

National competency standards for the midwife

Introduction

National competency standards, codes of professional conduct and ethics, and a range of position statements and guidelines for midwives are available on the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia (National Board or NMBA) website at www.nursingmidwiferyboard.gov.au.

In 2004, the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Council (ANMC) commissioned research to develop and validate national competency standards for midwives, the scope of practice of midwives, and a generic description of the midwife on entry to practice. ANMC was a peak national and midwifery organisation established in 1992 to develop a national approach to nursing and midwifery regulation.

The research was undertaken by a team of expert midwifery consultants, and included extensive consultation with midwives around Australia. The resulting standards are broad and principle based so that they are sufficiently dynamic for practising midwives to use as a benchmark to assess competence to practice in a range of settings.

The ANMC officially became the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Accreditation Council (ANMAC) on 24 November 2010. The name change reflected ANMC's appointment as the independent accrediting authority for the nursing and midwifery professions under the new National Registration and Accreditation Scheme (the [National Scheme](#)) that came into effect on 1 July 2010 (18 October 2010 in Western Australia).

With the onset of the National Scheme, the National Board took responsibility for the regulation of nurses and midwives in Australia, thus taking ownership of the *National competency standards for midwives*.

What are the standards used for?

The *National competency standards for the midwife* are the core competency standards by which your performance is assessed to obtain and retain your registration as a midwife in Australia.

As a midwife, these core competency standards provide you with the framework for assessing your competence, and are used by the National Board as part of the annual renewal registration of license process to assess midwives:

- educated overseas seeking to work in Australia
- returning to work after breaks in service, or
- involved in professional conduct matters.

The National Board may also apply the competency standards in order to communicate to consumers the standards that they can expect from midwives.

Universities also use the standards when developing midwifery curricula, and to assess student and new graduate performance.

These are YOUR standards — developed using the best possible evidence, and using information and feedback provided by midwives in a variety of settings. Included also are the principles of assessment which will assist you in understanding how these standards may be used to assess performance. We believe you will find them user-friendly and easy to understand.

Description of the midwife on entry to practice

On entry to practice, a midwife is a person who:

... having been regularly admitted to a midwifery educational program, duly recognised in the country in which it is located, has successfully completed the prescribed course of studies in midwifery and has acquired the requisite qualifications to be registered and/or legally licensed to practise midwifery.

The midwife is recognised as a responsible and accountable professional who works in partnership with women to give the necessary support, care and advice during pregnancy, labour and the postpartum period, to conduct births on the midwife's own responsibility and to provide care for the newborn and the infant. This care includes preventative measures, the promotion of normal birth, the detection of complications in mother and child, the accessing of medical care or other appropriate assistance and the carrying out of emergency measures.

The midwife has an important task in health counselling and education, not only for the woman, but also within the family and the community. This work should involve antenatal education and preparation for parenthood and may extend to women's health, sexual or reproductive health and child care.

A midwife may practise in any setting including the home, community, hospitals, clinics or health units. (ICM 2005)

The midwife will be able to demonstrate competence in the provision of midwifery care as specified in the National Board *National competency standards for the midwife*.

The four domains in the provision of woman-centred midwifery care include legal and professional practice, midwifery knowledge and practice, midwifery as primary health care and ethical and reflective practice.

Legal and professional practice

The graduate midwife has a sound knowledge of the Australian health care system, relevant legislation and the role of the midwifery profession both locally and internationally. She practises within legislation and common law. Thus she complies with policies and guidelines that have legal implications and fulfil the duty of care. The graduate midwife is able to identify unsafe practice and act appropriately. She works in partnership with women and collaborates with other members of the health care team. The ability to reason, whilst being able to justify practice within legal, professional, ethical and reflective frameworks are characteristic of the graduate midwife. She accepts accountability and responsibility for her actions, whilst recognising her own knowledge base and scope of practice. She is able to identify complications with appropriate and timely consultation and referral as needed. She delegates when necessary, always providing the appropriate supervision.

The graduate midwife documents practice according to legal and professional guidelines and procedures. She demonstrates competence in oral and written communication and technological literacy. She understands and values the imperative to base practice on evidence, is able to access relevant and appropriate evidence, recognise when evidence is less than adequate to fully inform care and identify areas of practice that require further evidence.

