



❖ Setting the standards
for nursing and
midwifery

A caring, respected and regulated profession

Nurses and midwives are two of Australia's most highly respected professional groups. They are recognised as skilled health care providers, combining education and professionalism with an ethical and caring concern for their clients.

All nurses and midwives practising in Queensland must be licensed and are required to meet the professional standards of their regulatory authority, the Queensland Nursing Council (Council). Its role is to ensure the safest and highest level of care is provided to people in this State.

Similar to nurses and midwives, other qualified health care professionals including doctors, dentists and physiotherapists require a licence to practise and have their own regulatory bodies.

Queensland Nursing Council

The Queensland Nursing Council was established under the *Nursing Act 1992* to help ensure that nurses treat people in this State safely, competently and with dignity and respect.

The Queensland Nursing Council is the authority responsible for licensing nurses and midwives in Queensland and develops professional standards by working in partnership with the community, nurses, midwives, employers and other health professionals.

Why do we need the Queensland Nursing Council?

The Queensland Nursing Council has been set up by law to protect the public. That law, the *Nursing Act 1992*, makes provision for ensuring safe and competent nursing practice.

How does the Queensland Nursing Council protect the public?

The Queensland Nursing Council helps to ensure that everyone receives the highest possible standard of care by:

- ✓ approving courses that lead to registration, enrolment or endorsement for nursing and midwifery practice
- ✓ issuing licences to nurses and midwives
- ✓ maintaining a register of all currently licensed nurses and midwives who have gained qualification through completion of an approved course
- ✓ assessing nurses' and midwives' competency for renewal of their annual licence to practise, and
- ✓ assessing and investigating complaints about the competence, health, behaviour and/or conduct of nurses and midwives in Queensland.

What is a licensed nurse?

All nurses in Queensland must hold a current licence from the Queensland Nursing Council and be qualified to practise as either a registered nurse (RN) or an enrolled nurse (EN).

These nurses work in public and private hospitals, the community, private medical practices, aged care homes, the defence forces, schools and many other areas.

Both ENs and RNs must formally apply to the Queensland Nursing Council to have their licences renewed annually.

What is a licensed midwife?

Special authorisation is needed for anyone wishing to provide midwifery services. There are two types of authorisation as a midwife following the successful completion of an approved course in an accredited educational organisation, and fulfilment of all application requirements:

1. A registered nurse undertakes a post-registration course to become known as an RN-midwife, whose licence certificate is endorsed midwife
2. A person who is not a registered nurse undertakes a midwife only course (usually a three year university degree) to become known as a midwife only, whose licence certificate is authorised "midwife only".*

*The *Nursing Act 1992* includes midwifery in definitions of nurse education, nursing course, nursing practice and nursing qualifications.

What is the difference between an RN and an EN?

Registered Nurses (RNs)

- Assess, provide and coordinate patient care.
- Supervise and delegate to ENs.
- Work in collaboration with doctors and other members of the health care team.
- Are authorised to give medications prescribed by a doctor.
- With special authorisation from Council, some RNs can also give immunisations or drugs used in sexual and reproductive health without a doctor's instruction.
- In rural and isolated areas of Queensland, some RNs have extended authority and can give a range of medications and supply them to a patient without a doctor's instruction.
- With an additional qualification, an RN may also practice as a nurse practitioner. A nurse practitioner is an RN educated to function autonomously and collaboratively in an advanced and expanded clinical role, which provides innovative and flexible health care delivery that complements other health care providers.

To become an RN, students must successfully complete an approved, three-year bachelor degree course at a university.

To become a nurse practitioner, an RN must complete an accredited Master of Clinical Nursing degree for Nurse Practitioners and have clinical leadership experience, competence in an advanced practice role and planned professional indemnity arrangements.

Some specialised practice fields, such as midwifery and mental health nursing, are noted as authorisations on a nurse's licence certificate. Only those authorised to practise midwifery can provide care during childbirth.

