

Analysis of CNA Program Establishment and Associated Costs in the Fort Myers, Florida Region

1.0 Executive Summary

This report provides a comprehensive analysis of the Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) training landscape in the greater Fort Myers, Florida, area, and outlines the detailed, step-by-step process for establishing a new CNA school within this region. The analysis addresses the user's inquiry regarding course charges for CNA programs and provides a strategic blueprint for launching a new educational institution.

The core findings indicate that the CNA training market in the region is characterized by a mix of public and private institutions with varying program structures and costs. A successful new school cannot compete on price alone, but must differentiate itself through a unique value proposition, such as program flexibility, accelerated curriculum, or strong clinical partnerships. For a home care provider like Comfort Keepers, establishing a CNA school presents a significant strategic opportunity for vertical integration. By controlling the training pipeline, the organization can ensure a consistent supply of caregivers who are not only certified but are also already aligned with the company's care philosophy and standards, thereby reducing recruitment and onboarding costs.

The process for establishing a new CNA school in Florida is a complex, multi-stage regulatory journey that requires meticulous planning and significant initial investment. The primary hurdle is securing dual licensure from the Florida Board of Nursing and the Department of Education. The following recommendations are critical for navigating this process:

- **1.1 Strategic Recommendations for Comfort Keepers:** The broad service area of Comfort Keepers Fort Myers, which spans Lee and Collier Counties, presents a strategic advantage. A new school could be positioned as a central training hub, drawing students from this wide geographic area to serve as a direct and reliable talent pipeline for the company's operations. This model shifts the school from a

simple business venture to a foundational strategic asset for the core home care business.

- **1.2 Summary of Key Recommendations:** The establishment of a new school should prioritize a dual-pronged regulatory strategy, secure strong clinical partnerships before application, and develop a robust financial plan that accounts for both startup and student costs. A clear, transparent fee structure for students, coupled with assistance in navigating financial aid, can serve as a powerful differentiator in a competitive market.
-

Part I: Market and Competitive Analysis of CNA Training in the Fort Myers Region

2.0 Geographic and Demographic Context of the Comfort Keepers Service Area

The operational scope of Comfort Keepers Fort Myers is notably extensive, covering a wide geographic region that includes all of Lee and Collier Counties and encompasses numerous cities such as Fort Myers, Cape Coral, Naples, Bonita Springs, Lehigh Acres, and more.¹ This expansive service area is a critical factor for any new educational initiative. A CNA school located in a central and accessible area, such as Fort Myers, could effectively serve as a regional hub, attracting prospective students from across this broad demographic and geographic base.

The demand for skilled caregivers within this region is directly linked to the operations of organizations like Comfort Keepers. The company explicitly recruits for "specially trained caregivers" and lists a "Careers" section on its website, indicating a persistent need for qualified staff.³ A new CNA school, therefore, can be a strategic tool, positioned not just as a standalone educational entity but as a direct pipeline for talent for Comfort Keepers. By training its own caregivers, the organization could ensure they are instructed in the company's core philosophy of "Interactive Caregiving" from day one, leading to a higher quality of service and a competitive advantage in the home care market.³ This approach streamlines the talent acquisition process, potentially lowering recruitment and training costs over the long term.

3.0 Competitive Landscape: A Survey of Existing CNA Programs

The Fort Myers and surrounding areas host a number of established CNA training programs. Key competitors include public technical colleges like Fort Myers Technical College (FMTC) ⁵, Cape Coral Technical College (CCTC) ⁶, and Lorenzo Walker Technical College (LWTC) in Naples.⁷ The market also includes private institutions such as Horizon Healthcare Institute (HHI).⁸

The presence of public colleges as primary competitors is a major market factor. These institutions often benefit from state subsidies, which allows them to offer transparent and comparatively low tuition rates. For a new private school, this means a pricing strategy focused on undercutting competitors is unlikely to be sustainable. Instead, a new program must distinguish itself through its value proposition, which could include offering an accelerated curriculum, smaller class sizes for more personalized instruction, or specialized training that goes beyond the basic state requirements.

