



Australian College of Nursing

# Men in Nursing

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES



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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Thanks to the Men in Nursing Working Party members:

**Ariel Yokota MACN**

**Ben Chiarella MACN**

**Ben Jenkins MACN**

**Chris Hinder MACN**

**Daryn Mitford MACN**

**David Stanley MACN**

**Haydon Cunninghame MACN**

**Jacob Roberts MACN**

**Kate Barnewall MACN**

**Kylie Hasse MACN**

**Luke Yokota MACN Chair**

**Lee Poole MACN Deputy Chair**

**Nick Hayward MACN**

**Prachi Javalekar MACN**

**Sean Woolford MACN**

**Shauna Wilson MACN**

**Tammie Breneger MACN**

ACN would also like to acknowledge the following for their contributions to developing these Guiding Principles:

**Adjunct Professor Kylie Ward FACN**

**Dr Jacqui Hoepner**

**Dr Carolyn Stapleton FACN**

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# FOREWORD

## Creating value through inclusion

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The Australian College of Nursing (ACN) is committed to ensuring Australia has an inclusive nursing workforce that promotes gender equity and reflects Australia's diverse population. At ACN, we believe providing compassionate, empathic, high-quality and person-centred care is not gendered.

Over the past four years ACN has established various social impact initiatives to provide a platform for nurses to make a difference to the profession and wellbeing of the populations we serve.

This Men in Nursing Guiding Principles outlines ACN's commitment to promoting nursing as an appealing career for men to pursue, to attracting and retaining men into the profession, and to breaking down broader socio-cultural barriers around gender roles and expectations.

These Guiding Principles are close to our hearts. ACN believes all nurses are leaders; with the power to advocate for diversity and inclusion in our workplaces and communities. ACN supports nurses across Australia to excel in their profession regardless of how they choose to identify, their gender, sexual orientation or cultural background.

Working in the nursing profession, I am all too aware of the outdated stereotypes and prejudice men in nursing can face on a day-to-day basis. While things are slowly changing for the better, more work needs to be done to overcome these barriers. From an early age, we need to teach boys that it's okay for men to care.

I am thrilled to have been the Chair of the Men in Nursing Working Party. Our objectives are to understand and address barriers to men pursuing nursing, promote nursing as a gender-neutral profession, and ensure men working in nursing are supported to grow and develop as leaders. This ensures a more inclusive workforce; more reflective of Australians' needs and better equipped to provide inclusive, person-centred care.

I'm excited to see these Guiding Principles come to fruition. They provide a clear set of values and actions for individuals, schools and training organisations, health care service providers and society more broadly to foster a more inclusive and equitable nursing workforce. Anyone who wants to pursue nursing should feel encouraged to do so, regardless of their gender.



**Adjunct Professor  
Kylie Ward FACN  
ACN CEO**



**Luke Yokota MACN  
Men in Nursing Chair**

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*“When I think of a nurse, I think of someone who truly cares for people, holds and nurtures them. Nurses are not afraid to be there in moments of hardship and joy. Nurses are well-educated and vital in the care of all patients. To me, these are genderless principles.”*

**Luke Yokota MACN**

Chair Men in Nursing Working Party

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Men in Nursing Working Party

