

Assessing System Readiness for Advanced Practice Nurse Integration: A Multidimensional Policy Framework for Primary Care Transformation

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Received : December 5, 2024

Accepted : January 13, 2025

Published : January 31, 2025

Citation: Rusman (2025). Assessing System Readiness for Advanced Practice Nurse Integration: A Multidimensional Policy Framework for Primary Care Transformation. *Curatio : Journal of Advanced and Specialized Nursing, and Care Planning*, 2(1), 26-39.

<https://doi.org/10.61978/curatio.v2i1.1396>

ABSTRACT: The increasing burden of chronic diseases, aging populations, and healthcare workforce shortages has intensified the demand for primary care transformation globally. Advanced Practice Nurses (APNs) have emerged as key contributors to healthcare delivery, yet their integration into primary care remains uneven due to systemic barriers and varying levels of readiness. This study aims to develop a multidimensional framework for assessing system readiness to integrate APNs effectively. The framework was developed through an extensive review of policy literature and readiness models, incorporating seven domains: Regulation, Financing, Workforce, Clinical Governance, Information Systems, Professional Acceptance, and Quality & Safety. Each domain includes measurable indicators derived from validated maturity models, policy analyses, and health system assessments. A pilot application using hypothetical data (Country A) demonstrated the framework's diagnostic capabilities, revealing how imbalances across domains impact implementation capacity. Key findings indicate that successful APN integration depends on coordinated progress across all readiness domains. Systems with strong governance and digital infrastructure may still fail to implement APN models effectively if financing or regulatory mechanisms are underdeveloped. The radar chart visualization and scoring tools offer practical methods for identifying gaps, prioritizing reforms, and benchmarking readiness over time. This framework provides a strategic tool for policymakers and health system leaders seeking to enhance APN integration. It supports evidence-based reform, enables systematic planning, and aligns implementation efforts with national health goals. Future research should focus on real-world testing, indicator refinement, and adaptation to other health professional roles.

Keywords: Advanced Practice Nurses, Primary Healthcare, Health System Readiness, Workforce Integration, Policy Framework, Maturity Model, Health Reform.



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INTRODUCTION

Healthcare systems worldwide are under increasing strain due to a convergence of global trends that challenge the capacity, accessibility, and sustainability of primary care delivery. The aging global population, rising prevalence of chronic diseases, and the rapid escalation of healthcare

costs have placed unprecedented demands on traditional models of care. According to Sankar et al. (2023), chronic diseases now account for a substantial share of global mortality, prompting health systems to seek adaptive strategies that better manage long-term conditions. Similarly, Sastre-Fullana et al. (2017) emphasize the growing complexity of healthcare needs among older adults, many of whom require continuous, coordinated care that often exceeds the capacity of existing primary care frameworks. In this context, the transformation of primary care has become a critical policy and practice priority across health systems.

The COVID-19 pandemic has further accelerated this imperative by revealing vulnerabilities in health infrastructure and catalyzing a shift toward more flexible, resilient care models. The adoption of telehealth and community-based care once considered supplementary has become central to maintaining service continuity during crises (Sastre-Fullana et al., 2017). This shift has underscored the need for primary care systems to evolve beyond physician-centric models and embrace team-based, technologically integrated solutions capable of responding to both immediate and long-term healthcare demands (Goddard-Nash et al., 2020).

Amid these changes, Advanced Practice Nurses (APNs) have emerged as key contributors to the transformation of primary care delivery. Comprising Nurse Practitioners (NPs), Clinical Nurse Specialists (CNSs), and Nurse Midwives, APNs are highly trained professionals whose roles encompass a broad scope of practice. APNs are particularly valuable in addressing care gaps in underserved populations and improving health system responsiveness (Beckmann et al., 2023; Hallas et al., 2021). Their responsibilities include direct patient care, chronic disease management, health promotion, disease prevention, and patient education functions that are increasingly central to modern primary care (Diaczun & Miller, 2023). Evidence consistently shows that APNs provide high-quality, patient-centered care that leads to improved patient satisfaction, greater accessibility, and enhanced health outcomes (Dzioba et al., 2022).

Importantly, APNs are equipped with clinical expertise that enables them to diagnose conditions, prescribe medications, and manage comprehensive treatment plans (Wyly, 2024). These competencies position them as essential actors in healthcare systems that aim to broaden access and maintain quality while containing costs. A growing body of research demonstrates that the integration of APNs into primary care can lead to reduced hospital readmissions, improved chronic disease outcomes, and better adherence to treatment protocols (Pittman et al., 2019). Moreover, APNs contribute to health system efficiency by minimizing reliance on more expensive specialty services and optimizing resource allocation (Jokiniemi et al., 2021).

