IADL support. If you prefer direct client contact, DNS is a good match.

- **Desire for stability over crisis care:** DNS nurses focus on preventing hospital visits and maintaining stability rather than responding to medical emergencies. If you prefer a proactive approach to client care, DNS could be rewarding.
- **Emotional resilience:** Caring for adults with chronic conditions requires emotional resilience. You'll need to provide not only physical care, but also emotional support for your clients—and their families.
- **Strong communication skills:** DNS nurses often work closely with families and other healthcare providers, making effective communication essential for coordinating care and adjusting treatment plans.
- **Commitment to adult independence:** DNS nursing helps adults maintain independence in their home environments. If you find purpose in helping adults remain self-sufficient and live with dignity, DNS could be your calling.

### What else should I know?

- DNS shifts may be from 4 to 16 hours.
- For independent contractor nurses, the ODDS hourly rate is \$61.96 for RNs, and \$39.08 for LPNs. Remember, you will have to pay your own taxes and operating costs, including mileage, from this amount. **Note:** Hourly rates quoted here are accurate as of February 2025.
- For nurses employed by agencies, the hourly rates may vary from those noted above for independent contractors; each agency can advise you on their rates.
- Nurse fees are billed in 15-minute increments.
- LPNs are responsible for obtaining their own RN oversight.

### 3. Long-Term Care Community Nursing (LTCCN)

Children and adults with I/DD sometimes require support with chronic and ongoing health and activity of daily living needs. This area is called Long-Term Care Community Nursing (LTCCN).

#### Case study - LTCCN:



**Maria, 30, has Down syndrome and lives at home with her father, Felipe.** In addition, she has several unlicensed paid caregivers who assist her with tasks. While she can complete many daily living tasks on her own, Maria needs help managing her medications and overall health and safety. Her LTCCN nurse evaluates her health regularly and has trained Felipe and the other caregivers to help Maria manage her endocrine disorder and hypertension. The LTCCN training includes blood pressure monitoring, administration of emergency hydrocortisone injection, and an adrenal crisis protocol. The nurse visits once a week to ensure Felipe and her caregivers are following the nursing care plan, and she adjusts it as needed to promote Maria's autonomy. The LTCCN nurse coordinates care with Maria's medical team to ensure she has updated orders, and with the ODDS Service Coordinator to provide required documentation. Maria has had decreased adverse health outcomes because of her LTCCN nurse's services.



**David has spent over 30 years working in hospital settings,** managing complex medical cases, and working with diverse patient populations. However, after decades in the hospital environment, he sought a more personal, community-based role where he could make a deeper, long-term impact on individual lives. By focusing on delegation and education, he helps foster an

environment where Maria's autonomy is promoted, and her health is maintained through the teamwork of her family and caregivers. From Maria's initial assessment, David developed a service plan outlining nursing-related goals and planning items. He then developed a care plan and associated teaching and delegation documents. Using these documents, David delegates and teaches her caregivers, Maria, and her family. With a deep passion for teaching, from the initial assessment, his role goes beyond just nursing—he is a mentor, ensuring that everyone involved in Maria's care understands how to manage her endocrine disorder, hypertension, and the protocols for handling emergencies. Whether it's teaching Felipe how to monitor blood pressure or training caregivers on administering hydrocortisone injections, David's expertise in delegation makes him a pivotal part of Maria's care.

**Delegation definition:**

Nurse delegation is a process in which an RN transfers the responsibility of performing certain tasks or procedures to an unregulated assistive person, such as a caregiver, while retaining accountability for the outcome. The tasks delegated must be within the scope of practice for the RN and appropriate for the skill level of the person being delegated to.

## Is LTCCN right for me?

If you're considering a career in LTCCN, here are some key factors to help you decide if it's the right fit for you:

- **Passion for working with people with I/DD:** LTCCN nurses focus on caring for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. If you find a purpose in improving the health and autonomy of clients with I/DD, LTCCN nursing could be a rewarding path.
- **Commitment to teaching and delegation:** LTCCN nurses spend a significant amount of time training and delegating tasks to family members and caregivers. If you enjoy teaching and empowering others to provide quality care, LTCCN is a great fit.
- **Comfort with long-term, ongoing care:** LTCCN nurses provide care over long periods, often building deep, trusting relationships with their clients. If you find fulfillment in ongoing, stable outcomes and seeing long-term growth, LTCCN nursing is ideal.
- **Focus on promoting autonomy:** A key aspect of LTCCN is helping clients maintain as much independence as possible. If you're driven to promote client autonomy through education and support, this role will suit you.
- **Strong organizational and planning skills:** LTCCN nurses develop and adjust service and care plans regularly. Being organized and detail-oriented is crucial as you coordinate with medical teams and ensure caregivers follow these plans correctly.
- **Delegated care:** LTCCN nurses delegate responsibilities to unlicensed caregivers. You'll need to be comfortable overseeing others and ensuring safe care delivery.
- **Experience with chronic conditions:** LTCCN nurses manage long-term health conditions like diabetes, hypertension, and reduced mobility. Familiarity with managing chronic conditions in non-hospital settings is beneficial.
- **Emotional resilience:** Caring for clients with I/DD and complex health needs requires patience and emotional resilience. You'll support both the client and their caregivers emotionally and medically.

