

# Nurse Practitioners

Position paper (Update)  
March 2018

*the future of rural health*

## About us

### National Rural Health Student Network

The National Rural Health Student Network (NRHSN) represents the future of rural health in Australia. It has more than 9,000 members who belong to 28 university Rural Health Clubs from all states and territories.

It is Australia's only multi-disciplinary student health network, bringing together people studying medicine, nursing and allied health, encouraging them to pursue rural health careers.

The NRHSN aims to:

- ▶ provide a voice for students who are interested in improving health outcomes for rural and remote Australians
- ▶ promote rural health careers to students and encourage students who are interested in practising in rural health care.

The NRHSN and its Rural Health Clubs offer rural experience weekends, career information sessions and professional development activities as well as providing a social base for students at university and when on rural placement.

The student network leaders also advocate on behalf of health students of all disciplines - including opportunities for more rural placements and training support.

### Rural Workforce Agencies

The NRHSN is an initiative of the Australian Government Department of Health, administered by the Consortium of Rural Workforce Agencies (RWAs). The NSW Rural Doctors Network is the RWA managing the NRHSN on behalf of the Consortium.

Each Australian State and the Northern Territory is served by a government-designated RWA that works to improve access to high-quality healthcare for people in remote, regional and rural Australia. RWAs do this through a range of programs, services and initiatives that attract, recruit, retain and support GPs, nurses and allied health professionals in rural and remote communities.

### Contact us

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### Rural Health Clubs



- 1 **ARMS** - Australian National University, ACT
- 2 **AURHA** - Adelaide University, SA
- 3 **BREAATHE** - University of Newcastle, NSW
- 4 **BUSHFIRE** - Bond University, QLD
- 5 **CARAH** - Charles Darwin University, NT in assoc with Flinders University, SA
- 6 **CRANC** - University of Canberra, ACT
- 7 **FURHS** - Flinders University, SA
- 8 **HOPE4HEALTH** - Griffith University, QLD
- 9 **KRASH** - Notre Dame University, Broome, WA
- 10 **LARHC** - La Trobe University, Bendigo, VIC
- 11 **MARHS** - Charles Sturt University, Albury, NSW including La Trobe University Wodonga campus
- 12 **MIRAGE** - University of Sydney, NSW
- 13 **NERCHA** - University of New England, NSW
- 14 **NOMAD** - Deakin University, VIC
- 15 **OUTLOOK** - University of Melbourne, VIC
- 16 **RAHMS** - University of New South Wales, NSW
- 17 **RHINO** - James Cook University, QLD
- 18 **RHUUWS** - University of Western Sydney, NSW
- 19 **ROUNDS** - Notre Dame University, Sydney campus, NSW
- 20 **ROUSTAH** - University of South Australia, SA
- 21 **RUSTICA** - University of Tasmania, TAS
- 22 **SHARP** - University of Wollongong, NSW
- 23 **SPINRPHEX** - Combined Universities of Western Australia, WA
- 24 **StARRH** - Charles Darwin University, NT including Flinders University, SA
- 25 **TROHIQ** - University of Queensland, QLD
- 26 **WAALHIIBE** - Combined Universities of Western Australia, WA
- 27 **WARRIAHS** - Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga, NSW
- 28 **WILDFIRE** - Monash University, VIC

## Background

The NRHSN believes that all health professionals contribute significantly to positive health outcomes in rural and remote Australia and is in full support of Nurse Practitioners being a vital part of this multidisciplinary team. Nurse practitioners are in a unique position in these communities to help alleviate workforce shortages but to also help to upskill the current nursing workforce.

The Australian Nursing and Midwifery Advisory Council defines a nurse practitioner as “a registered nurse educated and authorised to function autonomously and collaboratively in an advanced and extended clinical role.”<sup>1</sup> The Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia (NMBA) go on to say that a nurse practitioner is “An advanced practice nurse endorsed by the NMBA who has direct clinical contact and practises within their scope under the legislatively protected title ‘nurse practitioner’ under section 95 of the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law, enforced in each state and territory.”<sup>2</sup>

As we continue into the to the 21st century, rural and remote communities across Australia still lack adequate access to immediate medical attention of the highest quality. Qualified nurse practitioners have the potential to improve the health status of individuals in these communities, provide patients with better health opportunities and thus better life expectancies.

