

**TRAVEL**

# **NURSE LICENSURE**

## **GUIDE**

This guide was created to help travel nurses navigate the often confusing patchwork of state licensing laws. It breaks down the essentials of single-state licensure, explores the benefits of the Nurse Licensure Compact (NLC), and provides practical steps to ensure compliance wherever your next assignment takes you.

### **DEMAND FOR TRAVEL NURSES**

The demand for travel nurses has surged in recent years, driven by nationwide staffing shortages, regional healthcare crises, and an increasingly mobile workforce. Hospitals and healthcare facilities across the U.S. are turning to travel nurses to fill critical gaps—often on short notice and across state lines.

### **PROPER LICENSURE**

The freedom to practice in different states comes with one non-negotiable requirement: proper licensure. Nursing licenses are issued at the state level, and practicing without the correct license is not only illegal but also jeopardizes patient safety and a nurse's professional standing.

# Executive Summary

This guide was created to help travel nurses navigate the often confusing patchwork of state licensing laws. It breaks down the essentials of single-state licensure, explores the benefits of the Nurse Licensure Compact (NLC), and provides practical steps to ensure compliance wherever your next assignment takes you. Whether you're new to travel nursing or a seasoned pro, this resource is designed to make your licensure process easier, faster, and fully compliant.

## What is Travel Nursing?

Travel nursing is a unique and flexible career path that allows registered nurses (RNs) and licensed practical nurses (LPNs) to take on temporary assignments in healthcare facilities across the country. These assignments typically last 8 to 13 weeks, though some can be extended or shortened based on demand. Travel nurses are in high demand during peak seasons, public health emergencies, or when facilities face staff shortages due to turnover, leave, or expansion.



## Why Licensure is Essential for Travel Nurses

Every nurse, regardless of specialty or location, must be licensed by the state in which they practice. For travel nurses, this means securing the proper license in each state where they accept an assignment. Licensure is not just a regulatory box to check—it ensures a nurse meets professional standards, protects patients, and provides legal grounds for practicing. Working without a valid license can lead to fines, loss of employment, and disciplinary action by nursing boards.

## The Challenges of Multi-State Practice

Unlike many professions, nursing licensure does not automatically transfer between states. This can create barriers for nurses who want to work across state lines. Some states are part of the Nurse Licensure Compact (NLC), which allows qualified nurses to work in multiple states with one license. But not all states participate, and requirements can vary. Navigating these differences—along with timelines, fees, continuing education rules, and residency requirements—can be confusing and time-consuming.

## The Nurse Licensure Compact (NLC)

### RNs

The Nurse Licensure Compact (NLC) is an agreement among participating U.S. states that allows registered nurses (RNs) and licensed practical/vocational nurses (LPNs/LVNs) to hold one multistate license, which grants them the ability to practice—physically, telephonically, or electronically—in any other NLC state without obtaining additional licenses.

### LPNs

This initiative was created to increase nurse mobility, streamline the licensing process, and respond more efficiently to healthcare workforce demands.

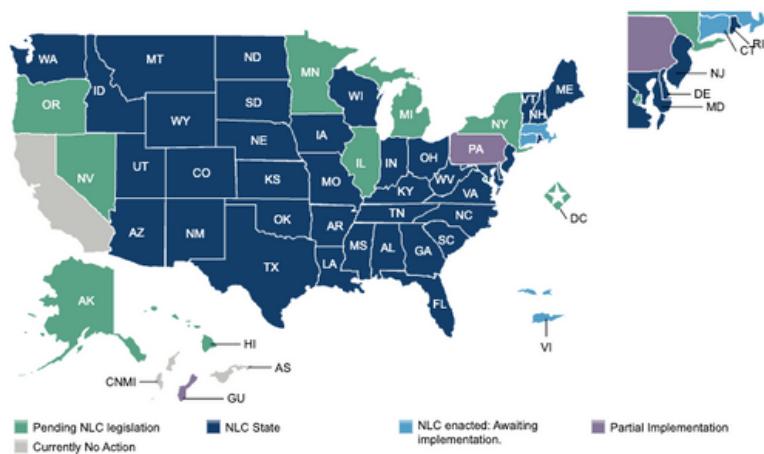
### LVNs

The NLC is governed by the Interstate Commission of Nurse Licensure Compact Administrators and operates under a uniform set of rules that participating states agree to uphold.