- **Strong communication skills:** LTCCN nurses must effectively communicate with families, caregivers, and other healthcare professionals to ensure the client's care plan is properly executed and adjusted.
- **Desire to work in a community setting:** LTCCN nursing is based in community settings, such as family homes, group homes, or foster homes. If you enjoy working outside of a hospital setting and fostering community integration, LTCCN is right for you.
- **Commitment to collaboration:** LTCCN nurses regularly collaborate with service coordinators, medical teams, and family members to update care plans. Teamwork and coordination are essential to success in this role.
- **Comfort with autonomy:** LTCCN nurses work autonomously. You must be comfortable working independently and making decisions that align with your scope of nursing practice.

### What else should I know?

- The LTCCN schedule is visit-based, with the frequency of visits determined by the nurse after completing an assessment and a nursing care plan.
- For independent contractor nurses, the hourly rate is \$80.00 for RNs. Remember, you will have to pay your own taxes and operating costs, including mileage, from this amount. **Note:** The hourly rate quoted here is accurate as of February 2025.
- For nurses employed by agencies, the hourly rate may vary from the rate noted above for independent contractors; each agency can advise you on their rates.
- Nurse fees are billed in 15-minute increments.

## Role matrix: PDN, DNS and LTCCN roles

Factors	Private Duty Nursing (PDN)	Direct Nursing Services (DNS)	Long-Term Care Community Nursing (LTCCN)
<b>Age of clients</b>	Birth through 20 years	21+ years	All ages
<b>Client needs</b>	Clients are usually technology-dependent	Clients are usually technology-dependent	Clients may need delegation; families and caregivers may need training for emergencies
<b>Location</b>	In the family's home (including foster homes), and residential homes	In the client's home (including foster homes), and residential homes	Eligible home and community-based settings
<b>Nurse type</b>	RN or LPN	RN or LPN	RN only
<b>Schedule</b>	Shift-based - 4 to 12 hours	Shift-based - 4 to 16 hours	Visit-based - frequency determined by the nurse

Factors	Private Duty Nursing (PDN)	Direct Nursing Services (DNS)	Long-Term Care Community Nursing (LTCCN)
<b>Day-to-day tasks</b>	Hands-on nursing tasks and basic care.	Hands-on nursing tasks and basic care.	<p>Delegating to caregivers for nursing tasks through discussion, written instruction, and demonstration.</p> <p>Teaching family, clients, and caregivers. This includes creating, developing, and maintaining teaching materials, e.g. protocols, guides and emergency medication instructions.</p>
<b>Documentation</b>	Creating/ maintaining a care plan, and daily charting such as shift narrative, tasks completed, and monitoring.	Creating/ maintaining a care plan, and daily charting such as shift narrative, tasks completed, and monitoring.	Developing a Nursing Service Plan. Creating protocols and guides for delegation and teaching. Completing summaries for each visit and service provided.
<b>Assessments required</b>	Assessments once a shift or as ordered/ per nursing rule	Assessments once a shift or as ordered/ per nursing rule	Initial assessments, and re-assessments every year, at minimum; and as needed/warranted



# Independent Contractor Nursing: How is it different from traditional employment?

For nurses working with ODHS in areas such as PDN, DNS, or LTCCN, there are distinct differences between independent contracting and traditional employment.

## 1. Autonomy and flexibility

- **Independent contractor:** As an independent contractor, you have full control over your schedule, the number of clients you work with, and the types of nursing services you provide. You can decide how many hours you want to work each week and how many clients you can take on in your caseload. You meet with each client before establishing a working relationship to ensure the nurse-client relationship is the right fit. This flexibility allows you to manage your workload while balancing personal commitments and priorities.
- **Employment:** As an employee, your schedule and workload are dictated by your employer. In a nursing agency or group home position, your hours and the clients you serve are fixed. In contrast to independent contracting, you have less control over the flexibility of your work schedule.

## 2. Financial responsibility

- **Independent contractor:** Independent contractors are responsible for managing their own taxes, including paying self-employment taxes, Social Security, and Medicare contributions. You also have to cover your own benefits like health insurance and retirement plans. Although you can deduct certain expenses for tax benefits, you need to plan for business costs such as travel and equipment, as well as

continuing education. These expenses can add up, so it's crucial to budget for operating costs and taxes.

- **Employment:** As an employee, taxes are automatically withheld from your paycheck, and many employers offer a range of benefits, such as health insurance, retirement plans, and paid time off.