Nurse practitioners deliver healthcare that is valued by patients and has a positive effect on their response to treatment.<sup>3,4</sup>

In countries such as the United States and New Zealand, nurse practitioners are an essential means of supplementing the physician workforce.<sup>5,6</sup> In September 2012, the total number of nurse practitioners in Australia was 765 and as of September 2017, this increased progressively to 1585, with Queensland recording the highest sub-section across the nation.<sup>7</sup>

In Australia, nurse practitioners are registered with AHPRA (Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency) and can practise in all Australian states and territories<sup>1</sup>. To qualify for endorsement, a nurse must satisfy all of these requirements:

- ▶ Current general registration as a registered nurse in Australia with no conditions or undertakings relating to unsatisfactory professional performance or unprofessional conduct
- ▶ The equivalent of three years’ full-time experience (5,000 hours) at the clinical advanced nursing practice level, within the past six years, from the date when the complete application seeking endorsement as a nurse practitioner is received by the NMBA
- ▶ Successful completion of:

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Health | Nurse Practitioners. (2018). Health.gov.au. Retrieved 1 February 2018, from <http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/work-nurse-prac>

<sup>2</sup> Australia NaMBo. Endorsement as a nurse practitioner 2016 [updated 07/02/2017; cited 2018 11/02/2018]. Available from: <http://www.nursingmidwiferyboard.gov.au/Registration-Standards/Endorsement-as-a-nurse-practitioner.aspx>

<sup>3</sup> Griffin M, McDevitt J. An Evaluation of the Quality and Patient Satisfaction With an Advanced Nurse Practitioner Service in the Emergency Department. *Journal for Nurse Practitioners*. 2016;12(8):553-9.

<sup>4</sup> Zhu Z, Islam S, Bergmann SR. Effectiveness and outcomes of a nurse practitioner-run chest pain evaluation unit. *Journal of the American Association of Nurse Practitioners*. 2016;28(11):591-5.

<sup>5</sup> Carryer J, Adams S. Nurse practitioners as a solution to transformative and sustainable health services in primary health care: A qualitative exploratory study. *Collegian*. 2017;24(6):525-31.

<sup>6</sup> Bauer JC. Nurse practitioners as an underutilized resource for health reform: Evidence-based demonstrations of cost-effectiveness. *Journal of the American Academy of Nurse Practitioners*. 2010;22(4):228-31.

<sup>7</sup> Australia NaMBo. Statistics 2017 [updated 10 November 2017. Available from: <http://www.nursingmidwiferyboard.gov.au/About/Statistics.aspx>.

- an NMBA-approved program of study leading to endorsement as a nurse practitioner, or
  - a program that is substantially equivalent to an NMBA-approved program of study leading to endorsement as a nurse practitioner as determined by the NMBA
- ▶ Compliance with the NMBA's Nurse practitioner standards for practice<sup>8</sup>

Fundamentally, the foundation of universal healthcare in rural and remote Australia is through a well-supported and sustainable multidisciplinary workforce. Due to the geographical isolation and lack of tertiary care offered in these areas, a collaborative approach to patient care is important if we are to reduce the gap between rural and metropolitan population health indicators.

## Position

- ▶ **RECOMMENDATION:** The NRHSN advocates for universal clarity in defining the role of a nurse practitioner and their extended scope of practice, particularly in rural and remote Australia. We encourage the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA), the Australian College of Nurse Practitioners (ACNP), the Australian Government and other organisations across Australia to work together, to ensure transparency and more unified policies across all states and territories. This, in turn, will enhance extraprofessional understanding and improve patient health outcomes through improved clinical competence.
- ▶ **RECOMMENDATION:** The NRHSN strongly feels that adequately trained and experienced nurse practitioners present a solution to alleviating workforce shortages and health access issues in rural and remote areas. By upskilling and expanding the scope of practice of current rural and remote nurses and those intending to work outside urban areas, this will enable them to provide a greater range of services to meet the health care needs of people in these communities.
- ▶ **RECOMMENDATION:** The NRHSN believes that there is an importance in specific funding/allowances being available for nurses in rural and remote areas that will enable them to upskill and continue professional development. By having continuous funding available, nurses will be better able to access training that enables them to expand their scope of practice and deliver a wider range of services in rural and remote communities.
- ▶ **RECOMMENDATION:** Establishing a rural/remote post-graduate support program which will encourage current and future Nurse Practitioners to remain in their host community or region. In particular, the focus should be on affordable or subsidised housing accommodation options in areas that may have higher costs of living. These may be through the local hospital and health service, in partnership with local council or through being offered specific allowance for rent/purchase privately. There must also be a travel allowance ready to offset the prohibitive cost of fuel and coverage of extensive distances required for work-related purposes.
- ▶ **RECOMMENDATION:** We strongly feel that nurse practitioners, upon arrival into Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, should have mandatory cultural immersion teaching lessons and experiences that will enable them to understand, appreciate and consequently provide more focused care for our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This should be a joint effort between local Indigenous communities, community controlled health services, local councils, local primary health networks and hospitals. Thus, it will facilitate greater interactions between healthcare workers and better outcomes for our Indigenous populations.

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<sup>8</sup> Australia NaMBo. Endorsement as a nurse practitioner 2016 [updated 07/02/2017; cited 2018 11/02/2018]. Available from: <http://www.nursingmidwiferyboard.gov.au/Registration-Standards/Endorsement-as-a-nurse-practitioner.aspx>