



Resolving professional practice issues in the workplace guidance note

1. Purpose

This guidance note provides guidance for employers as well as nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing about resolving professional practice issues in the workplace.

2. Definitions

Professional practice in nursing and midwifery includes attitudes, behaviours, judgements, ethics, and critical thinking, as well as the delivery of care and the maintenance of therapeutic and professional relationships.

A **professional practice issue** occurs when the level of performance in any aspect of professional practice falls short of the standard reasonably expected of a nurse or midwife with the appropriate level of training or experience.

3. Context

Under the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia (NMBA) codes, standards for practice and guidelines, all nurses and midwives have a professional responsibility to raise any nursing and midwifery practice issues and to take appropriate action.¹

Where practice issues also impact health and safety, nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing have obligations under work health and safety legislation. These obligations require them to:

- report to management any work-related injury, illness or hazard as soon as practical after becoming aware of it
- cooperate with any reasonable employer action aimed at providing a safe and secure workplace, including observing policies and procedures.

Employers must ensure staff can meet these obligations.

4. Guidance

Employer responsibilities

1. Employers should support nurses and midwives to meet their responsibility to report professional practice issues by developing and implementing clear policies and procedures for them to do so.
2. Employers should:
 - collaborate with nurses and midwives to develop, implement and review these policies and procedures
 - communicate these policies and procedures to all nursing and midwifery staff
 - manage all reports about professional practice issues in accordance with these policies and procedures.

¹ Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia (NMBA) professional codes, standards and guidelines are available at: <https://www.nursingmidwiferyboard.gov.au/Codes-Guidelines-Statements/Professional-standards.aspx>.



Nurse, midwife and assistant in nursing responsibilities

3. All nurses and midwives are responsible for maintaining professional standards and for identifying, escalating and addressing concerns regarding professional practice.

Urgent issues

4. When an urgent practice issue arises that is impacting, or likely to impact, health and safety, the registered nurse or midwife must take immediate action to resolve the issue in accordance with the most appropriate workplace policy (for example WHS policy; Workplace violence and aggression policy).

Non-urgent issues

5. In situations where there is no immediate danger, the registered nurse or midwife should:
 - identify the legal requirements or standards they consider are being breached and the effect this is having, or is likely to have, on themselves or others
 - report this in writing to their immediate manager or supervisor and ask to be notified of all management action to remedy the situation and prevent a reoccurrence
 - keep a copy of this report, including when and to whom they made the report
 - follow-up the matter with their manager or supervisor as needed until they are satisfied that the issue has been resolved.
6. Where the registered nurse or midwife considers the issue has not been remedied and the legal requirements or standards remain unmet, they should:
 - report the issue to the relevant external body in their state or territory as named in their workplace practice issues policy – for example, the state or territory health services' commissioner or the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (Aphra)
 - report the issue and their actions to the relevant state or territory ANMF office to alert the ANMF to the issue and to receive the ANMF's help to progress it.

Learn more

See the ANMF position statements: *Workplace health and safety (WHS)* and *Whistleblowing*.

5. Guidance note management

Document type: Guidance note	Review process: Federal Secretary every three years
Title: Resolving professional practice issues in the workplace	Last reviewed: November 2023
Endorsed: September 1994	Next review: November 2024