

The Health Professionals Prescribing Pathway

The Health Professionals Prescribing Pathway (HPPP) provides a nationally consistent approach to the prescribing of medicines by health professionals registered under the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme other than medical practitioners.

The HPPP includes:

- Principles for health professionals that prescribe.
- Steps that a health professional must complete to undertake safe and competent prescribing.
- Safe models of prescribing for health professionals.
- Roles and responsibilities in the HPPP.

Quality use of medicines

The HPPP sits within the context of the National Strategy for the Quality Use of Medicines¹. Quality Use of Medicines means: selecting medication management options wisely; choosing suitable medicines if a medicine is considered necessary; and using medicines safely and effectively to achieve the best possible outcomes. This strategy recognises that the quality use of medicines is based on:

1. the primacy of consumers
2. active and respectful partnerships
3. consultative, collaborative, multidisciplinary activity
4. support for existing activity
5. systems-based approaches.

Important definitions in the HPPP

Medicines: therapeutic goods that are represented to achieve, or are likely to achieve, their principal intended action by pharmacological, chemical, immunological or metabolic means in or on the body of a human or animal.

Person: covers patient, consumer and client.

Prescriber: a health practitioner authorised to undertake prescribing within their scope of practice.

Prescribing*: an iterative process involving the steps of information gathering, clinical decision making, communication and evaluation which results in the initiation, continuation or cessation of a medicine.

Scope of practice: the area and extent of practice for an individual health professional, usually defined by a regulator, a profession or employer, after taking into consideration the health professional's education, training, experiences, expertise and demonstrated competency.

*The definition of prescribing used in the HPPP may be different to the definition of prescribing provided in the legislation governing the use of medicines in each jurisdiction. Health professionals are advised to review the legislation in effect in the State or Territory in which they practice to ensure they understand their legal authorisation to prescribe medicines.

Principles of the Health Professionals Prescribing Pathway

The HPPP is based on the following principles:

- The health, wellbeing and safety of the person taking a medicine must be maintained at all times.
- Health professionals who prescribe are accountable for their actions.
- Health professionals authorised to prescribe undertake prescribing within their individual and professional scope of practice, and maintain the level of professional competence and ethical standards (including the separation of commercial interests) expected of their profession.
- Health professionals who prescribe commit to the safe and effective use of medicines as described by the *National Medicines Policy*.
- Health professionals involved in prescribing work in partnership with the person taking a medicine, their carers and other members of the health care team.

Steps to safe and competent prescribing

Health professionals must ensure they have completed the five steps in the HPPP to safely and competently prescribe. The five steps are:

Step 1: complete education and training

The health professional completes accredited prescribing education and training that is consistent with their scope of practice, and demonstrates the required level of competence.

A prescribing education and training program that a health professional undertakes must be part of an accredited program of study to the standards set by the Accreditation Council for the profession and approved by the National Board. Any standard set by the Accreditation Council should require that the prescribing education and training program includes a component of assessment of the essential competencies of the health professional to prescribe.

The prescribing competency framework developed by NPS Medicinewise² is the nationally recognised standard for prescribing education of health professionals. Accredited prescribing education and training programs must be aligned to the national prescribing competency framework.

Importantly, the professional context of the health professional, and their role in the prescribing process must also be considered in tailoring education to the needs of the health professional. Different models of prescribing may also guide the level of education required.

In practical terms prescribing education should be:

- Equitable, with sufficient capacity in the health and education sector to allow for access to quality education.
- Flexible, allowing for education to be delivered by different modalities.
- Effectual, providing quality clinically supervised practice to enhance learning.
- Assessable, to provide assurance of the competence of the practitioner.

Step 2: obtain recognition from the National Board of competence to prescribe

The health professional seeks and receives recognition of their competence to prescribe from their National Board, in accordance with the standards specified by the National Board.

The National Board recognises the competence of the health professional to prescribe medicines consistent with the health professional's scope of practice. There are two mechanisms by which the

National Board may recognise the health professional's competence to prescribe:

- Recognition that the primary qualification of registration is sufficient to prescribe medicines. This mechanism recognises prescribing as an inherent part of the scope of practice for the health professional.
- or
- Recognition via an endorsement to prescribe medicines, in accordance with Section 94 of the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law.

To support consistency between National Boards, registration standards to endorse a registered health professional to prescribe medicines should include three elements necessary for endorsement to be conferred:

1. The approved qualifications or assessments that will be used to recognise the competence of the health professional.
2. The supervised practice requirement that is required to be completed for a registered health professional to be endorsed, noting that this may be included in (1).
3. The imposition of restrictions for endorsement to prescribe, commensurate with the level of risk of the health professionals prescribing practice. Different models of prescribing may be instructive in terms of the level of education required.