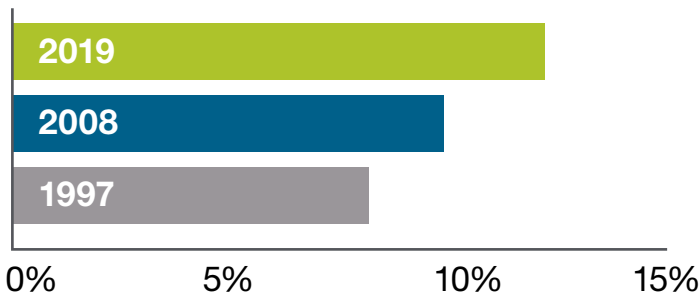
# INSIGHTS

## Men in nursing

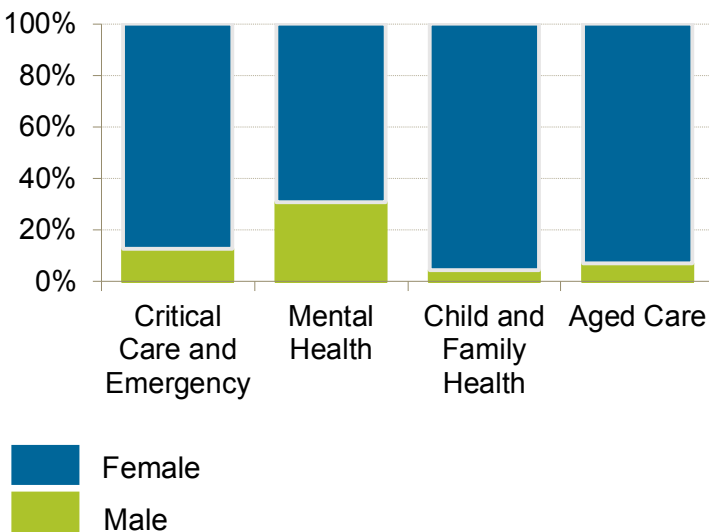
### DID YOU KNOW...

The number of men in nursing has slowly risen over the past three decades, with men making up just 7.7% in 1997<sup>1</sup>, 9.5% in 2008<sup>2</sup> and 12.1% in 2019<sup>3</sup>.

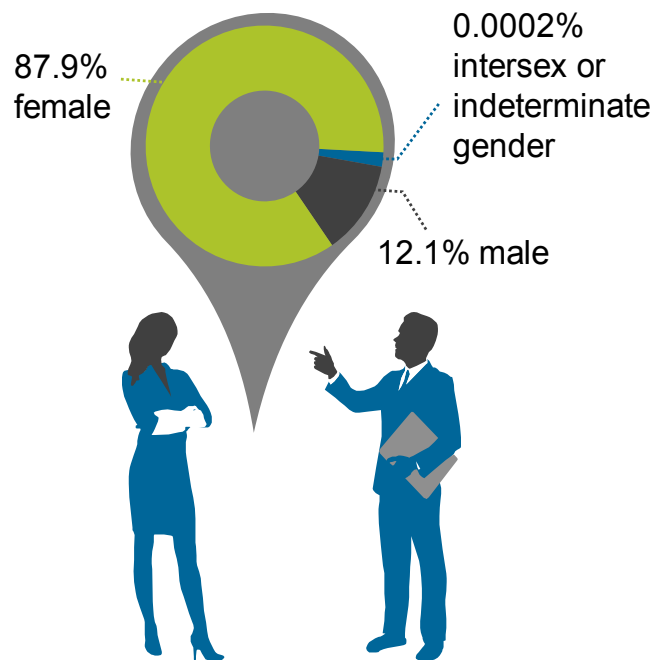
Percentage of men in nursing over time



Male nurses predominantly work in critical care and mental health<sup>4</sup>



**87.9%** of registered or enrolled nurses in 2019 were female<sup>5</sup>



But **15.7%** of nurse managers are male<sup>6</sup>

1 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (1999). Nursing Labour Force. National Health Labour Force Series. Number 20, p12. <https://www.aihw.gov.au/getmedia/b1a49546-59d9-4657-b1db-ef05ee024e1e/nurslf99.pdf.aspx?inline=true>

2 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2010). Nursing and midwifery workforce 2011. National health workforce series no. 2. Cat. No. HWL 48. Canberra: AIHW.

3 Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia (2019). Registrant data 01 July 2019 to 30 September 2019. Retrieved from <https://www.nursingmidwiferyboard.gov.au/About/Statistics.aspx>. Accessed 13 December 2019.

4 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2010). Nursing and midwifery workforce 2011. National health workforce series no. 2. Cat. No. HWL 48. Canberra: AIHW.

5 Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia (2019). Registrant data 01 July 2019 to 30 September 2019. <https://www.nursingmidwiferyboard.gov.au/About/Statistics.aspx>

6 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2015). The National Health Workforce Data Set



# GUIDING PRINCIPLES

## Overview

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ACN is the pre-eminent and national leader of the nursing profession. We are committed to advancing nurse leadership to enhance health care and strongly believe all nurses, regardless of job title or seniority, are leaders.