From a policy standpoint, the case for expanding APN roles is well supported. Economic evaluations highlight the cost-effectiveness of employing APNs, while patient-level outcomes affirm their contribution to accessible and high-quality care (Proffitt & Hooper, 2020). Nonetheless, the implementation of APN roles is frequently hindered by systemic barriers. Common challenges include restrictive regulations, lack of prescriptive authority, fragmented interprofessional collaboration, and organizational resistance (Dodson & Baker, 2020). Such barriers can impede the full realization of APN potential and limit their contribution to primary care transformation.

To address these obstacles, various policy frameworks have been proposed to guide the integration of APNs. The Patient Engagement in Professional Practice and Advances (PEPPA) framework, for instance, offers a structured approach for implementing APN roles across healthcare settings (Otti et al., 2024). These frameworks typically emphasize the need for clear role definitions, legislative support, and collaborative practice models. Sankar et al. (2023) argue that enabling regulations and prescriptive authority are fundamental to the effective deployment of APNs. Furthermore, McMullen & Shippee (2024) advocate for enhanced interprofessional collaboration to ensure optimal resource utilization and patient care outcomes.

Despite the growing body of literature on APN effectiveness and policy support, there remains a significant gap in tools for evaluating organizational readiness to implement APN roles. Pittman et al. (2019) note the absence of standardized instruments capable of assessing the multifaceted dimensions of readiness, including institutional culture, infrastructure, and policy environment. Existing evaluation models often overlook contextual factors critical to successful APN integration, such as stakeholder buy-in, educational infrastructure, and digital health capabilities.

The lack of comprehensive frameworks for readiness assessment poses a substantial barrier to strategic planning and policy implementation. McMullen & Shippee (2024) stress the importance of continuous evaluation mechanisms to support the evolution of APN roles and to adapt to dynamic healthcare environments. Without such tools, health systems may proceed with integration efforts without adequate preparation, increasing the risk of suboptimal outcomes and resistance from key stakeholders.

This study seeks to address these gaps by proposing a multidimensional framework for evaluating system readiness to integrate APNs into primary care. The framework is grounded in policy and empirical literature and draws on established domains such as regulation, financing, workforce capacity, clinical governance, health information systems, professional acceptance, and quality and safety outcomes. By operationalizing these domains into measurable indicators, the framework aims to provide policymakers and healthcare administrators with a practical tool for assessing readiness, identifying implementation bottlenecks, and prioritizing reforms.

The novelty of this study lies in its integration of policy-driven analysis with operational assessment tools to support evidence-based implementation of APN roles. Unlike existing frameworks that focus primarily on role definition and competency development, the proposed model offers a system-level perspective that considers the infrastructure, policy environment, and cultural dynamics essential to APN integration. In doing so, it responds to the urgent need for structured evaluation mechanisms that can guide the expansion of APN-led care in a manner that is sustainable, equitable, and responsive to local health system capacities.

In sum, this chapter has established the rationale for developing a readiness assessment framework for APN integration. It has outlined the global health challenges necessitating primary care transformation, reviewed the evidence on APN effectiveness, examined policy proposals for integration, and identified persistent barriers and evaluation gaps. The subsequent chapters will present the methodology for framework development, detail its components and application, and discuss its potential impact on primary care reform and workforce policy.

METHOD

This chapter outlines the methodological approach undertaken to develop a multidimensional framework for assessing system readiness to integrate Advanced Practice Nurses (APNs) into primary care. The methodology builds upon policy analysis, maturity model application, and operational research to construct, validate, and apply a practical assessment tool. This section also incorporates literature-based strategies for measuring regulatory, financial, and workforce-related policy variables, ensuring methodological robustness and relevance.

Framework Development

The framework development was informed by a comprehensive synthesis of international policy documents, empirical literature, and established readiness models. Drawing from sources such as the OECD (2024), Porat-Dahlerbruch et al. (2025), and the ICN (2020), seven core domains of readiness were identified: (1) Regulation, (2) Financing, (3) Workforce, (4) Clinical Governance, (5) Information Systems, (6) Professional Acceptance, and (7) Quality & Safety.

These domains were selected based on their repeated presence in APN policy frameworks and their influence on implementation outcomes. The process of domain selection was supported by earlier health system readiness models, such as the Framework to Assess Health System Readiness to Address Violence Against Women by Colombini et al. (2022), which highlighted the importance of institutional structures, capacity-building, and localized contexts.

