

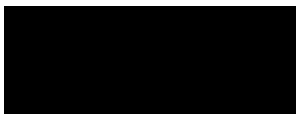


Australian College
of Mental Health Nurses

**Submission to the Australian
Health Practitioners Regulation
Agency (Ahpra) and Nursing and
Midwifery Board of Australia
(NMBA).**

**Draft Registration standard: General registration for
internationally qualified registered nurses**

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Our organisation

Australian College of Mental Health Nurses

The Australian College of Mental Health Nurses (ACMHN) is the peak professional organisation representing mental health nurses in Australia. A primary objective of the ACMHN is to enhance the mental health of the community through the pursuit of efforts to improve service and care delivery to those affected by mental illness and disorder. The ACMHN also sets standards of practice for the profession and promotes best practice of mental health nursing.

The College is recognised in Federal legislation across all jurisdictions and represents the interests of mental health nurses (MHN) nationally and internationally with the International Council of Nurses (ICN) and has done so for close to 50 years.

Universities offering MHN postgraduate study seek accreditation from ACMHN to ratify the training standards of MHN.

As a Peak nursing body, we sit on the Nursing and Midwifery Strategic Reference Group, we have legal standing on a variety of Board at Director level including with the Mental Health Professional Network (MHPN) and to be finalised as one of the four organisations on the National Nurse and Midwife Health Service Advisory Group.

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Executive Summary

The process of overseas nurses registering in Australia is a broad process that favours being generic. For the purposes of this submission the Australian College of Mental Health Nurses seeks to guide applicants to relevancy across two levels.

- 1) Credentialed Mental Health Nurse (CMHN)
- 2) Provisionally Credentialed Mental Health Nurse (PCMHN)

The highest standard in the CMHN is outline later in this submission and features recognition of years of experience, a recognition of prior learning (RPL), and recognition of qualifications as outlined.

The base line early career standard of the PCMHN also recognises limited experience, some RPL and seeks to confirm a minimum of a postgraduate certificate level study in mental health nursing.

1. Definition of CMHN

What is a Credentialed Mental Health Nurse (CMHN)

Mental Health Nurses (MHN) have a base qualification of Bachelor of Health Science Nursing, then complete a 12 month clinical graduate year followed by a post graduate diploma in mental health nursing, all of which is 6 years to complete. The Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA) identifies MHN as Registered Nurses (RN) therefore the Australian College of Mental Health Nurses (ACMHN) provide a Credentialing program to differentiate MHN from other Registered Nurses (RN). Credentialed Mental Health Nurses (CMHN) provide services across urban, regional and rural settings, acute and crisis services, primary care and private practice.

CMHN workforce in primary care has declined following the discontinuation of the Medicare Mental Health Nurse Incentive Program (MHNIP) in 2016. MHN are highly qualified and skilled mental health professional workforce of 25000, many who have further qualifications in developmental disorders and specialise in ADHD.

CMHN scope of practice:

- Specialised MH, physical and risk assessment, intervention for suicidality, self-harm, and aggression management.
- Psychotherapy, counselling and focussed psychological interventions
- Physical health assessment, monitoring and linkage with health care services
- Medication monitoring, management, and administration
- Care coordination and multi-disciplinary teamwork.

Credentialed Mental Health Nurses:

Qualifications, scope of practice & evidence base

The CMHN scope of practice takes account of all aspects of a person's life that may be contributing to the development and maintenance of a mental illness, and to their opportunities for recovery including biological, psychological and social factors.

The qualifications, training and experience of CMHN equips them with a unique clinical skill set to deliver the full range of mental health services - from screening and assessment, to (nursing diagnosis), treatment (including evidence based psychological therapy 'talking therapy') and partnering for recovery - for people across the age and illness spectrum, experiencing, mild, moderate and severe mental health conditions.