Midwifery knowledge and practice

The graduate midwife appreciates the centrality of the relationship with women to the practice of midwifery, which she can demonstrate through working in partnership and communicating effectively. She works with women to plan and evaluate care whilst providing learning opportunities that facilitate decision-making by the woman.

The graduate midwife has the knowledge, skills and attitudes to practise midwifery according to the international definition of the role and scope of practice of the midwife. This is informed by other disciplines such as biological, physical, social and behavioural sciences, nursing, primary health care, ethics and law. The graduate midwife will be able to provide safe and effective care across the interface between hospital and community, in any setting, including the home, the community, hospitals, or in any other maternity service. She is able to comprehensively and accurately assess the needs of women and their babies and to plan, implement and evaluate midwifery care.

This includes the antenatal period, during labour and birth and in the postnatal period. She supports, and may practise

in, continuity of care models. The graduate midwife is versatile, adaptable and able to respond in a range of situations including emergencies.

When women or babies have complex needs and require referral, the graduate midwife will provide midwifery care in collaboration with other health professionals. The graduate midwife protects, promotes and supports breastfeeding while respecting each woman's choice in infant feeding. She is able to initiate, supply and administer relevant pharmacological substances in a safe and effective manner within legislation.

Midwifery as primary health care

The graduate midwife practises within a woman centred, primary health care framework and is committed to seeing midwifery as a public health strategy that encompasses a broad social context. The graduate midwife understands that health is a dynamic state, influenced by particular sociocultural, spiritual and politico-economic environments. The graduate midwife has an important advocacy role in protecting the rights of women, families and communities whilst respecting and supporting their right to self determination. A graduate midwife has a commitment to cultural safety within all aspects of her practice and acts in ways that enhance the dignity and integrity of others.

Midwifery practice involves informing and preparing the woman and her family for pregnancy, birth, breastfeeding and parenthood and includes certain aspects of women's health, family planning and infant well-being. The graduate midwife has a role in public health that includes wellness promotion for the woman, her family and the community.

Whilst the graduate midwife has the skills "to do" they also have an ability to develop relationships with the women for whom they care as well as others with whom they interact in their professional lives. The graduate midwife works collaboratively with health care providers and other professionals referring women to appropriate community agencies and support networks.

Reflective and ethical practice

The graduate midwife practises in accordance with the endorsed code of ethics, professional standards and relevant state and commonwealth privacy obligations. Through reflective processes developed during the program, the graduate midwife respects diverse values, beliefs and sociocultural structures. Integral to this process is the ability to understand and identify the impact of her own culture, values and beliefs on the provision of midwifery care, whilst recognising the power relations that exist within the health system and the community.

The graduate midwife has the ability and skills to analyse and reflect in, on, and about practice. She maintains competence through continual professional development. The graduate midwife is able to assess the effectiveness of her work and

regards lifelong learning as a key to continuing professional and personal development. The graduate midwife demonstrates a lively, questioning perspective that enables her to actively contribute to the development of midwifery as a discipline. She also demonstrates both computer and information literacy which is reflected in her capacity to derive information from multiple sources. The graduate midwife has the capacity to transform this into meaningful information that impacts on practice and interactions with women and the health care system as a whole. The graduate midwife has developed both a capacity and a desire to learn from experiences in the workplace and through more formal educational opportunities. She is able to contribute to, and evaluate, the learning experiences and professional development of others, particularly through mentoring. She is able to support students to meet their learning needs and objectives in collaboration with others, and contributes to orientation and ongoing education programs.

The graduate midwife uses research to inform midwifery practice. This includes interpreting evidence as a basis to inform practice, policy, guidelines and decision-making. This implies an understanding about the way that knowledge and evidence are continuously created, applied and recreated. The development of a critical self-awareness is essential to this reflective process and is a defining characteristic of a graduate.

National competency standards for the midwife

The *National competency standards for the midwife* provide the detail of the skills, knowledge and attitudes expected of a midwife to work within the midwifery scope of practice. The definition and scope of practice provides the broad boundaries of midwifery practice, whereas competency standards provide the detail of how a midwife is expected to practise and his/her capacity to practise. These will be minimum competency standards required of all midwives who seek authority to practise as a midwife in Australia. It is expected that all midwives should be able to demonstrate that they are able to meet the competency standards relevant to the position they hold.