## States That Participate

As of 2025, over 40 states and territories have enacted NLC legislation. These include high-demand travel nurse destinations like Texas, Florida, Arizona, North Carolina, and Missouri. States such as California, New York, and Illinois are not yet members, which means nurses must obtain a separate license to practice there.

**A current interactive map and list of participating states is available on [nursecompact.com](https://nursecompact.com).**



# Eligibility Requirements for a Compact License

**To be eligible for a multistate license under the NLC, nurses must meet the following criteria:**

- Reside in an NLC state and declare it as their primary state of residence
- Hold an active, unencumbered RN or LPN/LVN license in that state
- Graduate from a board-approved nursing program
- Pass the NCLEX-RN or NCLEX-PN
- Undergo a state and federal criminal background check
- Have no felony convictions or significant disciplinary action

Importantly, your primary state of residence (PSOR) must be an NLC state for you to qualify for a multistate license. If you move to a different compact state, you must update your license with your new state of residence.

## Benefits of Holding a Compact License

A compact license offers several strategic advantages for travel nurses:

- Mobility: Work across dozens of states without applying for new licenses each time
- Speed: Accept assignments more quickly, especially in urgent staffing situations
- Cost savings: Avoid paying duplicate application fees and background checks
- Flexibility: Practice telehealth or provide cross-border care without red tape
- Professional edge: Be more attractive to agencies and healthcare systems that prioritize speed and flexibility

## Misconceptions and Limitations of the NLC

Despite its benefits, the NLC is often misunderstood. Here are a few common misconceptions:

- **My state is in the NLC, so I automatically have a multistate license.**
  - **False.** You must apply for and meet eligibility requirements to be issued a multistate license.
- **I can use my compact license to practice in any U.S. state.**
  - **False.** Only participating compact states recognize the NLC. Non-compact states still require individual licensure.
- **I can keep my multistate license if I move to a non-compact state.**
  - **False.** Moving to a non-compact state means your license reverts to single-state status. You'll need to apply for licensure in your new home state.
- **The NLC applies to APRNs.**
  - **False.** The NLC only covers RNs and LPNs/LVNs. Advanced Practice Registered Nurses (APRNs) are governed by the separate APRN Compact, which has not been widely adopted.

# Obtaining a Compact Nursing License

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## Confirm NLC Participation

- ✓ Ensure that your state is part of the NLC.
- ✓ Visit [nursecompact.com](http://nursecompact.com) for a current list of participating states.

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## Meet Eligibility Requirements

✓ Reside in a compact state	✓ Pass the NCLEX-RN or NCLEX-PN
✓ Hold an active, unencumbered RN or LPN license	✓ Pass state and federal background checks
✓ Graduate from a board-approved nursing program	✓ Have no disciplinary actions or felony convictions

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## Declare Your Primary State of Residence (PSOR)

- ✓ When applying or renewing your license, you must legally declare your PSOR—the state where you vote, pay taxes, and hold a driver's license.

# Obtaining a Compact Nursing License

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## Submit Your Application

- ✓ Apply through your state's Board of Nursing website. Some states will automatically issue a multistate license if you meet the criteria; others may require you to select "multistate license" during the application process.

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## Complete a Background Check

- ✓ Most compact states require fingerprinting and a criminal background check. This may be coordinated through your state's nursing board or an approved vendor.

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## Pay Required Fees

- ✓ Expect to pay a standard application fee, plus a background check fee if required.