The structure and duration of existing programs also vary, indicating a segmented student market. FMTC and CCTC offer "articulated" programs that are 165 hours long, comprising 90 hours of Basic Healthcare Worker training and 75 hours of Nurse Aide training.⁵ This model creates a clear educational pathway for students interested in advancing to other health science programs. Conversely, other programs can be completed in as little as four weeks, while LWTC's program is a 15-week course.⁷ This variation in program length suggests that a new school should carefully consider its target audience—whether it's students seeking a comprehensive education and a pathway to further study or those prioritizing a fast track to employment. A shorter, more focused CNA-only program could attract the latter group, offering a quicker return on investment for students.

Table 1: Comparative Analysis of CNA Schools in the Fort Myers Region

School Name	Location	Estimated Total Cost	Program Duration	Key Admission Requirements	Program Structure
-------------	----------	----------------------	------------------	----------------------------	-------------------

Fort Myers Technical College (FMTC)	Fort Myers, FL ⁵	~\$1,290 + additional fees ⁵	165 hours (approx. 6 weeks) ⁵	18+ or high school diploma/GED ⁵	Articulated (Basic Healthcare Worker + Nurse Aide) ⁵
Cape Coral Technical College (CCTC)	Cape Coral, FL ⁶	~\$1,255 ⁶	165 hours (approx. 6 weeks) ⁶	18+ or high school diploma/GED ⁶	Articulated (Basic Healthcare Worker + Nurse Aide) ⁶
Lorenzo Walker Technical College (LWTC)	Naples, FL ⁷	Not specified	15 weeks ⁷	Not specified, though likely similar to others ⁷	IET Career Pathway (CNA) ⁷
Horizon Healthcare Institute (HHI)	Fort Myers & other locations ⁸	~\$800-\$850 + fees ¹⁰	4 weeks or 120 hours ¹⁰	17+ or high school diploma/GED ; TABE test if no diploma ¹³	Hybrid Certified Nursing Assistant Classes ⁹

Note: Costs are based on available information and may not represent the final total. A comprehensive breakdown of additional fees is necessary for an accurate comparison.

4.0 Comprehensive Cost Analysis for Prospective CNA Students

4.1 Tuition and Core Program Fees

The tuition for CNA programs in the region can vary significantly, from a low of approximately \$1,255 at CCTC to around \$1,290 at FMTC.⁵ Other programs may range from \$300 to \$3,000 in total tuition costs.¹⁴ These figures are often not all-inclusive. For example, specific fees such as an application fee (\$50 at FMTC) ⁵, an entrance exam fee (\$45) ¹⁵, and a registration fee (\$80) ¹⁵ are often billed separately. The

existence of free, employer-sponsored programs, primarily offered by nursing homes and hospitals in exchange for a work commitment, is a notable market dynamic that must be considered.¹⁴ This model appeals to a segment of the population that is highly price-sensitive. A new private school could either price competitively with public institutions or, for a higher price point, justify the cost with a superior program that offers job placement assistance with a reputable company like Comfort Keepers.

4.2 Ancillary Costs and Hidden Expenses

Beyond the advertised tuition, prospective students face a range of additional expenses that can add hundreds of dollars to the total cost. These can include:

- **State Exam Fees:** The Florida CNA exam costs \$155.¹⁴
- **Background Check and Fingerprinting:** Fees typically range from \$50 to \$100.¹⁴ A Level 2 background screen and drug test, required by many programs, can add an additional \$100.⁵
- **Immunizations and Physical Exams:** This can cost between \$100 and \$200.¹⁴ A two-step TB skin test and required titers may cost approximately \$45.⁵
- **Uniforms and Supplies:** Scrubs, non-slip shoes, and other necessary equipment can add \$30 to \$100.¹⁴
- **CPR Certification:** This is often a separate requirement with an estimated cost of \$30 to \$75.¹⁴

These "hidden" costs can be a significant source of stress for students. A new school can build a reputation for transparency and student support by providing a clear, itemized breakdown of all potential costs from the outset. Offering these items as a bundled package or providing direct assistance in navigating these requirements could create a positive enrollment experience and serve as a key differentiator.