Overarching framework

The competency standards have an overarching framework – woman centred care. Woman-centred care is a concept that implies that midwifery care:

- is focused on the woman's individual, unique needs, expectations and aspirations, rather than the needs of institutions or professions
- recognises the woman's right to self determination in terms of choice, control, and continuity of care

- encompasses the needs of the baby, the woman's family, significant others and community, as identified and negotiated by the woman herself
- follows the woman between institutions and the community, through all phases of pregnancy, birth and the post natal period, and
- is 'holistic' – addresses the woman's social, emotional, physical, psychological, spiritual and cultural needs and expectations.

The competency standards are underpinned by primary health care principles. These principles encompass equity, access, the provision of services based on need, community participation, collaboration and community based care. Primary health care involves using approaches that are affordable, appropriate to local needs and sustainable. These principles are outlined in the Ottawa Charter (1986).

Organisation of the national competency standards for the midwife

The competency standards include domains, competencies, competency elements and cues. A domain is as an organised cluster of competencies that characterise a central aspect of midwifery practice. Within each of the domains are competencies.

A competency represents a stand-alone function or functional area underlying some aspect of professional performance. Within each competency are elements. An element is a sub-section of the competency unit. The elements contain examples of competent performance known as cues. The cues are examples and prompts. These are neither comprehensive nor exhaustive and assist in assessment, self reflection and curriculum development.

Domains

The competencies which make up the National Competency Standards for the Midwife are organised in four domains.

The order of the domains does not reflect their diminishing order of importance.

Legal and professional practice

This domain contains the competencies that relate to legal and professional responsibilities including accountability, functioning in accordance with legislation affecting midwifery and demonstration of leadership.

Midwifery knowledge and practice

This domain contains the competencies that relate to the performance of midwifery practice including assessment, planning, implementation and evaluation. Partnership with the woman is included in this domain.

Midwifery as primary health care

This domain contains the competencies that relate to midwifery as a public health strategy. Included are the notions of self determination and the protection of individual and group rights.

Reflective and ethical practice

This final domain contains the competencies relating to self appraisal, professional development and the value of research. The competencies, elements and cues are outlined in the following pages.

Legal and professional practice

Competency 1

Functions in accordance with legislation and common law affecting midwifery practice

Element 1.1

Demonstrates and acts upon knowledge of legislation and common law pertinent to midwifery practice.

Cues

- Practises midwifery within the requirements of legislation and common law
- Identifies and interprets laws in relation to midwifery practice, including the administration of drugs, negligence, consent, report writing, confidentiality, and vicarious liability, and
- Recognises and acts upon breaches of law relating to midwifery practice.

Element 1.2

Complies with policies and guidelines that have legal and professional implications for practice.

Cues

- Complies with legal policies and guidelines, for example, occupational health and safety, child protection, family violence.

Element 1.3

Formulates documentation according to legal and professional guidelines.

Cues

- Adheres to legal requirements in all aspects of documentation
- Documentation is contemporaneous, comprehensive, logical, legible, clear, concise and accurate, and
- Documentation identifies the author and designation.

Element 1.4

Fulfils the duty of care in the course of midwifery practice.

Cues

- Undertakes midwifery practice in accordance with professional Australian standards for midwives.

Competency 2

Accepts accountability and responsibility for own actions within midwifery practice.

Element 2.1

Recognises and acts within own knowledge base and scope of practice.

Cues

- Recognises the midwife's role and responsibility for understanding, supporting, and facilitating pregnancy, labour, birth and the postnatal period
- Analyses strengths and limitations in own skill, knowledge and experience and addresses limitations
- Accepts professional responsibility and personal accountability for own practice, and
- Collaborates with other health care providers when care is outside the scope of practice.

Element 2.2

Identifies unsafe practice and takes appropriate action.

Cues

- Identifies practices that compromise safe and effective care, or contravenes legislation, and takes appropriate action
- Uses risk management and/or open disclosure policies in the follow-up of unsafe practice
- Promotes and engages in ongoing development of the safety and quality improvement agenda to optimise health outcomes of women and their families, and
- Supports other midwives or health care providers who report unsafe practice.