As Registered Nurses, CMHN are also able to identify and respond to the physical/medical co-morbidities frequently developed by people with psychiatric illness - including co-occurring physical health conditions, medication and pain management - as well as any barriers which could reduce or interfere with clinical mental health treatment outcomes (such as co-occurring poor physical health, medication side effects and/or social factors). This uniquely integrated skillset of specially qualified mental health nurses has also been recognised internationally (Delaney et al, 2017).

This unique clinical skill set are of particular relevance to people with eating disorders, who are likely to experience complexities such as co-occurring and interrelated physical health, mental health and social factors which need to be considered and responded to in the context of delivering evidence based clinical mental health treatment interventions and care. Providing integrated mental and physical health care in this context presents an important opportunity to improve both the mental and physical health and wellbeing of the Australian community who experience an eating disorder.

The individual scope of practice of a CMHN frequently involves additional training in specific therapies (e.g. CBT, Dialectical Behaviour Therapy, ACT, family therapy etc) which are especially relevant for particular presentations often classified as more severe and complex requiring more intensive, specialised and prolonged treatment (e.g. eating disorders such as anorexia nervosa, suicidal and self-harm behaviours, borderline personality disorder etc).

Mental Health Nurse Practitioners (MHNP) (who may or may not be Credentialed) are also able to diagnose, order necessary diagnostic investigations to confirm mental health diagnosis, make referrals to specialists, prescribe and review psychotropic medications.

In addition to a relevant individual scope of practice, nursing is, in and of itself, always a collaborative endeavour. Mental health nurses work in collaboration with other members of the health care team, often taking on a care coordination role as well as a therapeutic treatment role, where relevant and appropriate. In Primary Care, CMHN work with a person's GP, the treating psychiatrist/paediatrician, dietitian and others, including the

persons family/carers, to plan, deliver and evaluate care that meets the person's biopsychosocial needs.

There are a range of mechanisms available to assure quality in mental health nursing services, including:

- The *ACMHN Standards of Practice for Australian Mental Health Nurses (2010)* specify the minimum level of performance standards required for a registered nurse practicing in any mental health setting).
- The *C4N National Credentialing Framework* specifies the qualifications, professional development and practice requirement to meet the standards of practice.
- The Nursing and Midwifery Code of Conduct and professional standards⁵, which are general standards applicable to all registered nurses, regardless of where they are employed)

Minimum qualifications, training and experience

Credentialed Mental Health Nurses (CMHN) are specialist mental health clinicians with specific qualifications, experience and professional development in mental health.

There are three educational/training pathways to becoming CMHN:

- **Pathway 1:** Holds a specialty mental health nursing qualification (Graduate Diploma, Clinical Masters, Doctorate)
- **Pathway 2:** Holds a combination of qualifications related to mental health, one of which must be cognate to mental health nursing in the sub-specialty (e.g. Grad Cert in Mental Health Nursing *plus* a Grad Cert in Child & Adolescent Mental Health)
- **Pathway 3:** For nurses who undertook a specialist post basic hospital course recognized by the specialty organisation, or were registered as specialist nurses by previous Australian nursing registration authorities (obtained in Australia prior to 2004 or overseas).

In addition to the formal qualification training specified above, CMHN must also:

- **Demonstrate recency of practice in the specialty:** evidence of working a minimum of 12 weeks full time equivalent over the preceding 12 months or the equivalent length of experience over the preceding two years, or over the preceding three years in the area of specialty
- **Demonstrate length of experience in the specialty:** Provide evidence of duration of practice of a minimum of 12 months FTE experience since having undertaken a specialist / postgraduate qualification; or a minimum of 3 years FTE experience as a registered nurse in mental health, if the qualifications were completed within the preceding 12 months.
- **Provide evidence of completion of a minimum of 50 hrs CPD per year** (min 20 hrs mental health professional education, min 20 hrs mental health practice development e.g. clinical supervision; plus up to 10 hrs non MHN related CPD)

Evidence for Credentialed Mental Health Nursing services

CMHN have demonstrated great aptitude, value and competence in facilitating tangible and meaningful outcomes for people experiencing mental illness and this has been recognised in the literature (Delaney et al, 2017; McLeod, 2017; Lakeman, 2013; Richards, 2013, Happel et al 2010).