The aim of this document is to promote men in nursing and broader gender equity through principles to help shape attitudes and actions, establishing more inclusive and equitable working environments and patient care across the Australian nursing profession.

### The ACN Men in Nursing principles include:

#### **Principle 1:**

Eliminating rigid gender roles and expectations will help individuals achieve their potential, and foster a more inclusive, equitable and diverse society. Boys of all ages - and society in general - should be taught it is okay for men to care.

#### **Principle 2:**

The nursing workforce should reflect the diverse needs and backgrounds of all Australians, to ensure person-centred, empathic and inclusive care. This means encouraging men to pursue nursing in all health care settings, levels of seniority and specialisations.

#### **Principle 3:**

Schools, higher education and training organisations should actively promote gender equity in their curriculum, recruitment, and transition to practice programs.

#### **Principle 4:**

Health care service providers should promote gender equity and inclusion through enhanced collaboration, positive workplace culture, equitable governance structures and leadership.



# Principle 1: GENDER ROLES

## PERSONAL REFLECTIONS



Name: Ben Chiarella MACN

Clinical Background: Primary health care, health care technology, nurse management

Ben had been working in an uninspiring and draining corporate job when he and his wife had a baby. He realised he wanted to be the best father he could be, and provide a positive role model for his son to pursue a career he was passionate about.

After assessing his options he realised a nursing career would open doors to a world of possibilities, providing him much-needed meaning and purpose.

He has faced his fair share of pushback, but after experiencing the rewards and opportunities afforded to him through nursing, he has never looked back.

*“A nursing career opens doors to the world of health care... in a profession that has meaning and provides tangible benefits at both micro and macro levels for societies and health across the globe. If you are seeing a nurse as merely the assistant to the doctor, I think you’ve missed just how vital nurses are to health care.”*

### What next?

Ben continues to work across a variety of health care settings, developing technological innovations to health care delivery and providing outstanding health care within the community. He regularly proves the naysayers wrong, demonstrating the endless rewards of a career in nursing.

As early as possible and throughout their development, we need to instill in boys the idea that it is okay for men to care. The skill and patience it takes to sit with people during their highest highs and lowest lows takes bravery, compassion and incredible strength. These qualities should not be gendered. Anyone who demonstrates what it takes to be a nurse should be nurtured to grow and develop their skills, regardless of their gender, gender identity or expression, or sexual orientation.

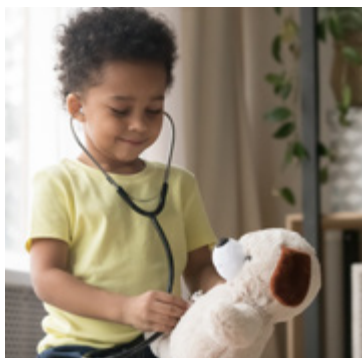
Despite the importance of attracting and retaining nurses who are men, the nursing profession has historically been female dominated. Although many of the factors that have traditionally deterred men from entering nursing, such as gender-biased titles of matron and sister, low pay, and perceptions of patient discomfort have been addressed, perceptions persist that may deter men considering a career in nursing (Stanley et al., 2014).

***“Though we have the courage to raise our daughters more like our sons, we’ve rarely had the courage to raise our sons like our daughters.” Gloria Steinem***

If we are to grow our nursing workforce to meet the increasingly complex and chronic health needs of Australia’s diverse population, we must overcome these stereotypes and barriers. ACN advocates for a future in which a man in a nursing role is entirely normal.

Recommended actions:

- Critically reflect on your own biases, language and behaviours around gender roles.
- Safely challenge others who use gendered language or jokes.
- Encourage any children in your life to pursue activities they are passionate about, rather than those ‘expected’ of them.





# Principle 2: NURSING WORKFORCE

## PERSONAL REFLECTIONS



Name: Haydon Cunninghame  
MACN

Clinical Background: Community  
and primary health care

After suffering from severe epilepsy as a child, Haydon was exposed to the vital role nurses play in health care early. After overcoming many of the real and perceived barriers his epilepsy posed, Haydon worked as an alpine search and rescue technician. While climbing in the United States, he suffered numerous fractures, leaving him unable to continue his search and rescue career.

