

Fact sheet

Scope of practice and capabilities of midwives

Approved September 2022



Nursing and
Midwifery Board
Ahpra

Introduction

The Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia (NMBA) regulates the practice of nursing and midwifery in Australia and one of its key roles is to protect the public. The NMBA does this by developing standards, codes and guidelines which together establish the requirements for the professional and safe practice of nurses and midwives in Australia. The NMBA undertakes its functions as set by the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law, as in force in each state and territory (the National Law).

Under the National Law, nursing and midwifery are recognised as two separate professions. These titles are protected under the National Law with each having different education, knowledge, skills and standards for practice and different responsibilities and activities.

This guidance on the scope of practice and capabilities of midwives provides a high-level collective synopsis of the NMBA's registration standards, standards for practice, codes and guidelines. It has been developed as guidance for stakeholders such as employers, private and public health services, and other health practitioners, on the varying roles and scope of practice of midwives and endorsed midwives. Employers can use the information as a starting point, when determining which practitioner best suits the needs and requirements of their health service. It can also provide clarity and guidance to the public when receiving care from a midwife.

The information in the following tables clarifies the educational outcomes, provides examples of core activities and fundamental differences between a midwife and an endorsed midwife. While the tables provide examples of some core activities that midwives carry out in practice, throughout their careers midwives continue to develop their knowledge and skills and expand their scope of practice. Further detail can be sourced on the NMBA's website at www.nursingmidwiferyboard.gov.au.

For information about the education pathways and core activities of **enrolled nurses, registered nurses and nurse practitioners**, please refer to the NMBA's [Fact sheet: Scope of practice and capabilities of nurses](#).

For information on Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) please refer to the [AQF website](#).



Midwifery education pathways and outcomes

Qualifications

Under the National Law there are specific titles which are referred to as 'protected titles'. Midwife and endorsed Midwife are protected titles. This means that only those midwives who are registered or endorsed with the NMBA can use these titles in Australia.

The following qualifications and outcomes are necessary for registration/endorsement with the NMBA

	Midwife	Endorsed midwife
Qualification/ program of study (NMBA approved)	<p>Bachelor of Midwifery (AQF 7)¹ <i>Study duration:</i> Three years full time</p> <p>or</p> <p>Master of Midwifery (AQF 9)¹ <i>Study duration:</i> Two years or equivalent</p> <p>or</p> <p>Graduate Diploma of Midwifery Post graduate pathway (AQF 8)¹ – for current RNs seeking midwifery registration. <i>Study duration:</i> 12 months Graduates commonly complete a supported transition to practice program, though this is not mandatory</p>	<p>Holds registration as a midwife in Australia and has 5000 hours of clinical practice as a midwife</p> <p>Plus, completion of an NMBA-approved program of post-graduate study leading to endorsement for scheduled medicines. (AQF 8)¹</p> <p>For example:</p> <p>Graduate Certificate in Midwifery Diagnostics and Prescribing</p> <p>or</p> <p>Prescribing for Midwives <i>Study duration:</i> 6–12 months</p>
Clinical placement hours/setting	Students complete a minimum of 10 continuity of care episodes (antenatal, labour and postnatal care) with women and their families.	
Educational outcomes	<p>Midwives graduate with a woman-centred approach to practice and an integrated theoretical and practice-based knowledge of care across the childbearing continuum.</p> <p>Midwives have an in-depth scientific knowledge that includes the administration, supply and quality use of medicine relevant to midwifery practice.</p> <p>Midwives have foundational skills in communication, relationships and management.</p>	<p>Endorsed midwives integrate woman-centred care to a holistic family centred approach with additional educational outcomes to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ordering, interpretation and referral of pathology and radiology. • Prescribe, order and administer medication on their own authority.

¹ [Australian Qualifications Framework](#) (AQF) is the national policy for regulated qualifications in Australian education and training.

Scope of practice

The NMBA publishes a list of midwives who are registered to practise in Australia. The list is called the ['Register of practitioners'](#). When a midwife's name appears on the list, you know that they are registered. Sometimes a registered practitioner has a type of registration or conditions that limit what they can do. If a midwife has restrictions or conditions associated with their registration you will see these on the public register. Midwives with endorsement are also identified on the public register.

While the foundational education of midwives in Australia captures the full breadth of the scope of the profession at the graduate entry level, the scope of practice of individual practitioners is influenced by the settings in which they practise. This includes the health needs of people, the level of competence and confidence of the midwife and the policy requirements of the service provider. As the midwife gains new skills and knowledge, their individual scope of practice changes

	Midwife	Endorsed midwife
What do midwives do?	<p>Midwives work in partnership with women. Midwives supervise student midwives and other healthcare workers and delegate activities from a midwifery plan of care.</p> <p>Examples of core midwife activities include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • antenatal care including abdominal palpation, performing clinical observations on mother and unborn baby • reviewing and ordering diagnostic and/or screening tests, and risk assessments from a clinical, health, lifestyle and psychological perspective • intrapartum care including monitoring and support of women during labour, monitoring the foetus during labour and medication management • birthing the baby, identifying variances to normal birth and escalating as necessary to specialist staff • managing medication and IV therapy within the context of midwifery practice • managing the third stage of labour, perineal assessment and suturing, facilitating initial mother and baby interaction, including skin to skin and breastfeeding support • advising and supporting parents on the daily care of their newborn babies • identifying where there may be concerns about the health and wellbeing of the mother and the newborn baby • offering breastfeeding and nutritional support • supporting parents who experience miscarriage, termination, stillbirth and neonatal death • women's health, reproductive and sexual health, and child and family health care. 	<p>In addition to the core activities of a midwife, examples of core activities of endorsed midwives include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provision of screening that includes ordering and interpreting diagnostic tests (pathology and medical imaging) relevant to the care of women and babies during pregnancy, labour and newborn period • prescribing, administering and supplying scheduled pharmacological and non-pharmacological interventions • comprehensive antenatal, intrapartum and postnatal care including the ability to admit women into hospital and provide care on their own authority • referral to obstetricians and paediatricians • accessing the Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) and Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS)

Document history

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Does this policy amend or update an existing policy? **Y**
If so which version? **V1.0**

Does this policy replace another policy with a different title? **Fact sheet: Scope of practice and capabilities of nurses and midwives**

Approval date	Version	Reason for change
September 2022	V1.0	Published
November 2023	V2.0	Separated the nursing and midwifery professions into two documents.