



POSITION

The work of primary health care nurses requires frequent contact with members of the public in settings where it can be difficult to minimise or control COVID-19 transmission. From both a personal protection and public safety perspective, APNA supports COVID-19 vaccination and strongly encourages all healthcare workers and healthcare students undertaking placements to be vaccinated where there is no medical contraindication. This includes nurses working across all primary health care settings including but not limited to general practice, aged care, schools, in-home services, community health and correctional facilities.

BACKGROUND

Benefits of COVID-19 vaccination

As regulated health professionals, nurses and midwives have a responsibility to promote the health of communities and build vaccine confidence. There are a number of benefits to widespread vaccination of the healthcare workforce. These include:

- Reducing the risk of transmission of COVID-19 to patients and the general community
- Reducing the risk of transmission of COVID-19 among health care colleagues who are at greater risk of contracting COVID-19

Medical exemptions

For health professionals with a medical contraindication to the COVID-19 vaccine as per the ATAGI clinical guidance on COVID-19 vaccine in Australia, formal documentation from an appropriate authority such as a health care provider should be provided to the employer. This medical contraindication should be verified and documented annually.

Employers will need to determine the level of risk posed by the unvaccinated health professional and implement appropriate measures to reduce the risk of transmission of COVID-19. Those professionals medically exempt from vaccination should be supported to undertake roles that are professionally fulfilling and maintaining their own health and safety.

Obligations for nurses and midwives

The National Board of Australia (NMBA) supported by the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA) is responsible for the regulation of the nursing and midwifery professions.



All registered nurses, enrolled nurses, nurse practitioners and midwives are required to practice in accordance with professional standards set by the NMBA. This includes the codes of conduct, codes of ethics and the standards for practice, the social media policy, and the guidelines for advertising regulated health services (NMBA, 2016).

The AHPRA and National Board's position statement Registered health practitioners and students and COVID-19 vaccination states the following:

“While some health practitioners may have a conscientious objection to COVID-19 vaccination, all practitioners, including students on placement, must comply with local employer, health service or health department policies, procedures and guidelines relating to COVID-19 vaccination. Any queries about these should be directed towards the individual employer, health service, state or territory health department and/or education provider for registered students”.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

For more information on professional standards for nurses and midwives visit: www.nursingmidwiferyboard.gov.au

For more information on COVID information for nurses visit: <https://www.apna.asn.au/hub/coronavirusinfofornurses> or contact APNA's Nurse Support Line on 1300 303 184.

REFERENCES

1. NMBA 2016, Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia – “Position statement on nurses, midwives and vaccination”, retrieved from <https://www.nursingmidwiferyboard.gov.au/codes-guidelines-statements/position-statements/vaccination.aspx>
 2. AHPRA 2021, “Registered health practitioners and students and COVID-19 vaccination”, retrieved from https://downloads.hpca.nsw.gov.au/s3fs-public/ahpra_position-statement_covid-19-vaccination-position-statement.pdf
 3. AHPRA 2021, “Vaccination information”, retrieved from www.ahpra.gov.au/news/COVID-19/vaccination-information.aspx
 4. Australian Department of Health, “ATAGI Expanded Guidance on temporary medical exemptions for COVID-19 vaccines”, retrieved from <https://www.health.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/2021/09/atagi-expanded-guidance-on-temporary-medical-exemptions-for-covid-19-vaccines.pdf>
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Australian Primary Health Care Nurses Association (APNA)

Australian Primary Health Care Nurses Association (APNA) is the peak professional body for nurses working in primary health care. APNA champions the role of primary health care nurses; to advance professional recognition, ensure workforce sustainability, nurture leadership in health, and optimise the role of nurses in patient-centred care.

APNA is bold, vibrant and future-focused. We reflect the views of our membership and the broader profession by bringing together nurses from across Australia to represent, advocate, promote and celebrate the achievements of nurses in primary health care.

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