He realised nursing would allow him to continue his lifesaving work. He works primarily in rural and remote areas, often overcoming limited access and resources to optimise health outcomes for his patients.

*“I would like to get to a point where gender is not as important as the skills you bring to the table... Increased diversity in nursing can only improve the patient experience and I actively encourage any males considering nursing as a career option to follow their dreams”*

### What next?

Haydon now works in nurse leadership, supporting and inspiring future nurse leaders to grow and develop, so they can meet the needs of increasingly complex and diverse needs of Australian health care consumers.

While men make up 49% of the Australian population, they represent just 12% of the nursing profession. Of these, most work in management, mental health and critical care roles.

To address the needs of Australia’s changing population and alleviate the pressure our health care system is under, we need to ensure the nursing workforce accurately and meaningfully reflects Australia, at different levels of seniority, in all health care settings and across the board.

***“The greatness of a man is not in how much wealth he acquires, but in his integrity and his ability to affect those around him positively.”***

**Bob Marley**

While nursing is female-dominated, women remain underrepresented in wider health care leadership at organisational, federal, state and territory levels. Therefore, health care organisations are not reflective of the community or leadership roles within the health workforce. ACN advocates for and promotes any efforts to foster a nursing workforce that is more representative, inclusive and diverse.

Recommended actions:

- Engage respectfully with men who are nurses; appreciating their skills and commitment to your care rather than their gender.
- Like the growing trend of women in engineering, science, politics, trades and construction, appreciate the benefits of men entering industries such as nursing, early childhood education and primary school teaching.
- Acknowledge the complex skills required to be a nurse and respect both men and women who perform well in the profession.



# Principle 3: EDUCATION & TRAINING

## PERSONAL REFLECTIONS



**Name:** Nick Hayward MACN

**Clinical Background:**  
Undergraduate nursing student

Nick grew up surrounded by wonderful nurses in his family, so he always knew it was an option, unlike many other boys his age. After spending his twenties working in bottle shops, he eventually realised his passion lay in caring for others and making a difference in people's lives.

Nick wants nursing to be recognised as the highly-technical, exciting and rewarding profession it is, while leaving behind tired stereotypes and tropes.

***“Boys and young men need to hear that nursing, caring and emotional labour is OK, and that nursing is a highly-skilled, technologically driven profession, grounded in good science.”***

Nick believes the only way to prevent a major predicted shortfall in the nursing workforce is to ensure young men see nursing as an attractive career option, where their work is recognised and appreciated on its merits.

### What next?

Nick is enjoying his studies and clinical placement and can't wait to begin his career as a registered nurse. As an ACN Emerging Nurse Leader, he is excited to be a role model for future nurse leaders.

Schools, higher education providers and training organisations should actively promote gender equity in their recruitment, courses and transition to practice programs.

While most boys and girls express themselves in similar ways at a young age, gender socialisation reinforced in the home and throughout school can discourage males from pursuing traditionally female-dominated professions such as nursing (Lawson et al 2015).

***“If we don't place the straitjacket of gender roles on young children, we give them space to reach their full potential.”*** **Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie**

Due to the gender disparity in nursing, men in the profession can face discrimination, isolation and prejudice, leading to significant attrition (Stott 2007). With Australia facing a shortage in the nursing workforce, educators have a responsibility to actively promote men in nursing and support them to stay.

Recommended actions:

- Critically review all courses, recruitment material and communication to ensure language is gender-neutral and promotes men in nursing.
- Undertake research to explore barriers to men pursuing a nursing career, and understand why more gravitate towards critical care, mental health and management roles.
- Design and implement targeted programs to support transition to practice for men in nursing, including mentoring, promotion of role models and professional networks.



# Principle 4: WORKPLACE CULTURE

## PERSONAL REFLECTIONS



**Name:** Lee Poole MACN, ACN  
Men in Nursing Deputy Chair

**Clinical Background:** Aeromedical  
and prehospital retrieval, nurse  
practitioner

After dismissing nursing as a potential career throughout his teenage years, Lee eventually shifted to nursing from business and psychology near the end of his second year at university.