**Once Approved:** Your license will be designated as a multistate license. You can verify this status through [Nursys.com](https://Nursys.com), the official national database for nursing licensure verification.

# How to Declare Your Primary State of Residence

**Your primary state of residence (PSOR) is where you live and legally reside—it's more than just where you work. You can demonstrate PSOR through:**

- A driver's license or state ID
- Voter registration
- Federal tax returns listing your home address
- Military form DD-2058 (for military personnel)

You can only declare one PSOR at a time, and it must be a participating compact state to qualify for a multistate license.

## What If You Move to a New State? (Re-declaring Residence)

If you move to a different compact state:

- You must apply for licensure by endorsement in your new state.
- Once your new license is issued, your multistate privileges shift to the new state and your former license becomes inactive (or single-state only).
- You should not practice in your new state under your old multistate license while the new one is pending.

If you move to a non-compact state, your multistate license becomes invalid for compact privileges. You must apply for a single-state license in your new home state and will no longer have the ability to practice in other compact states without applying individually.

## How Renewals and CEUs Work Across Compact States

- **Renew in Your PSOR Only:** You only need to renew your license in your declared compact state.
- **CE Requirements:** You must meet the continuing education (CEU) requirements of your PSOR only—not each state where you practice.
- **Practice Authority:** You can continue practicing in other compact states as long as your multistate license remains active and in good standing.

**Pro Tip:** Always keep proof of CE completion and license status handy. Many hospitals and travel agencies will ask for verification during onboarding.

# What If You Don't Live in a Compact State?

Not every nurse lives in a state that participates in the Nurse Licensure Compact (NLC). For those in non-compact states—like California, New York, and Illinois—travel nursing is still entirely possible, but it requires a bit more planning and paperwork.

## Options for Nurses in Non-Compact States

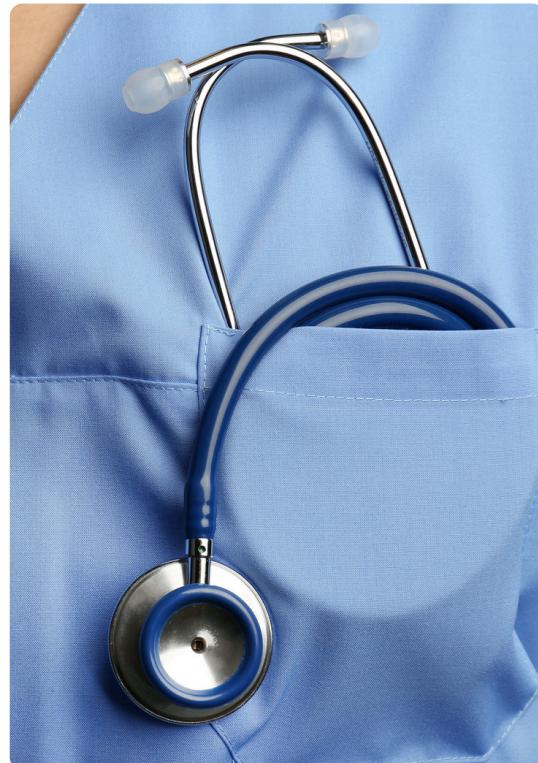
If your home state is not part of the NLC, you won't be eligible for a multistate license.

Instead, you must apply for a single-state license in every state where you plan to work.

You'll need to:

- Apply for licensure by endorsement in each destination state
- Keep track of multiple license expiration dates
- Meet each state's unique continuing education and renewal requirements

It's more work, but absolutely manageable—and many travel nurses in non-compact states successfully build thriving careers this way.



## How to Apply for Single-State Licenses

The process to apply for licensure by endorsement generally includes:

1. Application through the state Board of Nursing (usually online)
2. Verification of your original license (typically done via [Nursys](#))
3. Criminal background check and fingerprinting
4. Proof of education and passing NCLEX scores
5. Payment of state-specific fees

Each state may request different documentation, so it's essential to visit the Board of Nursing website for the specific state you're applying to.