4.3 Financial Aid and Funding Options

Access to financial assistance is a crucial component of a CNA program's accessibility and success. Local technical colleges participate in federal and state grant programs, such as the Federal Pell Grant and the Florida Public Postsecondary Career Education Student Assistance Grant (FSAG-CE), which are essential for many students.¹⁷ For a

new school, gaining approval to accept these forms of financial aid is not merely a benefit but a strategic necessity that broadens the potential student pool. The business plan for a new school must include the process and timeline for becoming an approved institution for these programs.

Additionally, local organizations offer hyper-local funding sources. For example, the auxiliaries of Cape Coral Hospital and Gulf Coast Medical Center budget over \$165,000 annually to assist individuals pursuing healthcare careers through an application process.¹⁸ Partnering with or publicizing these types of grants can provide an additional layer of financial support for students and foster a strong community presence for the new school.

Part II: The Definitive Guide to Establishing a New CNA School in Florida

5.0 The Florida Regulatory Framework: A Multi-Agency Approach

Establishing a new CNA training program in Florida is a multi-step process governed by two primary state agencies: the Florida Board of Nursing (FBON) and the Florida Department of Education (DOE), specifically its Commission on Independent Education (CIE). The process requires a new private school to obtain licensure from the CIE before seeking approval from the FBON.¹⁹ This dual-licensure mandate is the most significant regulatory hurdle. It requires the preparation of two separate, detailed applications and a carefully sequenced approach to avoid delays. The entire process is codified in specific legal frameworks, including Chapter 464, Part II, Florida Statutes, and Rule 64B9-15, Florida Administrative Code.¹⁹ Meticulous attention to these statutes and rules is essential for a successful application.

Table 2: Florida Board of Nursing Application Checklist

Section of Application	Required Documentation and	Relevant Florida Statute/Rule
------------------------	----------------------------	-------------------------------

	Policies	
Governing Body/Sponsoring Institution	Official school name, ownership (if private), evidence of DOE/CIE approval, student & faculty policies and procedures.	Rule 64B9-15.005(1), F.A.C. ¹⁹
Training Program	Description of purpose, goals, and objectives.	Rule 64B9-15.005(1)(a), F.A.C. ¹⁹
Finance/Physical Facilities	Evidence of sufficient finances and resources, supply list, diagrams of classrooms and labs.	Rule 64B9-15.005(4), F.A.C. ¹⁹
Student Policies	Policies for attendance, grading, record maintenance, fees, financial aid, and grievance procedures.	Rule 64B9-15.005(1)(d), F.A.C. ¹⁹
Faculty Policies	Qualifications and duties of the Program Coordinator and Instructors, faculty-to-student ratio policy.	Rule 64B9-15.005(3), F.A.C. ¹⁹
Clinical Agency/Facilities	List of all facilities, services utilized, number of students, and written clinical affiliation agreements.	Rule 64B9-15.006(2), F.A.C. ¹⁹
Curriculum	Course outline, syllabi, objectives, content (didactic/lab/clinical hours), teaching methods, textbooks (within 5 years), clinical skills checklist.	Rule 64B9-15.006, F.A.C. ¹⁹

6.0 Step-by-Step Application to the Florida Board of Nursing (FBON)

6.1 Phase 1: Pre-Application Requirements and Planning

The initial phase of the process is focused on meeting a series of critical prerequisites before the FBON application can be submitted. The most significant is obtaining a license from the DOE's Commission on Independent Education for a private school.¹⁹ This is not an optional step and typically involves its own set of requirements. Additionally, the applicant must demonstrate sufficient financial resources to sustain the program and provide a supply list for all required equipment.¹⁹ This requires a significant capital investment upfront. Furthermore, a new school must have secured a written agreement with a licensed nursing home or a long-term care facility for the mandatory clinical instruction portion of the curriculum.¹⁹ These preliminary steps are designed to ensure that only serious and well-resourced applicants proceed, and they represent key operational milestones that must be reached before any paperwork is filed.

