ACNP POSITION STATEMENT
NURSE PRACTITIONER SCOPE OF PRACTICE

All health professionals have a ‘scope of practice’. It describes the skills, knowledge and attributes of an area and context of practice in which they are competent to practice autonomously.

Australian nurse practitioners have extensive post-graduate clinical experience and have completed mandatory prescribed education at a Master’s level. They provide complete episodes of health care, using an advanced nursing model of care.

Nurse practitioners possess the legal authority to practice both independently and autonomously at a level of practice that is beyond that of a registered nurse. It is within a nurse practitioner’s ability to assess and diagnose health problems, order and interpret diagnostic investigations, formulate and assess response to treatment plans, prescribe medicines and refer to other health professionals within their individual areas of competence. Nurse practitioners may also admit and discharge consumers from health services, including hospital settings.

Nurse practitioners practice collaboratively with other health professionals to improve access to healthcare for Australian communities through health promotion, disease prevention, and health management strategies. They improve health outcomes for specific patient populations or communities.

Although nurse practitioners can practice as part of a larger healthcare team, nurse practitioners may also form partnerships with health consumers and their families to act as their primary health provider. Nurse practitioners combine advanced nursing knowledge and skills with advanced diagnostic reasoning and therapeutic knowledge to provide person-centred care. They can diagnose and manage health consumers with common and complex health conditions. As clinical leaders, they practice across healthcare settings to influence health service delivery and the wider profession.

Background

Nurse practitioners have been providing healthcare in Australia since 2000, and practice across all States and Territories. The initial focus of the nurse practitioner role was to increase access to care for marginalised and/or vulnerable populations, such as those living in rural and remote areas, persons experiencing homelessness and the aged. Nurse practitioners practice in a wide variety of clinical settings, ranging from hospital to community and primary care settings. Since 2010, nurse practitioners have been eligible providers of care that is subsidised through the Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) and the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS). A nurse practitioner’s beginning scope of practice is expected to evolve and expand with time, education and experience. Role expansion and scope of practice decisions are guided by the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia’s (NMBA) Decision-Making Framework (2019) and best available evidence, such as the Australian NP Metaspecialty Framework. In accordance with NMBA requirements, nurse practitioners are also expected to undertake relevant education and clinical training in order to demonstrate competence in an expanded scope of practice.

This position statement is endorsed by the Australian College of Nurse Practitioners Board on 2nd December 2019, and will reviewed by 2nd December 2021.

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