



Preventing workplace fatigue 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 (WHS) laws to prevent, eliminate and minimise workplace fatigue. It should be read with the ANMF position statements: *Workplace health and safety*; *Preventing workplace stress*; *Preventing workplace violence and aggression*; *Preventing sexual harassment*; and *Preventing workplace bullying*.

2. Definitions

Safe Work Australia defines **fatigue** as a state of mental and/or physical exhaustion which reduces a person's ability to perform work safely and effectively.¹

3. Context

Many nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing report experiencing fatigue.²

Fatigue has serious consequences for workers and workplaces. It reduces alertness and contributes to errors, incidents and injuries.

Fatigue can also cause long term health effects for workers such as heart disease; diabetes; high blood pressure; anxiety and depression.

4. Position

It is the position of the ANMF that:

1. Nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing have the right to a safe and healthy workplace free from the risk of workplace fatigue.
2. Employers must meet their obligations under WHS law to prevent, eliminate and minimise workplace fatigue by:
 - collaborating with WHS committees, health and safety representatives (HSRs), staff, unions, and experts to develop and implement a risk management strategy that identifies and assesses workplace fatigue hazards and puts control measures in place
 - integrating fatigue prevention into all aspects of organisational development and systems of work
 - endorsing a commitment to prevent workplace fatigue at management level
 - developing and implementing action plans that outline management responsibilities, timelines and resources for fatigue prevention action
 - providing systems of work, including clinical protocols and adequate staffing and skills mix, which are appropriate to the work requirements and workload and do not contribute to workplace fatigue
 - designing jobs to minimise fatigue

¹ See <https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/safety-topic/hazards/fatigue>.

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



- providing clear information, training, support and supervision to employees to help them perform their work without experiencing fatigue
 - ensuring managers and supervisors have the knowledge and skills to recognise and take action to prevent workplace fatigue
 - encouraging staff to raise potential fatigue-related risks and acting on those reports
 - building resilience in the workforce by providing access to employee assistance programs; debriefing opportunities; and clinical reflective supervision
 - promoting self-care strategies.
3. When developing their risk management strategy, employers should give particular attention to ensuring fatigue prevention is factored into all the following:³
- workplace culture
 - roster patterns
 - shift rotations including night duty shifts
 - the length of shifts
 - the length of time worked including double shifts
 - mental and physical job demands
 - workload including staffing levels and skills mix
 - work scheduling and planning
 - the length and timing of meal and rest breaks
 - the timing of shifts
 - recovery time between shifts
 - environmental conditions such as light, ventilation and temperature
 - work-related travel such as patient escorts and community visits
 - on-call and recall requirements and arrangements
 - management training to recognise, prevent and manage worker fatigue
 - flexible working arrangements to accommodate personal demands.
4. Employers must also consider fatigue when investigating incidents and analyse data on all fatigue related incidents to inform their prevention strategy.

5. Position statement management

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³ For more advice, see Safe Work Australia. 2013. *Guide for managing the risk of fatigue at work* available at <https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/doc/guide-managing-risk-fatigue-work> and the ACTU's *Health and safety guidelines for shift work and extended working hours* available at https://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/victorianunions/legacy_url/2249/ACTU_ShiftGuidelines.pdf?1565895084.