6.2 Phase 2: Compiling the Comprehensive Application Dossier

The FBON application is a structured document that requires an extensive compilation of detailed information, as outlined in Table 2. Each section, from the description of the Governing Body and its approval of policies to a full curriculum blueprint and a detailed list of clinical facilities, must be meticulously prepared.¹⁹ For example, the curriculum must contain specific items such as course objectives, a breakdown of didactic and clinical hours, and a clinical skills checklist.¹⁹ All student and faculty policies must be in writing and show evidence of Governing Board approval.¹⁹ The physical presentation of the application is also critical, with the Board specifying that pages should be secured with rubber bands, not placed in a binder or stapled.¹⁹ This seemingly minor detail is a testament to the Board's stringent quality control measures, which serve to ensure that the applicant is professional and detail-oriented.

6.3 Phase 3: Submission and Review Timeline

Once the application is submitted, a clear review timeline is in place. The Florida Board of Nursing staff will review the application within 30 days to check for any errors or omissions and provide written notification.¹⁹ The clock for a final approval or denial decision, which must be made within 90 days, only begins once a

complete application has been received and acknowledged by the Board.¹⁹ This means that any errors or missing information in the initial submission could significantly delay the final approval, impacting the planned program launch and enrollment schedule. Getting the application right the first time is therefore paramount to ensuring a timely and successful outcome.

7.0 Programmatic and Operational Blueprint

7.1 Faculty Qualifications: The Cornerstone of Quality

The qualifications for the Program Coordinator and instructors are highly specific and non-negotiable. The Program Coordinator must hold a clear and active professional nursing license in Florida, have two years of professional nursing experience, and one year of experience in nursing home services.¹⁹ This requirement ensures that the program is led by an individual with direct, hands-on experience in the long-term care environment. Program instructors must also hold an active professional or practical nursing license in Florida, have at least one year of professional experience, and either have one year of experience teaching adults, have completed a teaching adults course, or have one year of experience supervising nursing assistants.¹⁹ These stringent requirements are a direct reflection of the state's commitment to quality and safety in CNA education. For a new school, attracting and retaining this qualified talent pool is a significant operational cost and is directly tied to the program's reputation and ability to produce skilled graduates.

7.2 The Clinical Partnership Imperative

A crucial component of the program is the clinical instruction. Florida regulations mandate a total of 40 hours of clinical instruction, with a minimum of 20 hours taking place in a licensed nursing home or long-term care facility.¹⁹ To fulfill this, a new school must secure formal, written clinical affiliation agreements with these facilities.¹⁹ This process is a significant business development task, as a new school must actively negotiate these partnerships with local healthcare providers. Leveraging an existing network, such as the one held by a home care provider like Comfort Keepers, could provide a distinct advantage in this area. Securing an agreement with a large healthcare system, like Baptist Health, which offers "priority placement" to students from partner schools, can also be a powerful marketing tool for student recruitment, as it guarantees valuable, hands-on experience and a potential pathway to future employment.²³

7.3 Curriculum and Training Standards

The curriculum must adhere to a strict set of standards. The total program length must be a minimum of 120 hours, including 80 hours of classroom/didactic instruction and 40 hours of clinicals.²¹ A key regulatory detail is that students must complete a minimum of 16 hours of classroom instruction in foundational topics, such as communication, infection control, and safety, before they are permitted any direct contact with a resident.¹² This requirement impacts the program's scheduling and must be factored into the overall program calendar. The curriculum itself must be comprehensive, covering a broad range of topics from basic patient care and geriatric practices to anatomy, legal responsibilities, and emergency procedures.¹²

8.0 Financial and Business Planning for a New School

8.1 Estimating Startup and Operational Costs

While specific, all-inclusive figures for starting a CNA school in Florida are not available, the regulatory requirements provide a clear framework for a comprehensive startup budget. Based on the requirements for physical facilities, qualified staff, and legal processes, the startup costs will include, but are not limited to, the following:

- **Regulatory Fees:** Application fees for both the Florida Board of Nursing and the Department of Education/CIE.
- **Legal and Consulting Fees:** Costs associated with legal counsel to review contracts and ensure compliance with all state statutes and administrative codes.
- **Facility Costs:** Lease or purchase of a physical location, along with renovation and setup costs for classrooms and a skills laboratory.
- **Equipment and Supplies:** Purchase of all necessary medical equipment, teaching aids, and supplies.
- **Initial Payroll:** Salaries and benefits for the Program Coordinator, instructors, and administrative staff.

