



Primary healthcare position statement

1. Purpose

This position statement sets out the actions the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF) considers Australian governments should take to improve the provision of primary healthcare in Australia. It should be read with the ANMF position statements: *Medicare* and *Nurse practitioners*.

2. Definitions

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines **primary healthcare** as:¹

- essential healthcare that is universally accessible to individuals and families in the community at a cost that the community and country can afford
- the first level of a continuing healthcare process that is as close as possible to where people live and work
- the first level of contact that individuals, families and communities have with the national health system.

Medicare is Australia's publicly funded universal healthcare insurance system covering all Australian citizens; permanent residents; and citizens of countries with whom Australia has reciprocal healthcare access agreements who are living in Australia. Medicare pays for some of the costs of the essential healthcare that is listed on the Medicare Benefits Scheme (MBS).

3. Context

In Australia, primary healthcare plays an integral role in preventing ill-health and promoting public health. It deals with common and priority community health issues through services that provide care and treatment; rehabilitation and support; health promotion; chronic disease management; illness prevention; and community development. In so doing, it promotes self-reliance and resilience by encouraging community members to exercise control over the conditions that determine their health.

Nurses and midwives are the largest group of health practitioners working in primary healthcare.² They are skilled, educated, regulated and trusted health practitioners who understand the purpose and philosophy of primary healthcare and are committed to its goals. However, barriers prevent them from working to their full scope of practice and these barriers must be removed.

The barriers include:

- a lack of understanding about their educational preparation and scope of practice
- lack of funding
- resistance to change from health practitioner colleagues and other workers in the sector.³

¹ World Health Organization. *Declaration of Alma-Ata*. International conference on primary healthcare, Alma-Ata, USSR 6-12 September 1978. Available at <https://www.who.int/docs/default-source/documents/almaata-declaration-en.pdf>.

² Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. 2020. A profile of primary health care nurses. Available at: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/primary-health-care/a-profile-of-primary-care-nurses/contents/primary-health-care-nurses>.

³ Australian Primary Health Care Nurses Association. 2017. *Improving patient outcomes – primary health care nurses working to the full scope of practice* available at: <https://www.apna.asn.au/hub/news/improving-patient-outcomes---primary-health-care-nurses-working-to-the-breadth-of-their-scope-of-practice>.



Removing these barriers and encouraging more nurses and midwives to work in primary healthcare is essential for achieving improved population health. Doing so will:

- improve access to primary healthcare services for communities, especially rural and remote communities
- improve the management of chronic disease
- reduce demand on the acute hospital sector.

4. Position

It is the position of the ANMF that governments must:

1. invest in primary healthcare by funding research into, and implementing, health promotion and illness and injury prevention strategies that focus on the social determinants of health⁴
2. expand the role of nurses and midwives in primary healthcare to include working with communities on health promotion and illness and injury prevention
3. remove the legislative and funding barriers that prevent nurse practitioners from employment, including self-employment, in primary healthcare
4. grow the numbers of nurse practitioners employed in primary healthcare to improve community access to primary healthcare
5. enable nurse practitioners to access the Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) and block funding/incentive payments immediately
6. ensure national funding policies support models of primary healthcare that enable nurses and midwives to work to their full scope of practice.

5. Position statement management

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⁴ Australian Nursing Federation. 2009. *Primary health care in Australia: A nursing and midwifery consensus view*. Available at https://www.anmf.org.au/media/ytqhqa5z/phc_australia.pdf.