Element 2.3

Consults with, and refers to, another midwife or appropriate health care provider when the needs of the woman and her baby fall outside own scope of practice or competence.

Cues

- Applies relevant guidelines or policies to ensure timely consultation and referral, and
- Develops and maintains collegial networks with midwifery colleagues and others to optimise outcomes for the woman.

Element 2.4

Delegates, when necessary, activities matching abilities and scope of practice and provides appropriate supervision.

Cues

- Underpins delegation and supervision with knowledge of legal requirements and organisational policies
- Is accountable for actions in relation to the decision to educate, delegate and supervise other health care workers
- Uses a range of supportive strategies when supervising aspects of care delegated to others, and
- Ensures delegation does not compromise safety.

Element 2.5

Assumes responsibility for professional midwifery leadership functions.

Cues

- Integrates leadership skills into practice
- Acts as a role model for other colleagues by exemplifying best practice in midwifery, and
- Provides advice and guidance in problem solving and decision making to midwifery colleagues and others as appropriate.

Midwifery knowledge and practice

Competency 3

Communicates information to facilitate decision making by the woman.

Element 3.1

Communicates effectively with the woman, her family and friends.

Cues

- Actively listens to the woman and responds appropriately
- Assists the woman to identify her knowledge, feelings and thoughts about her pregnancy, labour, birth and the postnatal period
- Uses language that is readily understood
- Allows adequate time to meet the needs of the woman for information, advice and support, and
- Engages the assistance of a professional interpreter where appropriate.

Element 3.2

Provides learning opportunities appropriate to the woman's needs.

Cues

- Uses adult learning principles in the provision of information, and
- Incorporates learning opportunities into every facet of midwifery practice.

Element 3.3

Plans and evaluates care in partnership with the woman.

Cues

- Listens to the woman to identify her needs. Involves the woman in decision making
- Obtains informed consent for midwifery interventions, and
- Documents decisions, actions and outcomes including the woman's response to care.

Competency 4

Promotes safe and effective midwifery care.

Element 4.1

Applies knowledge, skills and attitudes to enable woman centred care.

Cues

- Participates in respectful partnerships with the woman and other members of the health care team
- Practises in ways that respects each woman's emotional, social, cultural and lifestyle needs, and
- Facilitates the involvement of family and friends as defined by the woman.

Element 4.2

Provides or supports midwifery continuity of care.

Cues

- Demonstrates an understanding of continuity of care and carer, and
- Supports models that provide continuity of carer.

Element 4.3

Manages the midwifery care of women and their babies.

Cues

- Organises workload to facilitate midwifery care for women and their babies
- Demonstrates appropriate time management and priority setting skills, and
- Ensures the effective use of resources including personnel.

Competency 5

Assesses, plans, provides and evaluates safe and effective midwifery care.

Element 5.1

Uses midwifery knowledge and skills to facilitate an optimal experience for the woman.

Cues

- Promotes the understanding that childbirth is a normal, physiological process and a significant life event for most women.

Element 5.2

Assesses the health and well being of the woman and her baby.

Cues

- Carries out a comprehensive assessment of the woman and her baby, and
- Interprets and acts upon information from the assessment.

Element 5.3

Plans, provides, and is responsible for, safe and effective midwifery care.

Cues

- Assists the woman to identify and plan her preferred pathway of care
- Orders (within relevant legislation) and interprets relevant investigative and diagnostic tests and screening procedures
- Attends and supports the woman and her baby and ensures appropriate, timely midwifery interventions are undertaken, and
- Assists with the transition to parenthood.

Element 5.4

Protects, promotes and supports breastfeeding.

Cues

- Proactively protects, promotes and supports breastfeeding, reflecting the WHO/UNICEF Ten Steps to Successful Breastfeeding
- Provides information to the woman, colleagues and community regarding breast feeding
- Respects and facilitates the woman's choice regarding infant feeding, and
- Assists the woman with her mode of infant feeding.

Element 5.5

Demonstrates the ability to initiate, supply and administer relevant pharmacological substances in a safe and effective manner within relevant state or territory legislation.