The business plan must account for these substantial initial investments. While seminars and online courses on starting a CNA school may cost between \$30 and \$2,500 ²⁴, these figures are for informational resources and do not represent the full startup capital required for a licensed and operational institution.

Table 3: Estimated Startup and Student Costs for a New CNA School

Category	Estimated Cost Range	Description
Business Startup Costs	Varies significantly	Includes regulatory fees (FBON, DOE/CIE), legal counsel, facility lease/renovation, equipment, and initial staff

		salaries. A significant capital investment is required to meet the "sufficient finances and resources" requirement.					
Total Student Costs	\$715-\$3,730 ¹⁴	Tuition & Program Fees: \$300-\$3,000 ¹⁴	State Exam Fees: \$155 ¹⁴	Background Check/Fingerprinting: \$50-\$100 ¹⁴	Immunizations/Physical Exam: \$100-\$200 ¹⁴	CPR Certification: \$30-\$75 ¹⁴	Uniforms/Supplies: \$30-\$100 ¹⁴

Conclusion: Strategic Insights and Actionable Recommendations

9.0 Synthesis of Findings and Strategic Blueprint

The CNA training market in the greater Fort Myers region is an active, competitive landscape with a clear demand for skilled healthcare workers. For a home care provider, establishing a CNA school is a highly strategic endeavor that can create a self-sustaining pipeline of quality caregivers. However, the path to licensure is arduous, requiring a deep understanding of Florida's regulatory framework and a proactive approach to operational planning. The success of a new school hinges on

its ability to navigate the complex dual-approval process, forge strong clinical partnerships, and develop a financial model that is both competitive and transparent.

9.1 Actionable Recommendations

- **A. Dual Regulatory Strategy:** The single most critical action is to prioritize the two-part regulatory process. The Florida Department of Education (CIE) licensure for a private school must be the first major milestone, followed by the detailed application to the Florida Board of Nursing. The business plan should be structured around these two distinct phases, with a clear timeline for each.
- **B. Competitive Differentiation:** A new school should not attempt to compete on price alone against established, subsidized public colleges. Instead, it should create a compelling value proposition. This could involve offering an accelerated, CNA-only program to attract students seeking fast entry into the workforce, or leveraging a direct partnership with Comfort Keepers to offer guaranteed job placement upon certification.
- **C. Clinical Partnership as a Core Asset:** Securing a clinical affiliation agreement is a prerequisite for state approval and should be treated as a key business development initiative. The new school should proactively engage with local licensed nursing homes and long-term care facilities, leveraging the existing network of Comfort Keepers to build these relationships. A strong clinical partnership can be a powerful marketing tool for recruitment and is essential for meeting the mandatory training hours.
- **D. Financial Planning:** Develop a comprehensive financial model that accounts for all startup and operational costs, including a realistic budget for facility build-out and the salaries of highly qualified faculty. A transparent fee structure for students, including a breakdown of all ancillary costs, will build trust. Simultaneously, the school should immediately begin the process of becoming an approved institution for federal and state financial aid to broaden its potential student base.

Works cited

1. In Home Senior Care Lee County, FL - Comfort Keepers, accessed August 12, 2025, <https://www.comfortkeepers.com/offices/florida/fort-myers/areas-served/area/lee-county-fl/>
2. In-Facility Home Care Services for Seniors in Ft. Myers, FL - Comfort Keepers,

