

WSR 25-04-067

EMERGENCY RULES

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH

[Filed January 30, 2025, 7:40 p.m., effective January 30, 2025, 7:40 p.m.]

Effective Date of Rule: Immediately upon filing.

Purpose: Home care aide and nursing assistant-certified (NA-C) alternate certification time frames.

The department of health (department) is establishing alternate certification time frames for individuals working toward certification as a home care aide or NA-C. This includes amending WAC 246-980-025, 246-980-030, 246-980-040 and 246-980-065; and adopting new WAC 246-980-011. Due to lasting impacts caused by the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) pandemic, many long-term care workers are still unable to obtain training and certification as home care aides or NA-Cs within statutory time frames. By continuing alternate time frames established under ESHB 1120 (chapter 203, Laws of 2021), the department will allow workers impacted by the pandemic more time to complete requirements while training, testing, and credentialing capacity issues are being resolved.

The seventh and anticipated final emergency rule continues, without change, emergency rules originally filed January 12, 2023, under WSR 23-03-066 and extended thereafter as necessary, and most recently on August 22, 2024, under WSR 24-18-004. These rules established alternate certification time frames for two different groups of long-term care workers: Individuals working toward certification as a home care aide and individuals working toward certification as an NA-C. The rule language for this extension is the same as the most recent filing. Rules impacting home care aides were developed in collaboration with the department of social and health services (DSHS), while rules impacting NA-Cs were developed in collaboration with DSHS and the Washington state board of nursing (WABON).

The new rule, WAC 246-980-011, establishes alternate time frames for long-term care workers seeking certification as a home care aide or NA-C.

Amendments to WAC 246-980-025, 246-980-030, 246-980-040, and 246-980-065 create cross-references to WAC 246-980-011 and, where applicable, to DSHS rules that establish alternate time frames for training and testing.

Citation of Rules Affected by this Order: New WAC 246-980-011; and amending WAC 246-980-025, 246-980-030, 246-980-040, and 246-980-065.

Statutory Authority for Adoption: RCW 18.88B.021; ESHB 1120 (chapter 203, Laws of 2021).

Under RCW 34.05.350 the agency for good cause finds that immediate adoption, amendment, or repeal of a rule is necessary for the preservation of the public health, safety, or general welfare, and that observing the time requirements of notice and opportunity to comment upon adoption of a permanent rule would be contrary to the public interest.

Reasons for this Finding: This emergency rule is necessary to avoid a critical shortage of long-term care workers as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, both training and testing were unavailable for several months in 2020 before resuming at limited capacity. This created a large backlog of long-term care workers unable to become certified as a home care aide or NA-C within statutory time

frames. During the COVID-19 declared emergency, thousands of workers seeking certification were allowed to continue working under Governor's Proclamations 20-52 and 20-65 (waivers), which waived credentialing requirements. Now that the waivers have been rescinded, however, uncertified workers will no longer be able to work and will still be unable to readily access the training and testing necessary for certification. Losing these workers would exacerbate the existing workforce shortage, forcing more medically vulnerable patients to rely on other care options, such as higher-level residential care settings, and further impact an already strained hospital and emergent health care settings to receive urgent health care services.

ESHB 1120, passed in 2021, gives the department authority to allow long-term care workers additional time to become certified if a pandemic or other declared state of emergency impacts their ability to complete certification timely. Pursuant to ESHB 1120, the department collaborated with DSHS and WABON to develop alternate, extended time frames for long-term care workers seeking certification as a home care aide or NA-C. These alternate time frames create a path to certification for uncertified home care aide and NA-C workers who are in the final hire or rehire period of July 1, 2023, through January 31, 2024. This allows workers to continue caring for clients while testing and training backlogs are being resolved by the department, ensuring required certification is met by April 30, 2025, under WAC 246-980-011.

Number of Sections Adopted in Order to Comply with Federal Statute: New 0, Amended 0, Repealed 0; Federal Rules or Standards: New 0, Amended 0, Repealed 0; or Recently Enacted State Statutes: New 0, Amended 0, Repealed 0.

Number of Sections Adopted at the Request of a Nongovernmental Entity: New 0, Amended 0, Repealed 0.

Number of Sections Adopted on the Agency's own Initiative: New 1, Amended 4, Repealed 0.

Number of Sections Adopted in Order to Clarify, Streamline, or Reform Agency Procedures: New 0, Amended 0, Repealed 0.

Number of Sections Adopted using Negotiated Rule Making: New 0, Amended 0, Repealed 0; Pilot Rule Making: New 0, Amended 0, Repealed 0; or Other Alternative Rule Making: New 1, Amended 4, Repealed 0.

