Preventing workplace stress position statement

1. Purpose

This position statement sets out the responsibilities the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF) considers employers should meet to fulfil their obligation under workplace health and safety laws to prevent, eliminate and minimise workplace stress. It should be read with the ANMF position statements: *Workplace health and safety; Preventing workplace fatigue; Preventing workplace violence and aggression; Preventing workplace sexual harassment;* and *Preventing workplace bullying.*

2. Definitions

Workplace stress is the response some workers may experience when they perceive the demands of their work exceed their ability or the resources they have to cope. The response may be physical, mental or emotional. Stress itself is not an injury but, if it becomes excessive and long-lasting, it can cause mental and physical ill-health.

3. Context

Many nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing experience workplace stress that affects their psychological and physical wellbeing.[1]

The World Health Organization says 'stress occurs in a wide range of work circumstances, but it is often made worse when employees feel they have little support from supervisors and colleagues and where they have little control over work or how they can cope with its demands and pressures'.[2]

Aspects of nursing and midwifery that can cause stress include the pace and unpredictability of work; under-resourcing and under-staffing; exposure to trauma and suffering; exposure to violence and aggression; deadlines and time pressures; and lack of management and peer support.

4. Position

It is the position of the ANMF that:

1. Nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing have a right to a safe and healthy workplace and to perform their work without experiencing the psychological and physical health effects of workplace stress.

2. Employers must meet their obligations under WHS law to prevent, eliminate and minimise workplace stress by collaborating with staff; WHS committees; health and safety representatives (HSRs); unions; and experts to develop and implement a risk management strategy that identifies and assesses the workplace stress hazards and puts control measures in place.

3. In developing such a strategy, employers must give particular attention to:

     a. integrating stress prevention into all aspects of organisational development and systems of work

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[1] Assistants in nursing refers to all care workers however titled.

[2] World Health Organisation. 2003. *Work Organisation and Stress.* Available at
https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9241590475.

   b. endorsing a commitment to prevent workplace stress at management level

   c. developing and implementing action plans that outline management responsibilities, timelines and resource for stress prevention

   d. providing systems of work, including clinical protocols and adequate staffing and skills mix, that are appropriate to the work requirements and workload and do not contribute to workplace stress

   e. designing jobs to minimise the risk of alienation and repetitive or mechanical work

   f. designing and maintaining workplaces that are conducive to the work that needs to be done in those spaces

   g. providing clear information, training, support and supervision to employees to help them perform their work without experiencing stress

   h. ensuring managers and supervisors have the knowledge and skills to recognise and take action to prevent workplace stress

   i. encouraging staff to raise potential stress-related risks, and acting on those reports

   j. building resilience in the workforce by providing access to employee assistance programs; debriefing opportunities; and clinical reflective supervision and promoting self-care strategies.

4. When developing their risk management strategy, employers should consider and include measures to address the following workplace stress hazards:

   a. poor task design and fragmented work practices

   b. unreasonable workloads or pace and fatigue

   c. unrealistic expectations and demands by employers or patients

   d. role conflict or uncertainty

   e. demanding work contexts such as routinely dealing with difficult people

   f. inappropriate work scheduling or lack of control over work or work scheduling

   g. insecure or uncertain employment

   h. poor physical workspaces and equipment

   i. poor leadership and management, including inadequate instruction and training; poor support practices; poor change management; and ineffective communication

   j. lack of consultation and involvement in decisions that affect the worker or lack of influence over the way the worker is to do their job

   k. unsupportive teams and work relationships including workplace bullying, harassment, violence or aggression

   l. culturally insensitive policies and practices

   m. scope of practice issues.

5. Position statement management

Document type: Position statement	Review process: Federal Executive every three years
Title: Preventing workplace stress	Last reviewed: November 2023
Endorsed: November 2010	Next review: November 2026