

Fact sheet

14 August 2020

Nurses and/or midwives changing their clinical context of practice in response to COVID-19

Background

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

The role of the NMBA is to protect the public by ensuring that anyone who is registered as a nurse and/or midwife is safe and competent to practice. A key requirement is that the nurse and/or midwife can demonstrate that they meet the relevant NMBA-approved standards for practice and registration standards.

This fact sheet addresses important considerations for nurses and midwives who have been asked or need to change their clinical context of practice a result of the COVID-19 pandemic response.

Who this fact sheet is for?

This fact sheet applies to nurses and midwives who are changing their clinical context of practice as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic response.

This fact sheet should also be used by health services in the process of recruiting, employing and supporting nurses and midwives who are changing their clinical context of practice as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic response.

COVID-19

As demand on healthcare resources escalate, nurses and midwives may seek to or, be asked to change their context of clinical practice to support the COVID-19 response, for example from acute surgical to aged care, general medical to intensive care. Nurses and midwives should use their professional judgment to assess risk and determine what is reasonable in current circumstances and ensure they are safe and competent to practice, as able, in that changed context of practice.

What should nurses and midwives consider when changing their context of practice?

Each nurse and/or midwife should reflect on and make an assessment of their professional competence and capability to safely deliver care in the changed practice context in which they are being asked to work. Competence is the combination of knowledge, skills, attitudes, values and abilities that underpin effective performance in a profession.

When considering competence and capability for a new clinical practice context, it is important nurses and midwives reflect on their recent experience, current skills and knowledge. Nurses and midwives can support the safe application of their current skills, knowledge and experience in a new practice context by:

- reflecting on the purpose of the change, the skills they bring to the new practice environment and any knowledge or practice gaps that will need increased support,

- collaborating, communicating early and regularly seeking support from senior staff when gaps are identified,
- seeking out opportunities to refresh knowledge and upskill in unfamiliar areas of clinical practice,
- engaging in reflective practice and regularly seeking feedback from nursing and/or midwifery leadership and colleagues,
- reading and applying local clinical practice guidelines, policies and procedures, and
- reading and referring to professional documents such as the Aged Care Quality Standards, the National Safety and Quality Health Service (NSQHS) standards, the NMBA Standards for practice, the NMBA Code of conduct and International Council of Nurses' (ICN) Code of ethics to guide their practice.

The NMBA is aware of the context of practice flexibility required for those working outside their usual clinical roles in this emergency. If a concern is raised about your decisions and actions, as always, the specific facts will be considered, including the factors relevant to your working environment. The NMBA will also take account of any relevant information about resources, guidelines or protocols in place at the time.

Considerations for health services

The NMBA recognises that demand for nurses and midwives is escalating in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The NMBA supports nurses and midwives to change their context of practice with the support of health service employers. When considering supporting nurses and midwives in changed practice contexts, the following factors should be considered:

- nurse and/or midwife's educational preparation, experience, capacity and competence to safely perform changed nursing/midwifery duties autonomously or with supervision,
- health service capacity to support appropriate supervision of the nurse and/or midwife including available skill mix, model of care and staffing levels, and
- health service capacity to employ or transition the nurse and/or midwife into a practice setting/ward that is most relevant/connected to their current role, or practice setting/ward which the practitioner self-reports a level of confidence and/or proficiency in.

Scope of practice

The NMBA understands that health services are likely to need to call on nurses and midwives to practise outside their usual scope or context to meet unprecedented demand. Under the *Health Practitioner National Law Act*, the NMBA does not regulate the scope of practice of nurses and midwives. Scope of practice should be managed between health practitioners, their employers, supervisors and colleagues.

Health services can rotate nursing and midwifery staff as necessary, but must ensure that they are working in roles that they have been educated in, trained in and are competent in. Where appropriate, they will also need to be receiving adequate supervision.

The NMBA's [Decision-making framework for nursing and midwifery](#) (the DMF) has been published to guide nurses, midwives and employers about changes to scope of practice.

For more information

The following pages on the NMBA website contain useful information for nurses and midwives and employers:

- [Registration standards](#)
- [Registration and endorsements](#)
- [Professional codes and guidelines](#)
- Visit www.nursingmidwiferyboard.gov.au under *Contact us* to lodge an online enquiry form
- For registration enquiries: 1300 419 495 (within Australia) +61 3 9275 9009 (overseas callers)

Document control

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This fact sheet will expire in 12 months from the commencement date unless otherwise specified.