**Pro Tip:** Some travel nurse staffing agencies will assist with license reimbursement or fast-track services.

# Timeline and Fees for Non-Compact Licensure



The timeline for obtaining a single-state license can vary widely:

- Fast states (e.g., Arizona, Missouri): ~1-2 weeks
- Average states: 3-6 weeks
- Slower states (e.g., California): 10-14+ weeks

**Fees** also vary, ranging from **\$100 to \$400** depending on the state. Add in the cost of fingerprinting, transcript requests, and mailing, and the total per license can rise quickly—though many nurses view it as an investment in career flexibility.

# Temporary Licenses



## When and How to Use Them

Many states offer **temporary or provisional licenses** to help nurses begin work while their full licensure is being processed. These are ideal for travel nurses on tight start dates.

### Eligibility



Must have a current active license in another U.S. state

### Valid For:



30 to 180 days (varies by state)

### Application Process



Often similar to the permanent license application but with expedited review

### Limitations



Cannot be renewed or extended in most cases; some states may restrict practice settings (e.g., no long-term care)

## Worth the Effort

Even if you don't live in a compact state, strategic planning and staying organized can keep your travel nursing career moving. Many nurses in high-paying or in-demand states find the extra licensure effort well worth it.

**Example:** A nurse from New Jersey applying to work in Oregon might receive a 90-day temporary license while waiting for their permanent license to be approved.

# Managing Multiple State Licenses

For travel nurses who don't hold a compact license—or who accept assignments in non-compact states—managing multiple nursing licenses can quickly become overwhelming without the right systems in place. From staying compliant with continuing education requirements to navigating state-specific tax laws, multi-state licensure requires diligence, organization, and the right tools.

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## ① Keeping Track of Expiration Dates and CE Requirements

Each state has its own license renewal cycle, continuing education unit (CEU) requirements, and rules around what CE content is accepted. Some states require annual renewals, others biennial. Some demand specific courses—like child abuse prevention, opioid training, or cultural competence—while others allow general CE hours.

Best practices include:

- Create a digital spreadsheet or calendar to log each license's expiration date, renewal window, and CE requirements.
- Use reminders and alerts to start renewals at least 60–90 days in advance.
- Store CE certificates and documentation in a central folder (cloud-based storage like Google Drive or Dropbox works well).

**Pro Tip:** A missed renewal can mean working with an expired license—an offense that can result in disciplinary action or job loss.

## ② Using Credentialing Services or Licensing Platforms

To lighten the load, many travel nurses turn to tools and platforms built to track and manage licensing:

- **Nursys e-Notify:** A free service that alerts you when your licenses are about to expire or are updated.
- **CE Broker:** Tracks CEUs across multiple states and helps you stay compliant.
- **StaffGarden or myMedCred:** Platforms that store credentials, CEU records, and immunizations for healthcare workers.
- **Agency-provided credentialing tools:** Many larger travel nurse agencies offer access to dashboards where you can track upcoming renewals and upload licenses or CEUs.

While these tools are helpful, **you remain legally responsible** for maintaining valid licensure and fulfilling each state's requirements.



## What Travel Nurse Agencies Provide vs. What You're Responsible For

Agencies can offer a lot of support—but they don't do everything:

Agency May Provide	You're Responsible For
License reimbursement or pre-payment	Researching requirements for each state
Credentialing team to help with paperwork	Submitting applications and documentation
Access to CE platforms or reimbursement	Completing the CEU hours before renewal deadlines
Temporary housing or travel arrangements	Declaring your primary state of residence (PSOR) correctly
Onboarding checklist and reminders	Renewing your licenses on time and storing certificates

**Important:** Even if your agency covers the fees or helps file paperwork, you are the license holder. The risk of noncompliance falls squarely on you.



