



## Nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing\* and harmful use of alcohol and other drugs

### It is the policy of the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation that:

1. Nurses and midwives practise nursing and midwifery in accordance with relevant legislation, professional standards, codes of ethics and conduct, policies, guidelines and protocols.
2. Harmful use of alcohol and other drugs has the potential to compromise performance at work and adversely affect the health and safety of self and others, including people receiving nursing and midwifery care and co-workers.  
  
Other factors may further compromise those affected by the use of alcohol and other drugs (AOD). These may include work related issues such as shift work, fatigue and stress that should be managed as part of the work health and safety program.
3. It must be recognised that substance abuse is a health issue. All staff including nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing should be encouraged to participate in programs of assistance, support, treatment, education and/or rehabilitation where indicated. We strongly discourage the use of disciplinary processes for staff who have identified substance use issues.
4. Each workplace should provide an external, accessible, non-punitive and confidential assistance and support program for nursing and midwifery employees.
5. Where the harmful use of AOD is identified, nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing have a right to be treated in a respectful and non-judgmental manner and should not be subjected to discrimination based on their health status.
6. Employers should, in conjunction with nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing and relevant experts, develop, implement and review policies and protocols relating to the management of nursing and midwifery staff known to have substance use issues.
7. The random or regular testing of employees for alcohol and other drug use is opposed. Testing for AOD is not supported for the following reasons:
  - current testing methods measure use or exposure rather than the impact of substance use on their ability to fulfil the inherent requirements of their role;
  - pre-employment testing is discriminatory;
  - inaccuracy and errors of interpretation of test results, both positive and negative;
  - infringement of right to privacy;
  - does not account for effects of prescribed medications; and
  - there is no evidence base that drug testing provides benefits to health and safety outcomes.As such, random or routine testing is also opposed. If an employer has concerns about potential substance use by employees, such concerns can be effectively identified and managed through direct observation and supervision.
8. The *Code of Conduct for Nurses*<sup>1</sup> and the *Code of Conduct for Midwives*<sup>2</sup> state that nurses and midwives have a responsibility to maintain their physical and mental health to practice safely and effectively. In accordance with the Codes, nurses and midwives must seek expert, independent and objective help and advice if they are ill or impaired in their ability to practice safely.
9. Nursing and midwifery staff have a responsibility to report staff who they believe are practising under the influence of alcohol or drugs. This should be brought to the attention of their immediate manager.

\*The term assistant in nursing also refers to care workers (however titled).



10. Further, if nursing or midwifery staff form a reasonable belief that another health practitioner has practised their profession whilst intoxicated by alcohol or drugs, they must make a mandatory notification to the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA) as required under the *Health Practitioner Regulation National Law*. Nursing and midwifery staff must be cognisant of their obligations as outlined in AHPRA's *Guidelines for Mandatory Notifications*.<sup>3</sup> Any reporting must not be malicious and should be supported by a detailed description of the basis for their reasonable belief.
11. Nursing and midwifery staff have a responsibility to advocate on behalf of individuals and groups whose care and safety may be compromised through the suspected harmful use of alcohol, drugs and other substances by another employee or contractor.

*Endorsed June 1998*

*Reviewed and re-endorsed June 2000*

*Reviewed and re-endorsed February 2005*

*Reviewed and re-endorsed November 2008*

*Reviewed and re-endorsed May 2012*

*Reviewed and re-endorsed November 2018*

#### References

1. Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia, *Code of Conduct for Nurses*, Melbourne, 1 March 2018
2. Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia, *Code of Conduct for Midwives*, Melbourne, 1 March 2018
3. Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency, *Guidelines for Mandatory Notifications* March 2014. Available at <http://www.nursingmidwiferyboard.gov.au/Codes-Guidelines-Statements/Codes-Guidelines.aspx>