Step 3: ensure authorisation to prescribe

The health professional is authorised to prescribe medicines by the relevant legislation and associated regulations provided by the state or territory in which the professional practices. Each state and territory has legislation that provides for certain health professionals to prescribe medicines. It is essential that health professionals understand which medicines they are authorised to prescribe prior to prescribing.

While legal authorisation to prescribe medicines is essential, health professionals should also ensure that any requirements set by their National Board, jurisdiction, health service or employer are met prior to prescribing.

Authorisation of a health professional to prescribe medicines by a jurisdiction or by a National Board does not confer approval to prescribe under the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS).

Step 4: prescribe medicines within scope of practice

The health professional prescribes within their scope of practice and a safe model of prescribing, working collaboratively with the person, their carer(s) (if applicable) and healthcare team for quality care of the person taking medicine.

The individual scope of practice of a health professional may be influenced by the:

- clinical settings and environment in which they practice including the requirements of health services or employers.
- level of their competence, noting that where the health needs of a person are not within the level of their competence, the health professional refers the person to a health professional with an appropriate scope of practice.
- legislative requirements of their jurisdiction and any standards / guidelines issued by the National Board.

The health professional also abides by the safety and quality requirements set by regulation, nationally recognised interprofessional standards, professional standards and the health service.

Requirements include:

- Codes of conduct set by the National Board, the profession or health service.
- Guidelines set by the jurisdiction, National Board, profession or health service on prescribing.
- Jurisdiction and health service policies that govern the use of medicines.
- Health service procedures that monitor the use of medicines and implement strategies to improve the safety and quality of medicines used.
- Australian Charter of Healthcare Rights.³

The critical elements to safe prescribing practice include:

- Communication between the health professional and person taking medicine in developing an agreed approach to treatment.
- Understanding the risks of a person being prescribed medicines by multiple health professionals, and making coordinated prescribing decisions with the person, their carers (if applicable) and other members of the health care team involved in the care of the person.
- Remaining within the boundaries of the health professional's scope of practice, and appropriate referring to another health professional for matters beyond the scope of practice of the health professional.
- Having appropriate access to diagnostic information, independent objective information and the medical history and records of the person (with their informed consent).
- Using appropriate technology such as electronic patient records and information systems with decision support to help health professionals, the person taking the medication and their carers to make informed treatment decisions and use medicines safely and effectively.
- Ensuring appropriate follow up systems are in place to assist in evaluating and monitoring treatment outcomes with the person or people involved.

National policies and standards support health services and health professionals to achieve safe and quality use of medicines. In particular, information on the quality use of medicines within the *National Medicines Policy*, and the Medication Safety Standard of the National Safety and Quality Health Service Standards⁴ provide important guidance for health services and health professionals on safe and quality use of medicines.

Step 5: maintain and enhance competence to prescribe

The health professional maintains and continuously develops their competence to prescribe medicines within their scope of practice, according to the requirements of their profession and employment.

Health professionals must take responsibility for maintaining competence to prescribe and continue to develop their skills and knowledge in prescribing. Health professionals should engage in reflective practice to evaluate and review their own performance in prescribing, and identify and address knowledge and skill needs. The basis for this reflection should be:

- the National Prescribing Competency Framework.
- developments in best practice for clinical care.
- compliance with continuing professional development and recency of practice standards and any requirements established by the National Board.
- guidelines on prescribing set by professional bodies.
- reports on medication incidents and adverse events.
- requirements of their employment (for example, the duty requirements of the health professionals position and the credentialing and recognition of privileges to support them to complete these duties).

In addition to the responsibilities of health professionals for maintaining competence, other parties with roles in the HPPP may have responsibilities to support the maintenance of the prescribing competence of health professionals. Responsibilities include providing support and resources for professional development, and monitoring of compliance with safety, quality and practice standards.

Safe models of prescribing by health professionals

Prescribing by health professionals may occur under different models of prescribing that recognise the diverse needs of people receiving medicines. In all cases, there is a need for safe and effective prescribing. In addition to the needs of people receiving medicines, other critical elements to safe prescribing models include:

- The competence of the health professionals involved in prescribing. Education must enable the health professional to obtain the required level of competence for their scope of practice.
- The legislative authorisation to allow a health professional to prescribe a medicine.
- The communication within a team of health professionals and the person taking medicine.