## Tax and Legal Implications of Multi-State Work

Working in multiple states isn't just a licensing issue—it's a tax and legal issue, too.

- **State income taxes:** You may owe taxes in each state where you work, depending on the length of the assignment and local laws.
- **Home vs. work state:** Your permanent tax home (often your primary residence or declared PSOR) determines how you file federal and state taxes.
- **Travel stipends and housing:** Mismanaging tax home status can turn tax-free stipends into taxable income.

Best practices:

- Consult a **tax professional who specializes in travel healthcare**
- Keep receipts, contracts, and assignment dates for tax reporting
- Ensure your PSOR documentation (driver's license, voter registration, etc.) is current and consistent

Managing multiple licenses is a reality for many travel nurses—but with the right tools, habits, and a little help, it doesn't have to be a headache. Staying organized not only keeps you compliant but also gives you the freedom to say "yes" to more opportunities, in more places, with fewer delays.

# Special Considerations

While the Nurse Licensure Compact (NLC) has significantly improved mobility for many RNs and LPNs/LVNs, not all nursing roles or situations are covered under its umbrella. Certain professionals and unique circumstances still face complex or evolving licensure requirements. Below are some key exceptions and special cases every travel nurse—or aspiring travel nurse—should understand.

## APRN Licensure (Not Covered Under the NLC)

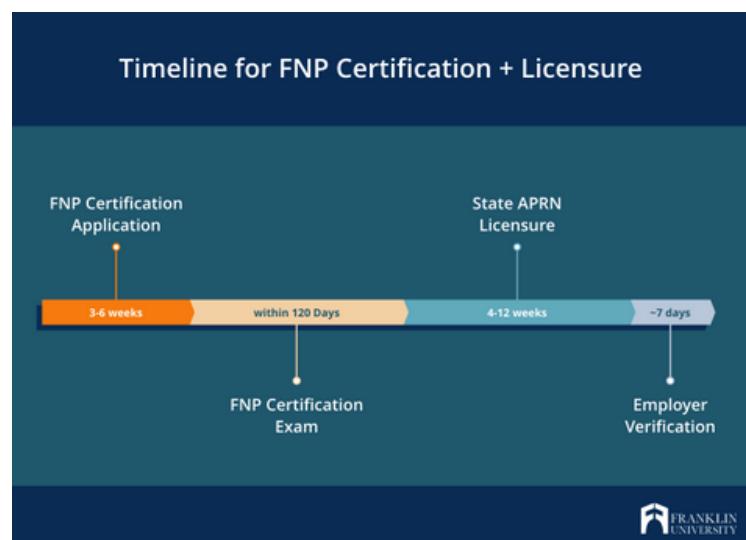
Advanced Practice Registered Nurses (APRNs)—including Nurse Practitioners (NPs), Certified Nurse Midwives (CNMs), Clinical Nurse Specialists (CNSs), and Certified Registered Nurse Anesthetists (CRNAs)—are **not included in the current NLC**.

APRNs must obtain **individual state licensure** for every state where they practice. This includes:

- Meeting state-specific scope-of-practice laws
- Completing additional CE requirements unique to APRNs
- Submitting documentation related to prescriptive authority, DEA registration, and collaborative agreements (if required)

There is a proposed **APRN Compact**, but as of 2025, it has not been widely adopted. Until more states enact this compact, APRNs must follow a separate and more complex licensure pathway than RNs and LPNs.

**Important:** Holding a compact RN license does not authorize APRN practice in other states.



## Pandemic-Era Changes: Emergency Licenses and Waivers

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many states issued **temporary emergency licensure waivers** to quickly mobilize nurses across state lines. These measures included:

- Temporary licenses valid for 30–180 days
- Suspension of endorsement fees
- Relaxed CE and fingerprinting requirements
- Broader acceptance of telehealth practice across state lines

While most of these waivers have **expired**, a few states have made **permanent changes** inspired by pandemic policies. It's critical to:

- Check each state's nursing board for current emergency or temporary licensing rules
- Understand that emergency licenses **do not carry compact privileges**
- Never assume pandemic-era rules are still in effect without official confirmation

**Pro Tip:** Some states, like New Jersey and California, developed fast-track licensure programs during COVID-19 that continue to speed up processing times for out-of-state nurses.

