

Fact sheet

Information for registered nurses and midwives: Practice in maternal, child and family health roles

Introduction

The Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia (NMBA) is part of the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme (the National Scheme) and undertakes functions set by the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law, as in force in each state and territory (the National Law). The NMBA regulates the professions of nursing and midwifery, and its primary role is to protect the public. The NMBA does this by developing registration standards, codes, guidelines and standards for practice which together establish the requirements for the safe and professional practice of nurses and midwives in Australia.

Key points

- Practice in maternal, child and family health roles require both registered nurses (RN) and/or midwives to broaden their individual scope of practice.
- Scope expansion may only occur within the contemporary scope of a RN and/or midwife's respective profession and where the standards for practice support the RN and/or midwife performing the activities.
- Application of the *Decision-making framework for nursing and midwifery* (DMF) and the *Midwife standards for practice* support that midwives without a nursing qualification may broaden their scope of practice to practise in maternal, child and family health roles when certain considerations (as described in the DMF) are addressed.
- Employers are responsible for ensuring their employees are suitably qualified and have the appropriate knowledge and skill to safely provide maternal, child and family health care within their service.

Background

The National Scheme protects the public by ensuring that all registered health professionals meet profession specific, high-quality national professional standards. In Australia, the titles of registered health practitioners are protected by law. This means that a person practising under the title of registered nurse (RN), enrolled nurse (EN) and/or midwife is appropriately trained and qualified in that profession, registered, and that they are expected to meet their profession's standards of practice.

National Boards do not set fixed scopes of practice for each profession, allowing flexibility for professions to evolve rather than constraining practitioners to a set of pre-defined tasks or a specific scope. For RNs and midwives, the [Code of conduct for nurses](#) and the [Code of conduct for midwives](#) place the responsibility on practitioners to exercise professional judgement and comply with their own scope of practice based on their individual education, training, competence and experience, in accordance with their terms of employment, local policy and broader legislative requirements.

Title protection

In Australia, the titles of registered health practitioners are 'protected' by law. Examples of protected titles include nurse, midwife, registered nurse, nurse practitioner and enrolled nurse. The NMBA recommends

the use of protected titles such as 'midwife' rather than the term 'registered midwife' and the abbreviation 'RM'. There is no special protection for the title 'maternal, child and family health nurse' and this is not a specific division in the nursing profession nor a specific type of registration. For further information on protected titles, please see the NMBA [Fact sheet: The use of health practitioner protected titles](#).

Purpose

The following information provides guidance to RNs and midwives (including midwives without a nursing qualification) seeking to expand their scope of practice into a maternal, child and family health role, and describes practitioners' regulatory and professional obligations when practising in this area.

Scope of practice

RNs and midwives in the National Scheme work within their own scope of practice based on their individual qualifications, skills and experience, and the ethical responsibilities and obligations set out in their standards for practice and code of conduct. This includes exercising professional judgement; recognising and working within the limits of their competence and contemporary scope of their profession; maintaining adequate knowledge and skills to provide safe and effective care; and practising in accordance with the current and accepted evidence base of their respective profession.

The scope of an individual RN and/or midwife's practice will vary depending on their education, the context in which the RN and/or midwife works, the health needs of the people, families and/or children receiving care, their level of competence/confidence and the policy requirements of the service provider. As RNs and midwives gain new skills and knowledge, their individual scope of practice will change.

For further information on the scope of practice of RNs and midwives, the NMBA has developed the [Fact sheet: Scope of practice and capabilities of nurses](#) and the [Fact sheet: Scope of practice and capabilities of midwives](#)

Scope of practice and maternal, child and family health

Practice in maternal, child and family health roles requires both RNs, dual qualified RN/midwives and midwives without a nursing qualification to broaden their individual scope of practice. It is acknowledged that for RNs and/or midwives to practice in more independent and autonomous maternal, child and family health roles, a postgraduate qualification, in addition to their entry to practice education program, is required for safe and effective practice.