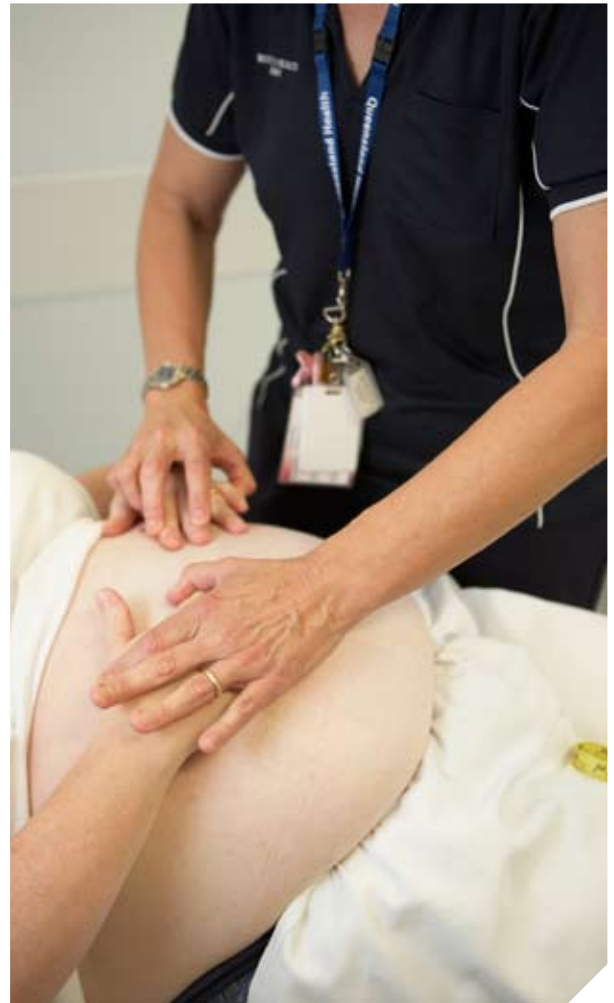
Enrolled Nurses (ENs)

- Provide care under the supervision and delegation of RNs.
- ENs, with medication endorsement, can give prescribed drugs, like antibiotics, under the supervision of an RN or doctor if they have completed an approved course on medications and have this authority from the Queensland Nursing Council on their licence.

In Queensland, to become an EN, students must successfully complete an 18-month pre-enrolment course through the vocational education sector (eg. TAFE).

What is the role of a midwife?

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 preventive measures, the promotion of normal birth, the detection of complications in mother and child, the accessing of medical or other appropriate assistance and the carrying out of emergency measures.



How do I know that the person caring for me is appropriately licensed?

Licensed nurses are called either a registered nurse or an enrolled nurse, and their title should appear on their identification badge. They should also be able to show you a licence issued by the Queensland Nursing Council, which states they are licensed to work.

Under current legislation, RNs who are endorsed midwives and persons who hold a "midwife-only" licence are not required to wear an identification badge stating their midwifery status, however, upon request they should be able to show you a licence issued by the Queensland Nursing Council, which states they are licensed to work.

All licences issued by the Queensland Nursing Council are valid for a 12 month period and must be renewed before 30 June each year.

Members of the public can visit the online register available on Council's website www.qnc.qld.gov.au to check whether a nurse or midwife is licensed to practise in Queensland.

Nurses and other health professionals

NURSING PROFESSION

Registered Nurses (RNs)
Enrolled Nurses (ENs)
Midwives

OTHER HEALTH PROFESSIONALS

Medical Practitioners
Physiotherapists
Dentists and others



Are all bound by a code of ethics and professional conduct*

All of these professionals undertake an educational program approved by the profession, usually at a university, to qualify for a licence to practise. Once licensed, they must practise according to the standards set by the profession and the community. A central authority, usually established by government under a state law, grants the licence to practise and monitors professional standards, including investigation of complaints. Practice standards are similar in all Australian states.

*All Queensland nurses and midwives are bound by the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Council's (ANMC) codes of ethics and professional conduct for nurses and midwives in Australia. Copies are available at www.anmc.org.au

Licensed nurses work as part of a multi-disciplinary team

RNs, ENs and midwives play a vital role in health care organisations, working as part of a team with other health professionals including doctors, psychologists and pharmacists.