### 3. Liability and risk

- **Independent contractor:** As an independent contractor, you are fully responsible for the services you provide, and therefore need to obtain professional liability insurance. In Oregon, this is particularly important for nurses where there are higher medical risks associated with caring for medically fragile children, for example. You also need to ensure you're complying with all state regulations and maintaining your own nursing license.
- **Employment:** When employed by an agency or group home, your employer typically assumes some liability for the care provided, as long as you follow the employer's policies and protocols. The employer holds some of the necessary insurance coverage, which reduces your personal risk as a nurse. You can also obtain private liability insurance for further protection.

### 4. Income stability

- **Independent contractor:** Your income as an independent contractor is based on securing and maintaining clients to work your desired number of hours. For example, an LTCCN providing care to adults with I/DD might have varying hours depending on client needs and workload. While independent contracting offers the potential for higher earnings, income can be less predictable, so it's essential to plan for months when you may not have as many clients.

- **Employment:** As an employee, income may be more stable, as you typically receive a fixed salary or hourly wage. It may be lower than that of an independent contractor, but to balance that, you have the security of a regular paycheck.

## 5. Professional development

- **Independent contractor:** As an independent contractor, you are responsible for your own continuing education and professional development. For example, nurses providing PDN must keep up with new technologies and therapies used in pediatric care. This means paying for certifications, training, and licensure renewals on your own.
- **Employment:** Employers often provide or subsidize professional development opportunities for employees. Nurses may have access to on-the-job training, certifications, and mentorship programs funded by their employer, easing the financial burden of professional growth.

## 6. Control over working environment

- **Independent contractor:** Independent contractors can choose the type of environment in which they work. For instance, if you prefer working in the home setting, you might focus on PDN, where you provide hands-on care to medically complex children in their homes. Alternatively, LTCCN involves traveling between homes for delegation visits and also offers working from home or a secure office location, where you develop your clients' care plans and the delegation protocols and teachings.
- **Employment:** As an employee, your work environment is typically determined by your employer. In healthcare systems, you may be assigned to specific patients or locations, leaving you with less choice over the environment or patient population you serve.

## 7. Contractual nature

- **Independent contractor:** As an independent contractor, your work is governed by establishing, maintaining, and working with individual clients. For instance, LTCCN nurses accept referrals and submit the nursing service plan and prior authorization for six months. Based on the nursing service plan, created after initial assessment, the LTCCN makes an estimate of service hours needed for a six-month time period. The case manager then authorizes the LTCCN's estimated time and services.
- **Employment:** As an employee, you are generally hired for an ongoing position based on a job description. You may have less flexibility in negotiating terms or changing aspects of your role without approval from your employer.

Independent contracting offers flexibility, autonomy, and the potential for higher earnings, but it also comes with greater responsibilities for managing finances, liability, and professional development. Employment, on the other hand, provides more stability, benefits, and less administrative burden, making it ideal for those seeking security and support. The decision between the two depends on your career goals, lifestyle, and level of comfort with risk and responsibility.

## Am I qualified?

It's common to feel unsure or face "Imposter syndrome", especially if you've never worked as an independent contractor. However, more and more nurses are making this transition successfully and thriving in these flexible roles. Nursing as an independent contractor offers you the chance to take control of your schedule, focus on the type of care that matters most to you, and grow professionally in new ways.

## Independent contractor nurses in the I/DD sector require certain soft skills

- A deep interest in helping individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Empathy and understanding are key to providing meaningful support.
- Independence and self-motivation, as you'll be responsible for managing your own time, planning, and paperwork without constant supervision.
- Ability to work independently, as you'll need to set your own hours, manage your schedule, and balance your client load effectively.

## Requirements for LTCCN

- A current and unencumbered RN license in Oregon.
- At least 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 you enroll with the Department. Read the [administrative rule](#) for more information.
- Experience in providing delegation. Alternatively, candidates who do not have delegation experience can pass the self-study delegation test to meet the requirements.

## Requirements for PDN and DNS

- A current and unencumbered license in Oregon as either an RN or LPN.

- At least one year of experience working with individuals with intellectual or developmental disabilities is recommended but is not a mandatory requirement.

## Requirements for all roles

- A driver's license and transportation to reach clients in various community settings.
- Complete an application package that discloses details about your business ownership, liability insurance, and criminal background check, and National Provider Identifier (NPI) number.
- Have a business plan in place to operate as an independent contractor.

## Training

You may wish to pursue training opportunities specific to nursing for individuals with I/DD. Check out the [Resources and Training Guide](#) under the **Resources for nurses** section on our website for some training options to consider.

## Next steps

So, are you ready to take the first steps toward becoming an independent contractor nurse in Oregon's I/DD sector? ODHS offers a range of [guides and tools](#) on our website to help you understand potential career paths and help guide you through the process of applying for and getting started as an independent contractor.