Broadening scope of practice must only occur within the contemporary scope of the RN and/or midwife's respective profession and where the standards for practice support the RN and/or midwife performing the activities. For example, the [Midwife standards for practice](#) clarify that midwifery practice may extend to child and family health; noting that to extend their scope of practice beyond the initial postnatal period, midwives may only do so through additional education, competency and authorisation. In this context, authorisation refers to the legislative environment.

Scope of practice decision making

The NMBA's [Decision-making framework for nursing and midwifery](#) (the DMF) is an evidence-based document that should be used in conjunction with the NMBA's professional practice framework, policy, regulations and legislation to guide decision-making relating to scope of practice.

RNs and midwives planning to extend their individual scope of practice into a maternal, child and family health role should ensure:

- the extension is within the contemporary scope of a RN or midwife's practice and that the relevant standards for practice support the RN and/or midwife broadening their individual scope of practice into this area
- there is no legislative basis that would prevent the RN or midwife from practising in this area
- they are compliant with the NMBA standards, codes and guidelines
- they have the necessary postgraduate qualification, experience and confidence to safely practice in a maternal, child and family health role, and

- there is organisational support, sufficient staffing levels and appropriate skill mix (as appropriate for the context of practice) to enable the RN and/or midwife to deliver maternal, child and family health care safely.

The NMBA has developed the [Decision-making framework summary: Nursing](#) and the [Decision-making framework summary: Midwifery](#) which should be applied and read in conjunction with the DMF when considering scope of practice change.

Meeting your professional obligations when practising in maternal, child and family health

RNs and midwives are accountable for delivering safe, high-quality care at all times. To do this, RNs and midwives must ensure they are meeting their professional obligations and are practising in accordance with the NMBA's professional practice framework (PPF). Underpinned by the standards for practice, codes of conduct and the DMF, the PPF is an essential regulatory safeguard to protect the public. In accordance with the obligations set out in the PPF, RNs and midwives practising in maternal child and family health must:

- comply with the [code of conduct](#) relevant to their profession(s), for example, by engaging with children and families in a culturally safe and respectful way and providing care that is holistic, free of bias and racism
- comply with the NMBA [Recency of practice registration standard](#) for example, by demonstrating at least 450 hours of practice as a RN and/or midwife within the past five years. Practice in maternal, child and family health can be counted towards meeting recency of practice as both a RN and midwife
- comply with the NMBA [Continuing professional development registration standard](#) for example, by completing at least of 20 hours of CPD per registration period and profession, and
- comply with the NMBA [Professional indemnity insurance registration standard](#). All RNs and midwives who practice in maternal, child and family health must ensure all aspects of their practice are covered by professional indemnity insurance (PII).

Responsibilities for employers

Employers of RNs and/or midwives practising in maternal, child and family health must ensure their employees hold current registration as a nurse and/or midwife with the NMBA. Registration details are available on the Ahpra online [register of practitioners](#).

The NMBA approves and publishes programs of study leading to registration and endorsement for RNs and midwives as required under the National Law. The NMBA is not involved in the approval, publication or regulation of postgraduate nursing or midwifery programs such as maternal, child and family health which are regulated separately i.e. in part, through the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TESQA).

As eligibility into, and content of maternal, child and family health qualifications vary across jurisdictions, the practice of RNs and/or midwives working in maternal, child and family health will not be the same at a national level. Employers are responsible for understanding and adhering to jurisdictional specific legislation and/or policy frameworks, and ensuring their employees are suitably qualified and have the appropriate knowledge and skill to safely provide maternal, child and family health care within their health service. This includes maintaining ongoing processes to periodically review the performance of all regulated health practitioners, including RNs and midwives practising in this area.

Employers also have a shared regulatory responsibility to ensure that newly employed RNs and midwives practising in this area have appropriate professional development and support to ensure a safe transition into maternal, child and family health as a novice practitioner. This extends to ensuring there are sufficient resources to enable safe practice, relevant policies and procedures are available to guide best practice and there are sufficient opportunities for the provision of regular and constructive feedback.

Document history

Approved by: The Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia

History:

Approval date	Version	Reason for change
27 March 2025	2.0	New factsheet published following previous version being rescinded.