Frequently, when working in health care organisations such as hospitals, aged care homes and medical centres, RNs, ENs and midwives work alongside health care workers who are not licensed. In some places, these workers may even help nurses and midwives to provide nursing services.

These health care workers can include orderlies, assistants-in-nursing and personal care assistants. Some health care workers may have a certificate in aged care or other TAFE qualification; however, unlike licensed nurses and other health professionals, these workers are not bound by a set of standards or strict code of ethics.

Special conditions also apply if these health care workers are requested to assist a person to take medication. More information about these conditions is available in the *Health Drugs and Poisons Regulation 1996*, which can be accessed from the Publications section of our website www.qnc.qld.gov.au.

It is important for patients and their relatives to know whether they are being cared for by a licensed nurse/midwife or unlicensed health care worker. It is also important to understand that unlicensed health care workers have a limited range of activities they are allowed to undertake. Additionally, there is no formal code of ethics or regulatory body that monitors the standard of their work.



Unlicensed health workers

OTHER HEALTH CARE WORKERS

Assistants-in-nursing
Personal care assistants
Carers
Orderlies
Ward attendants
Diversional therapists

Can work in hospitals, residential care facilities, health centers and private homes

- No state regulation, therefore do not require a licence to practise
- Some courses are available but do not require special approval by a central authority
- May assist with some nursing activities under supervision of an RN
- No complaint system that is linked to a right to continue to practise

Concerns about professional standards

Part of the Queensland Nursing Council's role is to assess and investigate concerns about the competence, health, behaviour and/or conduct of nurses and midwives in Queensland. Council has well-established processes to deal with any concerns.

If Council receives a report that a nurse or midwife's behaviour might be unprofessional or unsafe, the matter may be investigated. Nurses and midwives with health problems may be asked to undergo a health assessment and those whose ability to provide safe nursing care is in doubt may be referred for assessment of their nursing competence.

As a result of these assessments, nurses and midwives may have their licence suspended so that they cannot practice, or have conditions or limitations placed on their licence. These conditions usually mean that the nurse or midwife is not able to practise without supervision or that they may be restricted from practising in some areas such as mental health or child health. A nurse may also enter into a voluntary agreement or undertaking, to undergo re-education and/or counselling.

In 2000, to achieve quality outcomes in the regulation of professional standards in nursing and midwifery practice in Queensland, Council, in consultation with key stakeholders, developed its *Professional standards policy*. Revised in 2008, this document provides the policy framework for Council to address complaints and the possible action that may be taken. For more information about professional standards or to obtain a copy of this policy, visit our website www.qnc.qld.gov.au.

What if I am unhappy about how I have been treated by a nurse or midwife?

If you are concerned that a nurse or midwife is not providing a safe and competent level of care, or that their conduct is not as professional as you would expect, there are a number of things you can do.

- Talk about your concerns to someone in the organisation where the problem occurred. This might be the nurse in charge or, in some places, the complaints officer
- Contact the Queensland Nursing Council for advice on what Council can do (please refer to the back of this brochure for Council's contact details)
- Contact the Health Quality and Complaints Commission (HQCC) to report your concerns. The Commission is an independent organisation responsible for the oversight, review and improvement of health services through, among other activities, receiving and resolving health service complaints (contact details for the HQCC are available on the back of this brochure).

How will my complaint be assessed by Council?

All complaints about the conduct, health, behaviour and/or competence of a nurse or midwife made to Council are initially assessed by the Executive Officer (EO) to determine if action is necessary and if so, what type of action should be taken.

Upon making a complaint, you may be contacted by the EO or another staff member for more details to inform this assessment.

Depending on the assessment, our EO may decide:

- no further action needs to be taken
- to initiate an investigation
- to refer the nurse or midwife for an independent health assessment
- to arrange for the nurse or midwife to undertake an assessment of their competence
- to refer the complaint to another organisation, such as the HQCC that is better able to deal with it.