Operationalization of Indicators

Each domain was operationalized into measurable indicators using a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches. Regulatory readiness, for example, was assessed using policy document scoring assigning values from 0 (no formal support) to 2 (full policy enacted). Financing readiness included evaluation of reimbursement mechanisms through policy checklists and analysis of national health financing documents.

For the workforce domain, statistical data on APN availability, education pipeline, and training standards were collected and analyzed. Similar indicators were applied across domains such as Clinical Governance (e.g., existence of collaborative care protocols), Information Systems (e.g., EMR interoperability), and Professional Acceptance (e.g., Likert-scale surveys of provider and patient attitudes).

Methods were adapted from maturity model applications in healthcare policy evaluation. Cometto et al. (2022) illustrate how structured maturity scales can identify organizational progress and gaps in governance, regulation, and health workforce planning. These models informed the scoring rubrics used across the readiness domains.

Maturity Scoring Methodology

The scoring framework employs ordinal scales:

- Domains such as Regulation and Financing use a 0–2 scale.
- Domains like Clinical Governance and Information Systems use a more granular 0–4 maturity scale.

Each score represents a distinct stage in system preparedness from absence of policy to full implementation with measurable outcomes. For example:

- 0 = No policy or operational structure exists
- 1 = Partial presence (e.g., draft policy or pilot implementation)
- 2 = Full implementation with early outcomes
- 3–4 = Fully operationalized system with monitoring and evaluation mechanisms

These scales were informed by scenario-based models such as those used by Rees et al. (2020) in strategic workforce planning under uncertainty.

Literature-Informed Instrument Design

To enhance the framework's conceptual validity, several literature-based instruments were adapted. Hegarty et al. (2020) emphasized synthesizing practitioner readiness by integrating multiple thematic dimensions an approach that guided the inclusion of interprofessional collaboration and community engagement indicators. Radaelli (2018) further contributed methodological guidance for constructing regulatory performance indicators that align with international benchmarks.

Additionally, methods of stakeholder engagement, qualitative interviews, and documentary analysis were modeled after best practices outlined by Koutsoumpa et al. (2020), ensuring that the readiness framework is context-sensitive and actionable.

Pilot Application: Country A

To demonstrate feasibility, a hypothetical pilot application was conducted in "Country A," using simulated data. Each domain was evaluated using the proposed framework, and composite scores were generated.

Table 1: Domain Scores – Country A

Domain	Score (0–4)
Regulation	1
Financing	0
Workforce	2
Clinical Governance	3
Information Systems	2
Professional Acceptance	2
Quality & Safety	2

Validation Strategy

Although the pilot was hypothetical, the methodology supports validation through:

- Expert panel reviews for construct validation
- Stakeholder feedback from health administrators and APNs
- Benchmarking against health system performance indicators

Future work includes field-testing the framework across diverse health systems, further refining scoring instruments, and integrating real-world data.

Ethical Considerations

No human participants were involved in this conceptual framework development. Ethical considerations will apply in future empirical validation phases involving stakeholders or patients.

In summary, this methodology chapter describes the systematic construction and operationalization of a multidimensional readiness assessment framework. Informed by maturity models, validated policy indicators, and health system literature, the framework provides a structured tool for assessing APN integration capacity. It enables health systems to prioritize reforms, benchmark performance, and plan for sustainable workforce transformation.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the findings from the development and pilot application of a multidimensional framework to assess system readiness for integrating Advanced Practice Nurses (APNs) into primary care. It is structured into three major sections: (1) Framework Overview, (2) Scoring System, and (3) Pilot Application. Each section is supported by tables and visuals, and grounded in validated literature.

Framework Overview

The framework consists of seven domains critical to evaluating health system readiness:

1. **Regulation** – Examines legal authority, prescriptive rights, and written scope of practice.
2. **Financing** – Considers the existence and mechanisms of reimbursement for APN services.
3. **Workforce** – Evaluates APN availability, education pipeline, and distribution.
4. **Clinical Governance** – Reviews collaborative protocols, audits, and quality assurance practices.
5. **Information Systems** – Assesses EMR interoperability and quality dashboards.

6. **Professional Acceptance** – Measures perceptions of APNs by other professionals and patients.

7. **Quality & Safety** – Benchmarks care outcomes, such as readmission and patient satisfaction.

These domains are derived from validated readiness frameworks and literature. For example, Colombini et al. (2022) and Hegarty et al. (2020) advocate for integrating regulatory, organizational, and provider-level readiness factors. Teixeira et al. (2023) also emphasize digital infrastructure and stakeholder engagement as core components of readiness.