In an evaluation of a mental health nurse-led primary care liaison service in England, McLeod et al (2017) reported improved quality, effectiveness and efficiency of mental

health care and recommended decision makers consider adopting the service more widely. In the United States, qualified and experienced ‘psychiatric mental health nurses’ working in primary care have been recognised for their role in improving accurate and timely identification of mental health conditions, reducing service costs and improving the quality of life of the people experiencing mental illness (Delaney et al, 2017).

Meanwhile in Australia, Evaluations of the Commonwealth funded Mental Health Nurse Incentive Program highlighted the strengths and valuable contributions of CMHN in primary care. Evidence of particular outcomes with people who have severe and complex mental illness included, for example, symptom reduction, improved coping, improved relationships, enhanced community participation, reduced hospitalisation or use of state-funded mental health services, better use of health services, improved physical health and medication management, less use of coercive interventions, among others (Lakeman 2013).

The strong evidence in support of wider access to CMHN services was also recognised by the National Mental Health Commission in its 2014 *Review of Mental Health Programmes and Services*. The Commission’s Report noted the value of the CMHN workforce and recommended that mental health nursing services in primary care be expanded.

The CMHN model of care and skillset is well suited to responding to the integrated mental, physical and social care needs of people experiencing an eating disorder in the community. Utilising the CMHN workforce to its full scope of practice through a revision to the MBS has enormous potential to improve both mental and physical health outcomes for people experiencing an eating disorder, as well as improve access to and affordable and highly qualified and skilled specialist mental health providers.

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2. Definition of PCMHN

Provisionally Credentialed Mental Health Nurse

What does it mean?

ENTRY CRITERIA TO HOLD A PROVISIONAL CREDENTIAL (PC)

- Be a Registered Nurse with the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA).
- Holds or is working toward the equivalent of a specialist MHN qualification at Post Graduate Certificate level. Those who have completed four units of a Graduate Diploma or Master would be considered to hold the equivalent of a Post Graduate Certificate. (See **Addendum** of recognised courses, qualifications, and equivalencies).
- Has the equivalent of 12 months full time experience practising as a Registered Nurse working in a mental health setting or providing services with people with lived experience of mental health challenges. This can be evidenced by producing any of the following: letter of appointment or other contractual agreements, signed letter of confirmation from unit manager, mental health nurse educator or employer.
- Is, or is willing to become a member of the ACMHN as a condition of being awarded Provisional Credential status.

Where supporting evidence for the above criteria is unclear or is contested, the application for Provisional Credential will be sent to the Chair of the Credentialing Committee for a final decision to award, or not. Additional information may be requested for any rejected application to be re-considered in the future.

ADDENDUM OF RECOGNISED COURSES, QUALIFICATIONS AND EQUIVALENCIES.

The ACMHN only names those higher education providers who have ACMHN Accreditation. Those institutions offering recognised post graduate courses are:

- Australian Catholic University
- Edith Cowan University
- Southern Cross University
- CQ University Australia
- Nan Tien Institute

Equivalent courses from higher education providers without ACMHN accreditation will be recognised for Provisional Credentialling.

The Graduate Certificate in Mental Health Nursing* (however titled), must include content on mental health nursing theory and practice, and mental health theory and practice, which is clearly evident in no less than 75% of the program of study.

The Graduate Certificate in Mental Health Nursing* (however titled) must be inclusive of mental health nursing curricula, and not just nursing and /or mental health curricula. The Graduate Certificate level is about preparing a nurse for mental health nursing practice at the novice level. The course outline and subjects must clearly state that at least 75% is in the area of mental health nursing.

Equivalency awards

All United Kingdom and Republic of Ireland New Graduates have already met the required placement experience and can be given Provisional Credentialling when they meet the remaining criteria.

Other UG courses with named specialist MHN component. Examples of this are Bachelor of Nursing undergraduate degrees with a named mental health nurse speciality.