Date Adopted: January 30, 2025.

Kristin Peterson, JD
Chief of Policy
for Jessica Todorovich, MS
Acting Secretary of Health

OTS-3558.9

NEW SECTION

WAC 246-980-011 Long-term care workers working or hired during the COVID-19 public health emergency. (1) Unless exempt from certification as described in WAC 246-980-025, a long-term care worker affected by the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) public health emergency who is required to be certified as a home care aide must obtain certification as follows:

Hired or rehired during the time frame of:	Shall be certified no later than:
August 17, 2019, to September 30, 2020	January 31, 2024
October 1, 2020, to April 30, 2021	April 30, 2024
May 1, 2021, to March 31, 2022	July 31, 2024
April 1, 2022, to September 30, 2022	October 31, 2024
October 1, 2022, to June 30, 2023	January 31, 2025
July 1, 2023, to January 31, 2024	April 30, 2025
Beginning February 1, 2024	Standard training

The above chart provides additional time for a long-term care worker to be certified, as either a home care aide or nursing assistant.

(2) "Hired" and "rehired" as used in this section mean the date of hire as defined in WAC 246-980-010. A long-term care worker is considered rehired if they held previous employment as a long-term care worker and did not have an active home care aide credential when hired during the time frames outlined in subsection (1) of this section.

(3) If a long-term care worker or home care aide is limited-English proficient, the worker may request an additional 60 days to obtain certification under WAC 246-980-065.

(4) Nothing in this section prevents a long-term care worker hired between August 17, 2019, and September 30, 2022, from completing training or obtaining certification in advance of the deadlines stipulated in subsection (1) of this section.

AMENDATORY SECTION (Amending WSR 18-20-072 [24-15-025], filed 9/28/18 [7/9/24], effective 10/29/18 [8/9/24])

WAC 246-980-025 Individuals exempt from obtaining a home care aide certification. (1) The following individuals are not required to obtain certification as a home care aide. If they choose to voluntarily become certified, they must successfully pass the entry level training required by RCW 74.39A.074 and meet the requirements of WAC 246-980-040 (1)(b) and (c).

(a) An individual provider caring only for a biological, step, or adoptive child or parent.

(b) An individual provider who provides (~~(twenty)~~) 20 hours or less of care for one person in any calendar month.

(c) An individual employed by a community residential service business.

(d) An individual employed by a residential habilitation center licensed under chapter 71A.20 RCW or a facility certified under 42 C.F.R. Part 483.

(e) A direct care worker who is not paid by the state or by a private agency or facility licensed by the state to provide personal care services.

(f) A person working as an individual provider who only provides respite services and works less than (~~three hundred~~) 300 hours in any calendar year.

(g) Any direct care worker exempt under RCW 18.88B.041(1).

(2) The following long-term care workers are not required to obtain certification as a home care aide. If they choose to voluntarily become certified, they must meet the requirements of WAC 246-980-040 (1)(b) and (c). The training requirements under RCW 74.39A.074(1) are not required.

(a) An individual who holds an active credential by the department as a:

(i) Registered nurse, a licensed practical nurse, or advanced registered nurse practitioner under chapter 18.79 RCW; or

(ii) Nursing assistant-certified under chapter 18.88A RCW.

(b) A home health aide who was employed by a medicare certified home health agency within the year before being hired as a long-term care worker and has met the requirements of 42 C.F.R. Part 484.36.

(c) A person who is in an approved training program for certified nursing assistant under chapter 18.88A RCW, provided that the training program is completed within (~~one hundred twenty~~) 120 calendar days of the date of hire and that the nursing assistant-certified credential has been issued within (~~two hundred~~) 200 calendar days of the date of hire, or that the training and certification are completed in compliance with the deadlines in WAC 246-980-011.

(d) An individual with special education training and an endorsement granted by the superintendent of public instruction under RCW 28A.300.010 and is approved by the secretary.

(e) An individual employed as a long-term care worker on January 6, 2012, or who was employed as a long-term care worker between January 1, 2011, and January 6, 2012, and who completed all of the training requirements in effect as of the date of hire. This exemption expires if the long-term care worker has not provided care for three consecutive years.

(i) The department may require the exempt long-term care worker who was employed as a long-term care worker between January 1, 2011, and January 6, 2012, to provide proof of that employment. Proof may include a letter or similar documentation from the employer that hired the long-term care worker between January 1, 2011, and January 6, 2012, indicating the first and last day of employment, the job title, a job description, and proof of completing training requirements. Proof of training will also be accepted directly from the approved instructor or training program, if applicable.

