



Conscientious objection position statement

1. Purpose

This position statement outlines the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF) position on the right of nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing to refuse to participate in procedures which they judge, on their strongly held religious, moral and ethical beliefs, to be unacceptable, and the action they should take to safeguard patient care.¹

2. Definitions

Conscientious objection is when a person declines to participate in a lawful process or procedure because of their personal beliefs, values, or moral concerns.² Conscientious objection does not include declining to participate because of fear or personal convenience or preference.

3. Context

As changes in social norms and advances in technology, medicines, and therapies introduce challenging ethical issues, conscientious objection has become a key human right in healthcare.

4. Position

The ANMF affirms the right of nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing to conscientiously object and refuse to participate in procedures which go against their strongly held religious, moral and ethical beliefs.

The ANMF also affirms the right of the person receiving care to access the care they want and need in a safe and timely way.

In balancing these rights, it is the position of the ANMF that:

1. Nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing should give sincere consideration to avoiding employment where they anticipate a situation of conscientious objection may frequently arise.
2. Nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing have a responsibility to inform their employer before accepting employment positions where they believe they could frequently be involved in situations of conscientious objection.
3. Employers must not take any discriminatory or adverse action against any nurse, midwife or assistant in nursing who makes a conscientious objection either when applying for employment or during employment.
4. When exercising their right to conscientious objection, nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing must take all reasonable steps to ensure that the person's preference, quality of care, safety, and advance care directives are not compromised.

¹ Assistant in nursing refers to all care workers however titled.

² See <https://www.health.qld.gov.au/clinical-practice/guidelines-procedures/voluntary-assisted-dying/information-for-healthcare-workers/conscientious-objection>. Viewed 03 September 2023.



5. Subject to their scope of practice, nurses and midwives, in the course of their employment, must not refuse to carry out urgent life-saving measures or procedures when there is no ability to safely hand over care.³
6. Whenever possible, in situations of conscientious objection, the nurse, midwife or assistant in nursing should express their desire not to participate in that procedure or care in advance.
7. In situations of conscientious objection, the employer must uphold the right of the nurse, midwife or assistant in nursing to conscientious objection and allow them to leave the area or not participate in the procedure or care as soon as practicable and without any discriminatory or adverse action.
8. Nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing should support their colleagues who exercise their right to conscientious objection by doing their best to prevent them from being placed in situations that may compromise their strongly held religious, moral and ethical beliefs.
9. Nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing should have access to workplace counselling and support services when and as needed.

5. Position statement management

Document type: Position statement	Review process: Federal Executive every three years
Title: Conscientious objection	Last reviewed: November 2023
Endorsed: September 1994	Next review: November 2026

³ Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia. 2018. *Code of conduct for nurses* and *Code of conduct for midwives*. Available at <http://www.nursingmidwiferyboard.gov.au/Codes-Guidelines-Statements/Professional-standards.aspx>.