Cues

- Maintains up to date knowledge about pharmacological substances commonly used in midwifery practice
- Provides information to the woman
- Demonstrates safe administration including drug calculations, correct route of administration, side effects and documentation, and
- Demonstrates knowledge of pharmacological substances which are safe during pregnancy, birth and breastfeeding.

Element 5.6

Evaluates the midwifery care provided to the woman and her baby.

Cues

- Invites and acts upon constructive feedback on midwifery practice from the woman, and
- Demonstrates knowledge of the different ways in which midwifery practice can be evaluated.

Competency 6

Assesses, plans, provides and evaluates safe and effective midwifery care for the woman and/or baby with complex needs.

Element 6.1

Uses a range of midwifery knowledge and skills to provide midwifery care for the woman and/or her baby with complex needs as part of a collaborative team.

Cues

- Demonstrates a sound knowledge base of relevant disease processes and health complexities
- Demonstrates an understanding of the particular psychosocial needs of the woman and her family where there are complexities
- Continues to provide midwifery care when collaboration with a medical practitioner or other health care provider is required, and
- Uses, justifies and interprets appropriate technology to achieve best health outcomes for the woman and her baby.

Element 6.2

Recognises and responds effectively in emergencies or urgent situations.

Cues

- Recognises and responds to any urgent or emergency situations with timely and appropriate intervention, consultation and/or referral, and
- Maintains up to date skills and knowledge concerning emergency plans and protocols.

Midwifery as primary health care

Competency 7

Advocates to protect the rights of women, families and communities in relation to maternity care.

Element 7.1

Respects and supports women and their families to be self determining in promoting their own health and well-being.

Cues

- Articulates primary health care principles and acts accordingly
- Works with the woman to identify and develop appropriate sources of social and community support and health care
- Concludes the midwifery relationship in a timely and appropriate manner, and
- Involves women and communities in maternity service development, improvement and evaluation.

Element 7.2

Acts to ensure that the rights of women receiving maternity care are respected.

Cues

- Acknowledges, respects and advocates for the rights of the woman to be involved as an active participant in her care including her right to make informed decisions and maintain dignity and privacy, and
- Takes into account the woman's individual preferences and cultural needs.

Competency 8

Develops effective strategies to implement and support collaborative midwifery practice.

Element 8.1

Demonstrates effective communication with midwives, health care providers and other professionals.

Cues

- Adapts styles and methods of communication to maximise effectiveness
- Uses a range of communication methods including written and oral
- Liaises and negotiates with colleagues at all levels to build systems and processes to optimise outcomes for the woman
- Discusses and clarifies with relevant health care providers interventions that appear inappropriate or unnecessary and negotiates a collaborative plan, and
- Demonstrates effective communication during consultation, referral and handover.

Element 8.2

Establishes, maintains and evaluates professional relationships with other health care providers.

Cues

- Recognises the role of other members of the health care team in the provision of maternity care
- Identifies and responds to factors that facilitate or hinder professional relationships, and
- Invites, acts upon, and offers, constructive feedback on midwifery practice from peers and colleagues.

Competency 9

Actively supports midwifery as a public health strategy.

Element 9.1

Advocates for, and promotes midwifery practice, within the context of public health policy.

Cues

- Acknowledges the impact of social, economic and psychological factors on women's lives
- Acts to address public health issues, including the promotion of breastfeeding, smoking cessation, and responding appropriately in situations where there is domestic violence, drugs or alcohol use, and
- Plans, provides and evaluates care to ensure equity of access for women from marginalised communities.

Element 9.2

Collaborates with, and refers women to, appropriate community agencies and support networks.

Cues

- Collaborates with, and refers to, other health care providers, community groups and agencies, and

- Provides women with clear information about accessing community support agencies during pregnancy and following birth.

Competency 10

Ensures midwifery practice is culturally safe.

Element 10.1

Plans, implements and evaluates strategies for providing culturally safe practice for women, their families and colleagues.

Cues

- Incorporates knowledge of cross cultural and historical factors into practice
- Demonstrates respect for differences in cultural meanings and responses to health and maternity care
- Recognises the specific needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their communities, and
- Recognises and respects customary law.

Reflective and ethical practice

Competency 11

Bases midwifery practice on ethical decision making.