Table 2: Readiness Domains and Indicators

Domain	Indicator/Variable	Measurement Tool	Expected Output
Regulation	Scope of practice, prescription rights	Document scoring (0–2)	Practice clarity, legal accountability
Financing	Reimbursement mechanisms	Checklist + policy analysis	Financial sustainability
Workforce	APN ratio, education pipeline	HR statistics, trend analysis	Service capacity planning
Clinical Governance	Protocols, audit mechanisms	Maturity score (0–4)	Team integration, care quality
Information Systems	EMR, quality dashboards	Binary + maturity assessment	Real-time monitoring
Professional Acceptance	Provider/patient attitudes	Likert survey (1–5)	Barrier identification
Quality & Safety	Readmission, LOS, ACSC admission, satisfaction	Benchmarking & outcome rates	Demonstrated integration outcomes

Scoring System

Rating Methodologies

The framework employs hybrid scoring mechanisms combining maturity models, qualitative descriptors, and structured policy rubrics. Scales vary from 0–2 (e.g., regulation) to 0–4 (e.g., clinical governance). These methodologies are supported by prior applications in health system assessments (Tarhan et al., 2020).

Table 3: Scoring Matrix Example – Regulation

Score	Description
0	No policy or regulatory support
1	Draft or partial policy
2	Full policy enacted with clarity

Maturity Score Interpretation

Higher scores indicate stronger system readiness. Benchmarking against best practices allows comparative evaluation. Krasuska et al. (2020) emphasize benchmarking and phased improvements as key outcomes of maturity models.

Advantages and Limitations

Quantitative scoring provides standardization and comparability, but may risk oversimplifying context-sensitive barriers. Complementary qualitative assessments are encouraged (Koutsoumpa et al., 2020).

Comparative Readiness Models

Models such as the SCIROCCO tool and Nursing IT Maturity Model provide precedent for APN readiness evaluations. Other tools like the LHISI and digital health indicators support data-driven assessments.

Pilot Application: Country A

A hypothetical country profile was created to demonstrate practical use of the framework. Scores were assigned based on simulated national data across all seven domains.

Table 3: Country A Readiness Scores

Domain	Score (0–4)
Regulation	1
Financing	0
Workforce	2
Clinical Governance	3
Information Systems	2
Professional Acceptance	2
Quality & Safety	2

Country-Specific Variables

Factors influencing readiness include:

- Legislation quality and scope.
- Cultural perceptions of APNs.
- Training access and standards.

Case Study References

- U.S.: NP integration and outcome improvement.
- U.K.: CNS in oncology.
- Australia: Nurse-led clinic success.

Visual Communication Tools

Radar charts, heat maps, and progress (Tonkin et al., 2020) improve decision-making and engagement with stakeholders.

In summary, the proposed framework demonstrates practical value in assessing multidimensional readiness for APN integration. Through validated scoring methods and pilot testing, the model serves as a tool for planning and benchmarking in diverse health contexts.

The successful integration of Advanced Practice Nurses (APNs) into primary care systems hinges on the interplay between various readiness domains. This chapter discusses the implications of the proposed readiness framework, focusing on domain interdependencies, effective policy interventions, the role of digital health tools, and the evidential utility of readiness frameworks in health system reforms.

The interdependencies between regulation, financing, and workforce readiness are particularly significant. Regulatory frameworks that define and authorize APN practice are foundational to integration. For instance, when prescriptive authority is embedded in legislation, APNs can more fully exercise clinical autonomy and improve patient care (Nahari et al., 2023). However, without corresponding financial mechanisms, such as reimbursement schemes, these regulatory advances may fall short. Al-Maaitah et al. (2020) found that countries with both regulatory clarity and funding provisions experienced more robust APN integration. These findings illustrate how regulation and financing must align to support workforce readiness, enabling APNs to function effectively within multidisciplinary teams.

This interdependency is further emphasized by Gadsden et al. (2022), who argue that regulatory and financial alignment drives institutional acceptance and operational scalability. The interconnectedness of these domains means that fragmented policy approaches such as implementing training programs without practice authorization or funding risk underutilizing APN capacities. Consequently, holistic policy design that synchronizes these elements is necessary for sustainable integration.

Several policy interventions have demonstrated success in enhancing system readiness. Comprehensive licensing and credentialing structures have emerged as effective tools for legitimizing APN roles and increasing role uptake (Al-Maaitah et al., 2020). Countries that have embedded APN roles within broader national health reforms particularly where roles are defined, authorized, and financed have seen improvements in care quality and system efficiency. Financial incentives, such as direct reimbursement models for APN-provided services, are also vital. These mechanisms foster economic viability and encourage broader organizational acceptance (Gadsden et al., 2022).

