



Breastfeeding position statement

1. Purpose

This position statement sets out the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation's (ANMF) support for the *Australian national breastfeeding strategy: 2019 and beyond* and the responsibilities the ANMF considers nurses, midwives, health services and governments should meet to advance this strategy.¹

2. Definitions

Breastfeeding is the process of feeding a mother's breast milk to her infant, either directly from the breast or by expressing (pumping out) milk from the breast and feeding it to the infant with a bottle or cup.

3. Context

Promoting, protecting and supporting breastfeeding is a primary healthcare initiative with demonstrated short and long-term health benefits for infants, parents, families and communities.

The *Australian national breastfeeding strategy* recognises this and aims to 'build a society in which systems and settings support and value breastfeeding as the normal way to feed infants and young children'.²

It is the role and scope of practice of midwives and nurses – including maternal, child and family health nurses, general practice nurses and paediatric nurses – to protect, support and advocate for a positive breastfeeding culture.

4. Position

Responsibilities of nurses and midwives

It is the position of the ANMF that:

1. Breastfeeding parents and infants should have timely access to professional and expert breastfeeding help and support regardless of where they live or their social status.³
2. Midwives and nurses have a duty of care to provide evidence-based information and respectful support to all breastfeeding parents, partners and caregivers.
3. Midwives and nurses working with families should participate in professional development and continuous improvement opportunities to maintain a current, evidence-based knowledge of breastfeeding that includes the use of donor breastmilk, breastmilk banking, and the use of breastmilk substitutes.

¹ COAG Health Council. 2019. *Australian national breastfeeding strategy: 2019 and beyond*. Available at <https://www.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2022/03/australian-national-breastfeeding-strategy-2019-and-beyond.pdf>.

² *ibid*.

³ McFadden A, Gavine A, Renfrew MJ, Wade A, Buchanan P, Taylor JL, Veitch E, Rennie AM, Crowther SA, Neiman S, MacGillivray S. 2017. *Support for healthy breastfeeding mothers with healthy term babies*. Cochrane database of systematic reviews, Issue 2. Art. No: CD001141. DOI: 10.1002/14651858.CD001141.pub5. Available at <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/28244064/>.



Responsibilities of health services

It is the position of the ANMF that:

4. All maternity and early childhood community health and parenting services should, supernumerary to staffing ratios, employ midwives and nurses who have expertise in breastfeeding management to protect and promote the initiation, establishment and increased duration of breastfeeding.⁴
5. All maternity and early childhood community health and parenting services should implement the *Baby friendly health initiative* (BFHI) and have policies in place to:⁵
 - facilitate immediate and uninterrupted mother and baby skin-to-skin contact from birth
 - enable mothers and their infants to remain together 24 hours a day
 - support mothers to initiate breastfeeding as soon as possible after birth and to maintain breastfeeding and manage common difficulties
 - ensure breastfed newborns are not given any food or fluids other than breastmilk unless medically indicated
 - recognise the importance of non-breastfeeding parents and caregivers to successful breastfeeding and provide care to these supporters and help to recognise and respond to their infants' feeding cues
 - at every stage of care, incorporate culturally safe breastfeeding counselling that includes the importance of breastfeeding and how best to manage it; the risks of feeding bottles, teats and pacifiers; and the supports available after discharge for ongoing care
 - support staff to undertake continuing professional development to increase skills, knowledge and competence in providing comprehensive breastfeeding care.
6. All healthcare facilities should have a written breastfeeding policy that is routinely communicated to all staff and that:
 - promotes, protects and supports breastfeeding as the normal infant feeding method across all wards and units regardless of the area of practice
 - provides guidelines for breastfeeding management and the care of breastfeeding parents receiving treatment in non-maternity settings
 - includes contingencies for breastfeeding infants and children.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ BFHI Australia. 2020. *Baby friendly health initiative: Improving healthcare for babies, their mothers and families*. Available at <https://bfhi.org.au/>.



Responsibility of governments

It is the position of the ANMF that:

7. All Australian governments should:
 - adopt and comply fully with the World Health Organization *International code of marketing of breastmilk substitutes* and subsequent World Health Assembly (WHA) resolutions (collectively known as the Code).⁶
 - put appropriate legislation and regulations in place to give effect to the code and protect the community by ensuring:
 - infant formula is not marketed or distributed as an optimal preference to breastfeeding
 - the supply of free or low-cost samples of breast milk substitutes is not visible to clients attending any healthcare facility in Australia
8. All Australian governments should invest in breastfeeding research and national data collection to protect, promote and support increased initiation and duration of breastfeeding.
9. All Australian governments should protect the rights of parents to breastfeed at work.

Responsibility of employers

It is the position of the ANMF that:

10. All employers should support for the *Australian national breastfeeding strategy* by:⁷
 - actively promoting a positive attitude towards breastfeeding in their workplace
 - developing and promoting a culturally safe 'breastfeeding at work' policy that includes information about parental leave, flexible hours and other available supports
 - providing flexible working hours and other family-friendly working conditions
 - providing flexible lactation breaks in addition to standard rest and meal breaks and providing a clean, private lockable lactation area
 - permitting employees finding it hard to adjust from home-based breastfeeding to work-based breastfeeding to use the free Australian Breastfeeding Association's free helpline service during work time.

5. Position statement management

| | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| Document type: Position statement | Review process: Federal Executive every three years |
| Title: Breastfeeding | Last reviewed: November 2023 |
| Endorsed: June 1998 | Next review: November 2024 |

⁶ See <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/254911/WHO-NMH-NHD-17.1-eng.pdf>.

⁷ The area should be safe from hazardous waste and chemicals; have comfortable seating and easy access to bathroom facilities; a power supply; storage for equipment; and refrigeration facilities to store breast milk. Australian Breastfeeding Association. 2020. *Breastfeeding friendly workplace*. Available at <https://www.breastfeeding.asn.au/workplace>.