



Protecting workers from hazardous manual handling position statement

1. Purpose

This position statement sets out the responsibilities the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF) considers employers and nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing must meet to eliminate or minimise the risks associated with manual handling, including patient handling.¹ It should be read with the ANMF position statement: *Workplace health and safety*.

2. Definitions

Manual handling in healthcare refers to any activity involving physical force by a healthcare worker to lift, push, pull, carry, or move objects or people. This can include lifting and transferring patients, pushing equipment, carrying supplies, restraining patients, and holding objects.

3. Context

All workers have the right to a healthy and safe working environment. This includes the right to be protected from the risks associated with manual handling. In Australia, these rights are protected through state, territory and national WHS laws and regulations which compel employers to take protective action.

Nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing experience a range of manual handling injuries including lower back injuries, strains, rotator cuff injuries, and tendinitis. It is therefore imperative that employers develop, implement, evaluate and evolve a comprehensive strategy to minimise and eliminate the risks associated with manual handling and prevent workplace injury.

4. Position

Employer's responsibilities

Work and workplace design

It is the position of the ANMF that:

1. Employers must take all reasonable steps to:
 - a. eliminate or minimise hazardous manual tasks as far as reasonably practicable
 - b. provide safely designed premises, workspaces, facilities, fixtures, fittings, equipment and systems of work that do not create, contribute to, or exacerbate, manual handling risks.
2. To this end, employers must:
 - a. collaborate with WHS committees, health and safety representatives (HSRs), staff, unions, and experts to develop and implement effective policies and practices for: identifying, and eliminating or minimising, hazardous manual tasks as far as reasonably practicable²
 - b. seek the input of nurses and midwives into any proposed changes to the workplace, work environment, furniture, fittings and equipment, work policies, procedures, practices or training relevant to manual handling practices

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

² See the ANMF position statement: *Workplace health and safety* for more information about the role and powers of health and safety representatives.



- c. involve nurses and midwives in the design, trial and purchase of suitable equipment for safe manual handling.³

Resources

It is the position of the ANMF that:

3. Employers must provide workers with the resources they need to comply with:
 - a. all relevant state, territory and national legislation and regulations
 - b. all workplace policies, procedures, practices and controls in relation to manual handling
4. To this end, employers must provide:
 - a. adequate staff ratios and skills mix to manage the dependency levels and handling needs of patients and ensure the safe use, movement and storage of aids and equipment
 - b. the equipment to meet patient handling needs.⁴

Education and training

5. Employers must:
 - a. provide all workers with up-to-date information about any risk associated with the manual handling tasks they are required to perform and how to mitigate that risk
 - b. provide the information, instruction, training and supervision needed for nurses and midwives to perform their work in a way that is safe and without risks to health
 - c. provide induction and continuing education and training for all workers and adequate clinical supervision until workers achieve competency in:
 - workplace health and safety rights, responsibilities, policies and procedures
 - how to assess the handling needs of patients and identify patient handling risk factors and hazards
 - how to develop safe work practices and use aids and equipment correctly and safely
 - task specific techniques for moving, handling and transferring patients that eliminate lifting and minimise risk.

Nurse, midwife and assistants in nursing responsibilities

It is the position of the ANMF that:

6. Nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing must:
 - a. comply with the safe manual handling policies and procedures established by the employer and participate in all relevant training
 - b. report all patient handling incidents and injuries to their manager – employers must then initiate a hazard identification, risk assessment and risk control process to eliminate or reduce the risks of another occupational incident or injury.
7. Nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing must use the indicated equipment even when the patient or their family prefer them not to use it.

³ Equipment should be trialled before purchase to test if it can meet the needs of patients and staff. If needed, and in consultation with HSRs and the nursing staff concerned, the workplace should be modified to ensure it remains safe when any aids or equipment are installed and in use.

⁴ This includes providing and maintaining manual handling equipment, aids and furniture in good working order and ensuring all equipment, including lifting slings, is inspected before use.



Patient handling

It is the position of the ANMF that:

8. The manual handling of patients must be:
 - a. eliminated in all but exceptional circumstances
 - b. minimised in those exceptional circumstances where it can't be eliminated.
9. Patients should be encouraged to move independently and help with their own transfers, including bearing their own weight, as much as possible.
10. Registered nurses or midwives must assess all patients to determine their manual handling and equipment needs before admission or as soon as possible after admission.⁵

Manual handling assessments

11. Manual handling assessments should consider:
 - a. the person's ability to:
 - assist in their own transfers
 - comprehend and cooperate
 - manoeuvre their own weight, weight bear, stand with or without a gait aide
 - b. risk factors to the carer as well as the patient, including risks from:
 - sustained awkward postures and prolonged standing or sitting
 - bending and twisting
 - the person's previous history of falls
 - the duration and frequency of the hazardous manual task
 - the design of the work area and the layout of the workplace
 - the systems of work used
 - the nature, size, weight or number of people or equipment involved in the manual task
 - the handling aids available in the health service or on the market to assist with the manual handling tasks.⁶
12. Manual handling assessments must be conducted by the registered nurses or midwives involved in the person's care in collaboration with a physiotherapist when necessary. They should be repeated throughout the patient's care journey.
13. When a manual handling assessment identifies that aids are required, the employer must provide these aids and make them easily accessible to all involved in the person's care.

5. Position statement management

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⁵ The principles of safe patient handling apply to all patients, including patients with bariatric needs. The assessment of such patients must consider specific weight, size and body shape requirements.

⁶ There are many aids available including electronically operated lifting machines and hoists; motorised trolleys and wheelchairs; overhead tracking and rigid or fabric sliding devices.