(ii) For an individual provider reimbursed by the department of social and health services, the department will accept verification from the department of social and health services or the training partnership.

Reviser's note: The bracketed material preceding the section above was supplied by the code reviser's office.

AMENDATORY SECTION (Amending WSR 18-20-072, filed 9/28/18, effective 10/29/18)

WAC 246-980-030 Working while obtaining certification as a home care aide. (1) A long-term care worker may provide care before re-

ceiving certification as a home care aide if all the following conditions are met:

(a) Before providing care, the long-term care worker must complete the training required by RCW 74.39A.074 (1)(d)(i)(A) and (B).

(b) The long-term care worker must submit an application for home care aide certification to the department within ~~((fourteen))~~ 14 calendar days of hire. An application is considered to be submitted on the date it is post-marked or, for applications submitted in person or online, the date it is accepted by the department.

(2) Except as provided in WAC 246-980-011, a long-term care worker is no longer eligible to provide care without a credential under the following circumstances:

(a) The long-term care worker does not successfully complete all of the training required by RCW 74.39A.074(1) within ~~((one hundred twenty calendar days from their date of hire))~~ the timelines in WAC 388-71-0876 or 388-112A-0081;

(b) The long-term care worker has not obtained their certification within ~~((two hundred))~~ 200 calendar days from their date of hire, or ~~((two hundred sixty))~~ 260 calendar days if granted a provisional certificate under RCW 18.88B.041.

(3) This section does not apply to long-term care workers exempt from certification under WAC 246-980-025.

AMENDATORY SECTION (Amending WSR 21-02-002 [24-15-025], filed 12/23/20 [7/9/24], effective 1/23/21 [8/9/24])

WAC 246-980-040 Certification requirements. (1) To qualify for certification as a home care aide, except as provided in WAC 246-980-011, the applicant must:

(a) Successfully complete all training required by RCW 74.39A.074(1) within ~~((one hundred twenty calendar days of the date of hire as a long-term care worker))~~ the timelines in WAC 388-71-0876 or 388-112A-0081;

(b) Successfully pass the home care aide certification examination, after completing training; and

(c) Become certified within ~~((two hundred))~~ 200 days of date of hire, or ~~((two hundred sixty))~~ 260 days if granted a provisional certificate under RCW 18.88B.041.

(2) An applicant for certification as a home care aide must submit to the department:

(a) A completed application for both certification and the examination on forms provided by the department;

(b) The exam fee set by the examination vendor and required fees under WAC 246-980-990; and

(c) A certificate of completion from an approved training program indicating that the applicant has successfully completed the entry level training required by RCW 74.39A.074. The certificate of completion or other official verification may also be submitted directly from the approved instructor or training program.

(3) An applicant must submit to a state and federal background check as required by RCW 74.39A.056.

(4) An applicant exempt from certification under WAC 246-980-025(2) who voluntarily chooses to be certified must provide documentation of qualification for the exemption. The applicant is not

required to take the training required in subsection (1)(a) of this section or provide proof of training completion to the department.

Reviser's note: The bracketed material preceding the section above was supplied by the code reviser's office.

AMENDATORY SECTION (Amending WSR 16-09-004, filed 4/7/16, effective 5/8/16)

WAC 246-980-065 Home care aide provisional certification. (1)

The department may issue a provisional certification to a long-term care worker who is limited-English proficient and submits:

- (a) A request for a provisional certification; and
 - (b) Verification of his or her date of hire as a long-term care worker, as follows:
 - (i) For individual providers, verification of the applicant's date of hire submitted directly by the department of social and health services; or
 - (ii) For all other applicants, a form supplied by the department and completed by the employer who hired the applicant as a long-term care worker, verifying the applicant's date of hire.
- (2) A provisional certification will be issued only once.
- (3) Except as provided in WAC 246-980-011, a provisional certification will take effect ((two hundred)) 200 days from the applicant's date of hire as a long-term care worker, as defined in WAC 246-980-010(2).
- (4) Except as provided in WAC 246-980-011, a provisional certification will expire ((two hundred sixty)) 260 days from the applicant's date of hire as a long-term care worker. The applicant must stop working on the ((two hundred sixtieth)) 260th day of employment if the certification has not been granted for any reason.
- (5) A request for provisional certification may be denied pursuant to chapter 18.130 RCW, the Uniform Disciplinary Act, or based on RCW 18.88B.080.
- (6) For the purposes of this section, "limited-English proficient" means that an individual is limited in his or her ability to read, write, or speak English.