What if I am unhappy about how I have been treated by an unlicensed health care worker?

If you are concerned that an unlicensed health care worker is not providing safe care, you can:

- Talk about your concerns to someone in the organisation where the problem occurred such as the nurse in charge or complaints officer.
- Contact the Health Quality and Complaints Commission.



Nurse and midwife education

In Queensland, Council is responsible for setting and monitoring standards for the approval of courses leading to registration, enrolment and endorsement in this state.

Those organisations wishing to conduct such courses are required to submit documentation addressing the six standards outlined in Council's *Nursing and midwifery education policy: an accreditation framework*, available from Council's website www.qnc.qld.gov.au.

The framework is divided into two main areas:

- Accreditation of the educational organisation offering the course
- Accreditation of the course curriculum.

Accreditation for each area is sequential.

Accreditation can be conditional or unconditional and is granted for up to five years with a mid-term review of both the provider and the course undertaken at the mid point.

National accreditation and regulation of health professionals

At the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) meeting in Adelaide on 26 March 2008, it was agreed that a national registration and accreditation scheme for health professionals would be introduced by 1 July 2010. COAG members signed an Intergovernmental Agreement that outlines the arrangements on which a single national registration system will be created and operated.

The system will initially cover ten health professions, including nursing and midwifery. A communiqué issued by COAG suggests that national accreditation and registration will improve workplace mobility, reduce red tape and promote a more flexible, responsive and sustainable health workforce. A national system will also provide greater safeguards for the public and facilitate to the provision of high quality education and training.

For more information or to obtain a copy of the COAG communiqué and *Intergovernmental Agreement*, please visit www.nhwt.gov.au/natreg.asp



For more details about the Queensland Nursing Council

More information about the Queensland Nursing Council and how it works to protect the public is available on our website www.qnc.qld.gov.au or by contacting us using the email, phone and facsimile details listed at the bottom of this page.

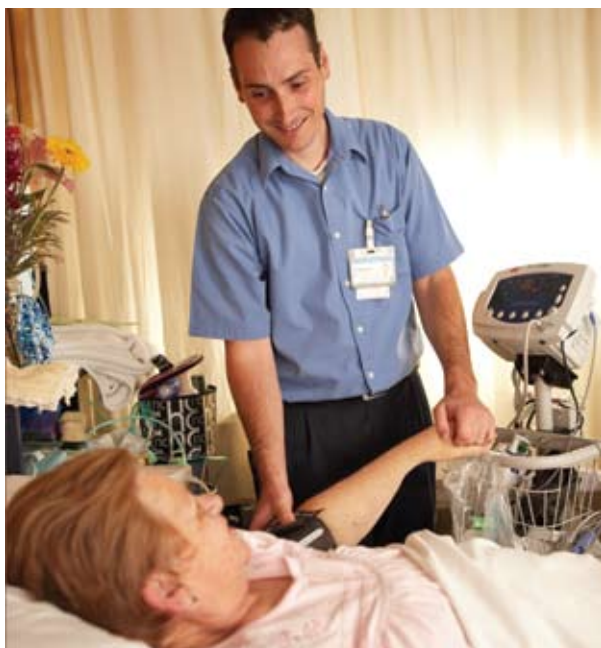
Other contacts

Health Quality and Complaints Commission

GPO Box 3089, Brisbane, QLD 4001

Phone: 07 3120 5999 or 1800 077 308 (callers outside Brisbane)

Website: www.hqcc.qld.gov.au



Copyright protects this publication. However, the Queensland Nursing Council has no objection to this material being reproduced except for commercial purposes. For commercial purposes contact Council. © 2008 Queensland Nursing Council.

GPO Box 2928
Brisbane Q 4001

Level 14
201 Charlotte Street
Brisbane Q 4000

General enquiries
07 3223 5111

Queensland callers
outside Brisbane
1300 139 993

Facsimile
07 3223 5115

www.qnc.qld.gov.au



Queensland
Nursing Council
SETTING THE STANDARDS