



## Workplace stress prevention

The Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF) recognises that many nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing\* in health and aged care are exposed to work-related stress which may affect their psychological and physical well-being.

The ANMF objective is the prevention of work-related stress amongst nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) defines stress as:

*'the response people may have when presented with demands and pressures that are not matched to their knowledge and abilities and which challenge their ability to cope'*

The WHO advises that *'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'*.<sup>1</sup>

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

1. Nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing have a right to a safe and healthy workplace environment and to perform their work without psychological and physical health risks from work-related stress.
2. This policy should be read in conjunction with the following ANMF Policies relating to Work Health and Safety (WHS):
  - a) Occupational Health and Safety
  - b) Prevention of Occupational Violence and Aggression in the Workplace
  - c) Bullying in the Workplace
  - d) Fatigue Prevention
3. Work-related stress hazards to be addressed include:
  - a) Task design, such as fragmented work
  - b) Work load and/or work pace, such as work overload, high work rate or time pressures
  - c) Unrealistic expectations, workloads and demands by employers or patients
  - d) Role in the organisation, such as role conflict or uncertainty
  - e) Work context, such as dealing with difficult patients, residents or visitors
  - f) Work scheduling, such as shift work, long working hours
  - g) Employment status, such as insecure employment
  - h) Physical work environment and equipment, such as lack of space, poor equipment
  - i) Degree of control over work, such as lack of control over scheduling of work

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



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- j) Organisational function and culture, such as poor management of organisational change, poor or ineffective communication within the workplace
  - k) Lack of consultation and involvement in making decisions that affect the worker and lack of influence over the way the job is done
  - l) Management of work, such as poor leadership, inadequate instruction and training
  - m) Relationships at work, such as bullying, interpersonal conflict, lack of support from management or colleagues
  - n) Workplace violence
  - o) Fatigue
  - p) Culturally inappropriate workplace policies and practices, such as lack of recognition of cultural differences in policies.
  - q) Issues related to scope of practice
4. The ANMF expects employers of nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing to meet their obligations under WHS law to eliminate work-related stress risks where possible and to minimise the risks where elimination is not possible, including through:
- a) Provision of systems of work, including clinical protocols and adequate staffing and skills mix, that are, so far as is reasonably practicable, safe and without risks to health caused by stress
  - b) Provision of job design that minimises the risks of alienation, repetitive and mechanistic work
  - c) Design and maintenance, so far as is reasonably practicable, of workplaces in a condition that is safe and without risks to health caused by stress
  - d) Provision to employees of information, instruction, training and supervision to enable work to be performed in a way that is safe and without risks to health caused by stress.
5. The ANMF considers that employers should prevent work-related stress through:
- a) Implementation of risk management to identify, assess and control work-related stress hazards and risks
  - b) Integration of stress prevention into all aspects of the workplace and systems, including organisation planning and procedures, WHS representation, consultation and issue resolution
  - c) Endorsement of a management policy commitment to prevent work related stress
  - d) Communication to raise understanding and involvement in stress prevention in facilities
  - e) Action plans which outline management responsibilities, timelines and resource allocation for stress prevention action
  - f) Ensuring managers and supervisors have knowledge and skills in work-related stress prevention
  - g) Encouraging staff to raise potential stress-related risks, and acting on reports
  - h) Employing mechanisms to assist in building resilience in the workforce, including provision of Employee Assistance Programs, debriefing opportunities and promoting self-care strategies



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- i) Employing staffing numbers and skill mix appropriate to the work requirements and workload.
6. The ANMF will assist to address work-related stress hazards through our work health and safety and industrial activities.
7. The ANMF assists Health and Safety Representatives (HSRs) and WHS committee members in undertaking their role in prevention of work-related stress by supporting:
  - a) Consultation with and representation of workers
  - b) Facility Health and Safety Committees (HSCs) which formulate, review and disseminate plans for prevention of work-caused stress
  - c) WHS issue resolution procedures
  - d) The issuing of a Provisional Improvement Notice (PIN) or a request for an WHS inspector to attend the workplace if the employer has not acted, after consultation with HSRs, to resolve the stress issue.
8. The ANMF will encourage WHS Regulators to take action for the prevention of work-related stress by :
  - a) Development and promotion of guidance material across the public and private sectors
  - b) Data collection on the extent and causes of stress
  - c) Skills and guidance in stress prevention for inspectors and investigators
  - d) Targeted visits to workplaces by inspectors
  - e) Inclusion of prevention of stress in business plans for health and aged care
  - f) Development and implementation of codes and guidance on stress prevention under the national WHS system
  - g) Enforcement of WHS legislation, including strategic prosecutions.
9. The ANMF addresses the causes of work-related stress, where possible, in enterprise agreements.
10. The ANMF encourages workplace delegates to work with HSRs on the prevention of work-related stress.
11. The ANMF supports involvement of members in the prevention of work-related stress through encouraging:
  - a) The reporting work-related stress issues to HSRs and management
  - b) Their engagement in consultation with HSRs on stress prevention measures
  - c) Them to recognise the physical manifestation of stress.
12. The ANMF will include work-related stress prevention measures in our information, education and training for HSRs, workplace delegates and other members.
13. The ANMF commits to supporting the prevention of stress amongst nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing and increasing the capability of Organisers, WHS Officers, Health and Safety Representatives, workplace delegates, and other members to prevent work-related stress through advocacy, education and support.



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References:

1. World Health Organisation 2003, (page 3). *Work Organisation and Stress*. Available at [https://www.who.int/occupational\\_health/publications/en/ochstress.pdf](https://www.who.int/occupational_health/publications/en/ochstress.pdf)

Reference should also be made to the WHS Acts and Regulations. The following Guidance is also relevant:

- *Stop Stress At Work - A Union Guide For Workers*, Australian Council of Trade Unions (ACTU), 2003, [www.actu.org.au](http://www.actu.org.au)
- *Work Organisation and Stress*, World Health Organisation, 2003, [www.who.int](http://www.who.int)
- *Preventing and managing work related stress: A guidebook for employers*. WorkSafe Victoria, June 2017