

Registered Psychiatric Nurse

A nurse trained from day one in mental health and addictions. Same pay as a registered nurse, but only licensed in Western Canada.

TYPICAL PAY

\$90,000

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$62k to \$113k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

3 to 4 years

after high school

DEMAND

Very high

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

Yes

regulated job

WHERE YOU WORK

Psychiatric hospitals, mental health units, addiction clinics, co...

How you get there

- 1 High school** Grades 11 and 12
 Grade 12 English, biology, chemistry and a math. Psychology helps too.
- 2 Psychiatric nursing degree** 3 to 4 years
 A 4-year Bachelor of Psychiatric Nursing at MacEwan University in Alberta, Brandon University in Manitoba, or a BC school such as Douglas College. Saskatchewan Polytechnic also trains psychiatric nurses. Clinical placements start early.
- 3 Write the RPNCE (Registered Psychiatric Nurses of Canada Examination)** After graduation
 A 200-question, computer-based multiple-choice exam offered in January, May and October. You get 3 tries.
- 4 Register with your provincial college** A few weeks
 BC, Alberta, Saskatchewan and Manitoba each have a regulator. Registration lets you legally use the title.

Pros and cons

- + Same pay and pension as a registered nurse
- + Mental health demand is rising everywhere
- + You build real relationships with patients over weeks
- Your licence works in only four provinces and Yukon
- Verbal abuse and occasional violence are part of the job
- Nights, weekends and holidays

Good to know

RPN means two different things

In Western Canada, RPN (registered psychiatric nurse) is this job. In Ontario, the same three letters mean RPN (registered practical nurse), a completely different job with a 2-year diploma. Check which one a...

A profession that exists only west of Ontario

Psychiatric nursing grew up inside the big provincial mental hospitals of the Prairies and BC in the early 1900s and became its own licensed profession there. The rest of Canada never split it off from general nu...

Optional boosts

Forensic psychiatry. Opioid use disorder certification. Master of Psychiatric Nursing. Charge nurse or team lead.

Where these numbers come from

Job Bank: Registered psychiatric nurses, wages (updated Nov 2025)
 BC College of Nurses and Midwives: the RPNCE exam
 College of Registered Psychiatric Nurses of Manitoba: exam fees and dates
 MacEwan University: Bachelor of Psychiatric Nursing

Numbers checked September 2026. Pay figures are typical full-time annual amounts in Canadian dollars, based on Government of Canada Job Bank wage data and published salary grids. They vary by province, employer and experience. Tuition is for domestic students. Sources, links and the click-through version: <https://career.help/ca/careers/registered-psychiatric-nurse>



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