## Military Spouses and Licensure Mobility

For military spouses who are nurses, frequent relocations can create ongoing licensure challenges. To address this, several federal and state-level protections exist:

- The Military Spouse Licensure Portability Act (part of the 2023 National Defense Authorization Act) encourages states to recognize out-of-state licenses for military spouses.
- Many NLC states expedite or simplify endorsement for military spouses residing in the state due to active-duty orders.
- Some states allow practice under an existing license for a limited time (often 6–12 months) while the nurse applies for a new one.

Best practices include:

- Notifying the state board of nursing as soon as orders are issued
- Providing documentation of marriage, PCS (permanent change of station) orders, and active license
- Seeking assistance from the Military OneSource or state military family assistance programs

**Helpful Resource:** Military OneSource Licensure Support provides guidance and reimbursement options for licensure costs.

# Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

## Can I start work while my license is pending?

**NO**

In most cases, no. You cannot legally begin working as a nurse in a state where your license has not yet been issued, even if you've submitted your application. Some states do offer **temporary or provisional** licenses that allow you to start work while your permanent license is processing, but this depends entirely on that state's policies.

Always verify with both the **state board of nursing** and your **travel agency** before starting an assignment.

## Do I need a license to interview or shadow?

**NO**

**No license is required to interview** for a travel assignment or to discuss contract terms with a recruiter. However, if you plan to **shadow on a unit or interact with patients**, even in a limited capacity, **a valid state license may be required**. Some hospitals allow observational-only shadowing under supervision, but this varies by facility and state.

Never touch a patient or perform any task without proper licensure—you risk liability and disciplinary action.

## Can I work in a non-compact state with a compact license?

**NO**

Your compact license only grants authority to practice in **other compact states**. If you accept a job in a **non-compact state**, you **must obtain a license in that specific state**, regardless of whether you hold a compact license.

Working in a non-compact state **without the correct license is illegal**, and can result in:

- Loss of employment
- Disciplinary action from your home state's board
- Permanent damage to your professional record

# Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

## How long does it usually take to get licensed in a new state?

**1-14 Weeks**

The licensing timeline varies significantly by state and the completeness of your application. Here's a general range:

- Fast-track states: 1–2 weeks (e.g., Arizona, Texas)
- Standard processing: 3–6 weeks (e.g., North Carolina, Pennsylvania)
- Slow states: 10–14+ weeks (e.g., California, Oregon)

Delays often occur due to incomplete paperwork, missing transcripts, or background check issues. To speed things up:

- Apply early (60+ days before your contract start date)
- Use online portals where available
- Check for temporary license options

**Pro Tip:** Some travel nurse agencies will reimburse fees or help you track progress—don't be afraid to ask.

## Can I hold multiple single-state licenses at once?

**YES**

Yes. Many travel nurses hold active licenses in several non-compact states. There's no limit to how many single-state licenses you can maintain—as long as you meet each state's renewal requirements and CE obligations. Just remember, you must renew each license separately and comply with state-specific rules.

## Are endorsement and reciprocity the same thing?

**NO**

While often used interchangeably, they're not quite the same.

- **Endorsement** is the process of applying for a license in another state based on your existing license and qualifications.
- **Reciprocity** usually refers to a formal agreement between states to recognize each other's licenses (like the NLC).

Travel nurses use endorsement when applying for single-state licenses outside the NLC.

# Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

## Do I need to notify the board if I move?

**YES**

Yes. If you move to a new state—whether it's a compact state or not—you must **update your address** with your current state board of nursing. If you're moving between compact states, you'll also need to **apply for a new multistate license** in your new primary state of residence. Failing to update your information can lead to delays, suspension of privileges, or legal complications.

