Public and private health services position statement

1. Purpose

This position statement sets out the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation's (ANMF) support for a high-quality public health system that provides free and timely healthcare to all Australians. It should be read with the ANMF position statement: *Medicare*.

2. Definitions

The **public health system** is owned and operated by the Australian national, state and territory governments.

Private health services are owned and operated by private providers.

3. Context

Health services in Australia are provided by both the public and private sectors.

Medicare and the public hospital system provide free or low-cost access for all Australians to many healthcare services.

The private system complements the public system by presenting a choice that can be accessed by those who can afford to do so. However, the private profit motive and fee for service model are at odds with the principle that healthcare is a fundamental human right for all.

Governments must therefore make investment in the public system a key propriety and have safeguards in place to ensure quality care always comes before profit in the private system.

4. Position

It is the position of the ANMF that:

1. Health is a public good with shared benefits and shared responsibilities.

2. Access to healthcare is a fundamental human right of every Australian, not a privilege.

3. Australians requiring healthcare have the right to choose how and where that healthcare is provided.

4. A universally accessible and free public health system is the best way to provide healthcare for all Australians and address disadvantage.

5. Medicare – Australia's publicly funded universal health insurance scheme – is an efficient and effective mechanism to provide timely and equitable access to affordable healthcare based on clinical need rather than capacity to pay.

6. Private health services that allow Australians to exercise their right to choose where they obtain health services are a useful complement to the public system and should remain as such.

7. Governments should prioritise investment in the public system as the provider of high-quality healthcare that is accessible to all Australians when and where they need it. This includes expanding the medical and pharmaceutical benefits schemes.[1]

---

[1] See the ANMF position statement: *Medicare.*

8.   Private health services must never be expanded at the expense of the public health system.

9.   Public health services must never be privatised by:

  • transferring public hospital ownership to private owners

  • contracting out services provided by public employees such as facility management, radiology or pathology services to private providers

  • using private providers to deliver government funded health services.

10.   All public and private health services should:

  • be planned in the context of the total needs and requirements of the population being served

  • subject to government regulation and accountability

  • meet acceptable health outcome standards.

11.   Legislated minimum nursing and midwifery staffing ratios should be in place in both public and private health services.

12.   Information about nursing and midwifery staffing numbers, skills mix and quality outcomes in the public and private sectors should be publicly available to enable scrutiny and encourage accountability.

13.   The terms and conditions of employment for public sector nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing must be negotiated and agreed between the government and the ANMF and any other relevant unions.[2]

14.   Private sector nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing should receive terms and conditions of employment equivalent to those provided in the public sector.

5.   Position statement management

Document type: Position statement	Review process: Federal Executive every three years
Title: Public and private health services	Last reviewed: November 2023
Endorsed: September 1994	Next review: November 2026

---

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