Safe prescribing models can be described in three categories:

1. **Autonomous prescribing.**

Prescribing occurs where a prescriber undertakes prescribing within their scope of practice without the approval or supervision of another health professional. The prescriber has been educated and authorised to autonomously prescribe in a specific area of clinical practice. Although the prescriber may prescribe autonomously, they recognise the role of all members of the health care team and ensure appropriate communication occurs between team members and the person taking medicine.

2. **Prescribing under supervision.**

Prescribing occurs where a prescriber undertakes prescribing within their scope of practice under the supervision of another authorised health professional. The supervised prescriber has been educated to prescribe and has a limited authorisation to prescribe medicines that is determined by legislation, requirements of the National Board and policies of the jurisdiction, employer or health service. The prescriber and supervisor recognise their role in their health care team and ensure appropriate communication occurs between team members and the person taking medicine.

3. **Prescribing via a structured prescribing arrangement.**

Prescribing occurs where a prescriber with a limited authorisation to prescribe medicines by legislation, requirements of the National Board and policies of the jurisdiction or health service prescribes medicines under a guideline, protocol or standing order. A structured prescribing arrangement should be documented sufficiently to describe the responsibilities of the prescriber(s) involved and the communication that occurs between team members and the person taking medicine.

Health professionals may work within more than one model of prescribing in their clinical practice.

Roles and responsibilities in the Health Professionals Prescribing Pathway

To ensure that prescribing is undertaken in a safe and effective manner, it is important that the roles and responsibilities of all parties are understood and fulfilled.

Role	Responsibility
Person (covers the terms patient, consumer and client)	- Share timely information on their health status and care including medicines with all nominated health providers. - Participate in decision making about their health needs and treatment options.
Consumer representatives	Participate and advocate for standards of health care and the professional prescribing practice of health professionals on behalf of consumers
Carer (this role could be an informal care role such as a family member or friend acting in an unpaid capacity; or a formal role such as a paid carer)	- Support the person within their care to manage their responsibilities in the prescribing of medicines. - For carers acting in a paid or employed capacity, perform the care duties that apply to medicines management as required by their employer.
Prescriber	- Complete education and training requirements consistent with the scope of the prescriber's practice. - Ensure any applicable requirements of the National Board have been met and the correct endorsement has been obtained prior to practice. - Be aware of and understands the state or territory legislation and regulation for the prescribing of medicines. - Engage in reflective practice to evaluate and review own performance, and manage professional development and maintenance of professional standards. - Meet requirement of job specification of employer and any clinical policies or guidelines. - Ensure personal practice includes: - adherence to policies and protocols for the safe and effective use of medicines - mechanisms to facilitate coordination of care across all care providers, including informing others of new medicines prescribed or changes to existing medicines. - use of objective evidence-based information sources - participation in quality use of medicine programs - awareness of and acting within personal scope of practice.
Education provider	- Develop and provide high quality, best practice and accredited education and training in prescribing. - Assess health professional's competence to prescribe. - Ensure prescribing education and training meets the needs of consumers and health professionals.
Health service or employer	- Support health professionals to receive education that supports their ability to fulfil health service requirements. - Develop, implement and monitor appropriate governance arrangements to

Role	Responsibility
	ensure safe prescribing practices occur in the health service.
National Board	- Recognise the competence of health professionals to prescribe. - Publish applicable standards, codes or guidelines to support the endorsement of health professionals to prescribe including recency of practice and continuing professional development requirements.
Accreditation Council	- Develop education and training standards for approval by the National Board. - Assess education providers and education programs against education and training standards, and the national prescribing competency framework.
Jurisdiction	- Develop, implement and maintain the legislation and regulation under which practitioners prescribe medicines. - Develop, implement and maintain public policies on safe and quality use of medicines.
Health professional association	- Develop and maintain professional practice standards and policies covering safe and effective practice (including professional development) for the profession. - Provide advice and support to the health system, consumers and health professionals on professional practice and prescribing.

References

1. *The National Strategy for the Quality Use of Medicines*. Department of Health and Ageing, Australian Government
2. *Prescribing Competency Framework*. NPS MedicineWise <http://www.nps.org.au/health-professionals/professional-development/prescribing-competencies-framework>
3. *Australian Charter of Healthcare Rights*. Australian Commission for Safety and Quality in Healthcare.
4. *National Safety and Quality Health Service Standards*. Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care (September 2012) <http://www.safetyandquality.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/NSQHS-Standards-Sept-2012.pdf>

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