## Can New Graduates Work as Travel Nurses?

**NOT Recommended**

Technically, yes—but with limitations. Most travel nurse agencies and hospitals require at least 12–18 months of recent bedside experience before accepting a nurse for travel assignments. This is because travel nurses are expected to hit the ground running with minimal orientation and adapt quickly to new environments.

While you may be licensed and eligible to practice right after graduation and passing the NCLEX, it's best to:

- **Gain clinical experience** in a hospital setting, preferably in a high-demand specialty (e.g., med-surg, ICU, ER)
- **Build a strong professional foundation** and confidence before taking on the fast-paced demands of travel nursing
- **Use your first year** to develop time management, charting, and critical thinking skills essential for success on the road

**Pro Tip:** Some agencies offer “**New Grad to Travel Nurse**” programs that provide structured training or place new grads in staff roles before transitioning to travel.

**In short:** new grads should plan ahead, gain experience, and then go travel—it's worth the wait.

# Appendix

## 1

### Official Licensing & Compact Resources

✓ **Nurse Licensure Compact (NLC) Official Site**

<https://www.nursecompact.com>

Check participating states, compact license eligibility, and FAQs

✓ **Nursys® (License Verification & Alerts)**

<https://www.nursys.com>

Free, secure tool to verify nursing licenses and receive expiration reminders

✓ **National Council of State Boards of Nursing (NCSBN)**

<https://www.ncsbn.org>

Governing body for the NLC, licensure standards, and national nursing regulation

✓ **State Boards of Nursing Directory (via NCSBN)**

<https://www.ncsbn.org/contact-bon.htm>

Direct links to every U.S. state's Board of Nursing website

## 2

### Continuing Education & Credential Tracking

✓ **CE Broker**

<https://www.cebroker.com>

Track CE compliance across multiple states (required in some states)

✓ **NursingCE.com**

<https://www.nursingce.com>

Affordable CEUs for all 50 states, including specialty courses

# Appendix

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## Travel Nurse Job Platforms & Agencies

✓ **Next Move Healthcare**

<https://nextmovehealthcare.com/>

A nurse first travel nurse agency run by nurses and located in Missouri.

✓ **Aya Healthcare**

<https://www.ayahealthcare.com>

One of the largest travel nurse staffing agencies with licensing help

✓ **Trusted Health**

<https://www.trustedhealth.com>

Travel nurse job marketplace with license support and transparency

✓ **Nomad Health**

<https://www.nomadhealth.com>

Modern platform connecting clinicians with travel contracts directly

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## Legal & Special Circumstances

✓ **Military OneSource – Licensure for Military Spouses**

<https://www.militaryonesource.mil>

Guidance and reimbursement options for relocating military families

✓ **Federation of State Medical Boards (FSMB) – for APRNs**

<https://www.fsmb.org>

Resources on APRN licensing (pending adoption of APRN Compact)

# Appendix

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## Bonus Tools for Organization

- ✓ **Google Sheets** (Free Template for License Tracking)

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets>

Create your own templates for tracking

- ✓ **Trello** (Task Management for CE & Licensure)

<https://trello.com>

Organize license deadlines, documents, and state requirements visually

- ✓ **Nurse Backpack**

<https://www.nursebackpack.com>

A secure mobile and web app built for nurses to store, organize, and share credentials, licenses, CEUs, and certifications. You can even share a link with recruiters.

- ✓ **Kamana**

<https://www.kamanahealth.com>

A free digital profile tool designed for travel nurses. Store credentials, licenses, work history, and compliance docs in one professional portfolio—perfect for agency sharing.

- ✓ **MyMedCred**

<https://www.mymedcred.com>

Cloud-based credentialing platform that helps track nursing certifications, immunizations, and more. Especially useful for travel and per diem nurses.



# Contact Us



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