Mental health nursing position statement

1. Purpose

This position statement sets out the responsibilities the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF) considers governments and employers should meet to support mental health nursing practice. It should be read with the ANMF positions statements: *Specialty nursing practice*; *Professional practice framework and standards for nurses and midwives; Credentialling for nurses and midwives;* and *Workplace health and safety (WHS).*

2. Definitions

Mental health nursing involves the care of individuals with a mental health disorder to help them recover and improve their quality of life.

3. Context

All healthcare has a mental health component, with holistic nursing and midwifery care encompassing mental, psychosocial, environmental, cultural, spiritual and physical health and wellbeing. This means all nursing and midwifery care must include an assessment, care plan, interventions and evaluation for mental health.

However, for an increasing number of people, groups and communities, mental healthcare is the primary or key presenting need. The National Study of Mental Health and Wellbeing (NSMHW) revealed that, of Australians aged 16–85 in 2020–21, an estimated:[1]

- 44 per cent had experienced a mental disorder at some time in their life

- 21 per cent had experienced a mental disorder in the previous 12 months.

This makes it imperative that Australian governments take practical steps to increase workforce capacity and capability to ensure community need can be met now and in the future.

4. Position

Government responsibilities

It is the position of the ANMF that:

1. All governments must provide adequate funding for mental health nursing care that is underpinned by rigorous local, state and national planning involving nurses at all levels.

2. All governments must ensure all individuals requiring mental health care can receive care at the facility and in the ward or unit that best addresses their needs regardless of the health service catchment area or funding system.

3. All governments must create and maintain a viable mental health nursing workforce and ensure:

    - undergraduate nursing courses offer core subject material in mental health nursing

    - postgraduate courses specific to mental health nursing with theoretical and clinical components are readily available and accessible.

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[1] Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW). 2023. Mental health. Available at: https://www.aihw.gov.au/mental-health/topic-areas/mental-illness. Viewed 24 October 2023.

4. All governments must ensure mental health nurses have access to:

   - continuing education that is appropriate to their area of practice and supports their individual professional development needs

   - postgraduate qualifications leading to nurse practitioner endorsement and roles in both the public and private sector

   - post registration educational opportunities in forensic mental healthcare.

5. All governments must ensure mental health nurses, regardless of the setting in which they work, are covered by nursing awards or enterprise agreements and can access membership to nursing professional and industrial associations.

Forensic mental healthcare

6. Governments must ensure that:

   - individuals in a forensic service who are not guilty of an offence due to mental illness are accommodated in an appropriate mental health facility with access to mental health nurses (taking into account all relevant safety issues)

   - individuals who are unfit to plead to a criminal charge due to mental illness are treated in a suitable mental health facility until such time as they are fit to plead and have access to a continuum of rehabilitation services

Health service responsibilities

It is the position of the ANMF that:

7. All health services must:

   - provide career paths for mental health nurses that include clinical, administrative, managerial, education and research streams

   - enable mental health nurses to provide and receive formal paid clinical supervision

   - maintain professional lines of accountability to nursing regardless of the setting[2]

   - ensure mental health nurses can practice in accordance with all relevant WHS legislation.

8. All health services must also ensure they do not:

   - impose unnecessary barriers to employment in mental health nursing by requiring private credentialling

   - erode mental health nursing positions and services by employing other staff categories.

5. Position statement management

Document type: Position statement	Review process: Federal Executive every three years
Title: Mental health nursing	Last reviewed: November 2023
Endorsed: June 1998	Next review: November 2024

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[2] This does not preclude functional reporting within non-nursing organisational structures.