Element 11.1

Practises in accordance with the endorsed Code of Ethics and relevant state/ territories and commonwealth privacy obligations under law.

Cues

- Demonstrates knowledge of contemporary ethical issues in midwifery
- Demonstrates ethical behaviour towards women, colleagues and communities, and
- Develops and assesses strategies to address ethical issues and breaches of confidentiality and privacy in collaboration with others.

Competency 12

Identifies personal beliefs and develops these in ways that enhance midwifery practice.

Element 12.1

Addresses the impact of personal beliefs and experiences on the provision of midwifery care.

Cues

- Recognises own attitudes, biases and values and their potential impact on practice, and

- Evaluates own practice and its effect on women and others.

Element 12.2

Appraises and addresses the impact of power relations on midwifery practice.

Cues

- Demonstrates an awareness of the impact of gender, race and social policies on women and maternity services
- Works towards addressing power imbalances between health care providers, childbearing women and others in the community
- Acts to eliminate harassment, victimisation and bullying in the work place, and
- Demonstrates a commitment to, and respect for, co-workers.

Competency 13

Acts to enhance the professional development of self and others.

Element 13.1

Assesses and acts upon own professional development needs.

Cues

- Identifies own learning needs through reflective practice and self evaluation
- Contributes to self appraisal and peer review activities as appropriate
- Prepares and actions annual professional development plans using continuing professional development frameworks
- Seeks and engages in opportunities to maintain or update skills, knowledge, attitudes and experience, and
- Demonstrates and documents own professional development.

Element 13.2

Contributes to, and evaluates, the learning experiences and professional development of others.

Cues

- Supports students to meet their learning needs and objectives
- Contributes to orientation and ongoing education programs
- Undertakes and critiques mutual sharing of experiences and knowledge with multidisciplinary colleagues

- Contributes to mentoring, peer support and/or clinical supervision
- Seeks and engages in opportunities to maintain or update skills, knowledge, attitudes and experience, and
- Demonstrates and documents own professional development.

Competency 14

Uses research to inform midwifery practice.

Element 14.1

Ensures research evidence is incorporated into practice.

Cues

- Values and acknowledges the importance of research and evidence
- Maintains current knowledge about relevant research
- Demonstrates skills in retrieving and understanding research evidence including levels of enquiry and forms of evidence
- Discusses the implications of evidence with the woman and colleagues
- Participates in reviews of practice and policies, and
- Supports research in midwifery and maternity care.

Element 14.2

Interprets evidence as a basis to inform practice and decision making.

Cues

- Underpins midwifery practice with current knowledge and best evidence
- Accesses evidence, shares and uses to inform policy and practice, and
- Explains options while recognising the woman's right to choose.

Glossary

ANMAC

The Australian Nursing and Midwifery Accreditation Council, which is the new name for the ANMC

ANMC

Australian Nursing and Midwifery Council

Appropriate

Matching the circumstances, meeting needs of the individual, group or situation

Attributes

Characteristics which underpin competent performance

Competence

The combination of skills, knowledge, attitudes, values and abilities that underpin effective and/ or superior performance in a profession/occupational area

Competency element

Represents a sub-section of a competency unit, and contains examples of competent performance known as cues

Competency standards

Consist of competency units and competency elements

Competency unit

Represents a stand-alone function or functional area underlying some aspect of professional performance

Competent

The person has competence across all the domains of competencies applicable to the nurse, at a level that is judged to be appropriate for the level of nurse being assessed

Contexts

The setting/environment where competence can be demonstrated or applied

Core competency standards

Essential competency standards for registration

Cues

Generic examples of competent performance. They are neither comprehensive nor exhaustive. They assist in assessment, self-reflection and curriculum development

Domains

An organised cluster of competencies in nursing practice

Exemplars

Concrete examples typical of competence. They are not the standard but are indicative of the standard

Midwife

A person who 'has successfully completed the prescribed course of studies in midwifery and has acquired the requisite qualifications to be registered and/or is legally licenced to practice midwifery' (ICM 2005).

National Board

The Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia

National Scheme

The National Registration and Accreditation Scheme that commenced on 1 July 2010

NMRAs

Nursing and midwifery regulatory authorities (states and territories)

Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia

The national body responsible for the regulation of nurses and midwives

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