- accessed August 12, 2025,
<https://www.comfortkeepers.com/offices/florida/fort-myers/care-services/specialized-care/in-facility-care/>
3. Comfort Keepers | In-Home Care, accessed August 12, 2025,
<https://www.comfortkeepers.com/>
 4. In-Home Senior Care in Fort Myers, FL | Comfort Keepers, accessed August 12, 2025,
<https://www.comfortkeepers.com/offices/florida/fort-myers/areas-served/area/fort-myers-fl/>
 5. Nursing Assistant (Articulated) – Fort Myers Technical College, accessed August 12, 2025,
<https://fortmyerstech.edu/programs/health-science/nursing-assistant-articulated/>
 6. Nursing Assistant Articulated – Cape Coral Technical College, accessed August 12, 2025, <https://capecoraltech.edu/course/nursing-assistant-articulated/>
 7. CNA / CNA, accessed August 12, 2025,
<https://www.collierschools.com/Page/18708>
 8. Horizon Healthcare Institute | Nursing School | Three Florida ..., accessed August 12, 2025, <https://www.hhi.education/>
 9. Hybrid Certified Nursing Assistant Classes - Horizon Healthcare Institute - Fort Myers, accessed August 12, 2025,
<https://dreambound.com/school/horizon-healthcare-institute-fort-myers-fort-myers-fl/certified-nursing-assistant>
 10. Horizon Healthcare Institute - Florida CNA Training - CaregiverList.com, accessed August 12, 2025,
<https://www.caregiverlist.com/certified-nursing-aide-school-training/Florida/Ft.-Myers/Horizon-Healthcare-Institute>
 11. Horizon Healthcare Institute - Florida CNA Training - CaregiverList.com, accessed August 12, 2025,
<https://www.caregiverlist.com/certified-nursing-aide-school-training/Florida/Melbourne/Horizon-Healthcare-Institute>
 12. CNA Certification FL | Getting a Florida CNA License - CNA Training, accessed August 12, 2025, <https://www.cnaonlinecourse.com/florida-cna-certification>
 13. Nursing Assistant Program | Training Courses | Fort Myers FL - Horizon Healthcare Institute, accessed August 12, 2025,
<https://www.hhi.education/nurse-assistant-na>
 14. How Much Does It Cost to Become a CNA in Florida?, accessed August 12, 2025,
<https://cnaclassesintampa.com/how-much-does-it-cost-to-become-a-cna-in-florida/>
 15. Nursing Assistant | Brevard Nursing Academy | United States, accessed August 12, 2025, <https://www.brevardnursingacademy.com/nursing-assistant>
 16. How Much Does It Cost to Become a CNA? Cost Breakdown - Florida Health Care Academy, accessed August 12, 2025,
<https://www.fhcaorlando.com/blog/certified-nursing-assistant-classes-cost>
 17. Financial Aid - Fort Myers Technical College, accessed August 12, 2025,

- <https://fortmyerstech.edu/about-fmtc/financial-aid/>
18. Grants & Scholarships | For Volunteers - Lee Health, accessed August 12, 2025, <https://www.leehealth.org/for-volunteers/grants-scholarships>
 19. New Nursing Assistant Training Program Application, accessed August 12, 2025, <https://floridasnursing.gov/applications/nursing-assistant-training-application.pdf>
 20. How to Become a CNA Instructor in Florida: 4 Steps to This Rewarding Role, accessed August 12, 2025, <https://www.rasmussen.edu/degrees/nursing/blog/how-to-become-a-cna-instructor-in-florida/>
 21. Florida CNA Requirements - NursingHome411, accessed August 12, 2025, <https://nursinghome411.org/cna-regs/regs-fl/>
 22. Certified Nursing Assistant Syllabus - Pinellas County Schools, accessed August 12, 2025, <https://www.pcsb.org/cms/lib/FL01903687/Centricity/Domain/8183/CNA%20Syllabus%2018-19%20Final.pdf>
 23. Academic Partners | Baptist Health South Florida, accessed August 12, 2025, <https://baptisthealth.net/academics/why-choose-baptist-health/academic-partners>
 24. FLORIDA: How To Start A CNA School (Mini Course) - The Secret Cocktail University, accessed August 12, 2025, <https://thesecretcocktail.teachable.com/p/start-a-cna-school-in-florida-mini-course>
 25. Start a CNA Training School In Florida Seminar (August 16-18, 2024) Payment Plan, accessed August 12, 2025, <https://thesecretcocktail.com/product/start-a-cna-school-in-florida-seminar-august-16-18-2024-payment-plan/>