Beyond financing, educational and collaborative interventions are essential. Interprofessional education initiatives, such as those documented by Kielmann et al. (2021), foster mutual respect and understanding across disciplines. This educational foundation reduces professional resistance and cultivates a culture supportive of task-sharing and team-based care, both of which are vital for APN integration.

Digital health tools have become instrumental in facilitating APN integration and improving care quality. Kalita et al. (2023) highlight that electronic health records (EHRs), telehealth systems, and

clinical dashboards enable APNs to manage patient information efficiently, improving continuity of care and accessibility. In particular, telehealth expands the reach of APNs into underserved areas, aligning with health equity goals (Gadsden et al., 2022). These tools also support real-time quality monitoring and performance evaluation through embedded analytics and patient feedback loops.

Gadsden et al. (2022) further emphasize the accountability mechanisms embedded in digital platforms, which enable health administrators to track service delivery outcomes and compliance. This data-driven environment enhances transparency and supports continuous quality improvement. As APN roles evolve, digital tools will remain integral to operational management, system integration, and strategic evaluation.

Readiness frameworks have proven to be essential tools in guiding health policy reforms. Evidence from Greene et al. (2023) shows that frameworks such as the Community Readiness Model enable stakeholder-driven assessments, revealing structural and cultural gaps that must be addressed prior to implementation. These tools foster shared understanding and provide clear pathways for strategic action.

For example, Greene et al. (2023) demonstrated the adaptability of readiness frameworks in LGBTQ+ healthcare service integration, underscoring their relevance in diverse policy contexts. The framework's ability to surface latent barriers such as underfunded training programs or insufficient stakeholder engagement enables more responsive and adaptive reform efforts. Furthermore, Gadsden et al. (2022) argue that frameworks integrating multifactorial indicators are more likely to drive successful healthcare reforms. Their utility lies in guiding systematic assessment, policy alignment, and resource mobilization.

Ultimately, the proposed readiness framework for APN integration contributes to this tradition by offering a structured and context-sensitive tool for assessing system preparedness. Its domains reflect the complex realities of healthcare systems and the interdependent variables that shape implementation success. The pilot example illustrates its diagnostic utility, while the literature affirms its relevance and applicability.

In conclusion, a readiness-based approach is vital to implementing APN roles effectively. Policymakers must recognize and address the interdependencies between key domains, employ targeted policy interventions, leverage digital technologies, and utilize structured frameworks to guide reform. Only through coordinated and data-informed strategies can health systems optimize APN integration and achieve broader goals of accessibility, quality, and sustainability.

CONCLUSION

The integration of Advanced Practice Nurses (APNs) into primary healthcare systems represents a pivotal strategy in addressing the growing demands of healthcare delivery. This study developed and applied a multidimensional readiness assessment framework, enabling health systems to evaluate their preparedness across seven critical domains: Regulation, Financing, Workforce, Clinical Governance, Information Systems, Professional Acceptance, and Quality & Safety.

Through the construction and pilot application of the framework, it became evident that the success of APN integration hinges not on any single domain, but on the synergistic readiness of the system as a whole. The pilot results from Country A demonstrated how strengths in clinical governance and information systems can be undermined by weaknesses in regulation and financing. Such insights reinforce the necessity of coordinated policy and operational reform.

The study also highlighted the value of maturity models, visual tools such as radar charts, and hybrid quantitative-qualitative assessments in providing actionable diagnostics. The literature confirmed that system readiness assessments especially when they integrate stakeholder feedback and contextual adaptability can meaningfully guide policy interventions.

The key contribution of this research is the establishment of a practical, evidence-informed framework that supports benchmarking, planning, and reform for APN integration. It fills a gap in implementation science by addressing not just the 'what' and 'why' of APN roles, but the 'how' of preparing systems to adopt them effectively.

In terms of implications, the framework equips policymakers and healthcare leaders with a strategic tool for:

- Diagnosing system-level barriers
- Prioritizing investments in policy, infrastructure, and training
- Monitoring readiness evolution over time

Furthermore, by promoting a readiness-based approach, this study underscores the need for comprehensive alignment between laws, financing mechanisms, organizational culture, and digital infrastructure to achieve sustainable APN implementation.

Future research should focus on field-testing the framework across multiple countries and contexts, refining indicators, and integrating outcome-based evaluations. Additionally, expanding the framework's application to other health professions and models of care could support broader system transformation.

In summary, this research offers a timely and practical contribution to health policy and workforce development. It provides the tools necessary for systems to move from aspirational policy commitments to measurable, scalable, and sustainable APN integration.

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