Despite dealing with jokes and questions about his sexuality, Lee has never felt discriminated against for being a man in nursing. He has worked with some amazing male nursing role models and has experienced a broad range of exciting and challenging opportunities.

*“I love the diversity in job roles and the ability to change lives and support people at an individual patient level. Through to systems levels... I [get] to see some amazing places, meet some wonderful people and work in challenging situations.”*

### What next?

While working with the Royal Flying Doctor Service (RFDS), Lee completed his studies and was endorsed as a nurse practitioner. He now heads RFDS Nursing and Clinical Governance and leads health care system innovation at the clinical and educational level.

Organisations should promote gender equity and inclusion through enhanced collaboration, governance structures and leadership.

Accounts from men in nursing highlight the impact of role misconceptions and harmful gender stereotypes on their sense of belonging in the nursing profession. For instance, one study found male nurses were often met with patients or family members initially assuming they were the doctor, followed by surprise, suspicion or ridicule. In the same study, some male nurses said they avoided telling people in social situations what they did for work (Juliff, Russell, & Bulsara, 2016). In other accounts, men in nursing detail encounters with damaging gender stereotypes; for instance that they are ‘soft’, incompetent or even predatory when acting in caring roles (Selinger-Morris, 2016).

***“Inclusion and fairness in the workplace... is not simply the right thing to do; it’s the smart thing to do.” Alexis Herman***

Recommended actions:

- Review existing governance structures through a critical gender lens to identify whether systems reflect gender equity and inclusion.
- Develop strategies to increase the number of nurses who are men in your organisation, such as blind recruitment where possible and implicit bias training for managers.
- Establish a mentoring program to support nurses who are men to connect with male role models.
- Actively promote a workplace culture supportive of men who are nurses.
- Implement measures to reduce stigma, discrimination and stereotypes through role modelling appropriate practices and behavior.
- Support and encourage men to work in non-traditional clinical areas.



# MEN IN NURSING ETIQUETTE

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## ✓ DO...

- Recognise the value of a nursing workforce that represents Australia's diverse population, not your expectations around gender roles
- Be respectful and open-minded towards men in nursing and acknowledge their skills, knowledge and quality of care provision, rather than their gender
- Understand the difference between 'diversity', 'equity' and 'inclusion'
- Acknowledge everyone has their own unconscious bias (it's not a bad thing, but checking it helps)
- Remember change takes time, don't expect things to change overnight
- Call out disrespectful, rude or sexist behaviour
- Tell boys and men that it is okay to care

## ✗ DON'T...

- Make comments or jokes about a nurse's gender, gender expression or sexual orientation
- Assume a man in a nursing role is automatically any more or less competent than a female nurse
- Assume a man in a nursing role is the doctor
- React with shock or ridicule when you find out the male nurse is not the doctor
- Forget discrimination comes in many forms – both direct (that you can see and hear) and indirect (where it may not be so obvious)
- Ignore exclusive behaviour or discriminatory policies or practices, speak up, report it, contact ACN
- Let staff sexual orientation or gender identity influence which patients they care for
- Accept stereotypes



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# ABOUT ACN

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The Australian College of Nursing (ACN) is leading the way to empower nurses around the country to achieve the health and wellbeing they deserve. Nurses dedicate their lives to caring for others and often neglect looking after themselves in the process. We support our members to be the best they can be by keeping them informed, connected and inspired.

- ACN advocates on behalf of the nursing profession
- The expertise of ACN's members helps to shape health care and aged care policies
- ACN nurtures the nurse leaders of today and tomorrow
- ACN is an accredited higher education provider for qualified nurses

## CONTACT US

### CANBERRA

**Street address:**

1 Napier Close,  
Deakin ACT 2600

**Postal address:**

PO Box 219, Deakin West  
ACT 2600

e [acn@acn.edu.au](mailto:acn@acn.edu.au)

t 02 6283 3400

### SYDNEY

**Street address:**

Level 6, 9 Wentworth Street,  
Parramatta NSW 2150

**Postal address:**

PO Box 650, Parramatta  
NSW 2124

e [acn@acn.edu.au](mailto:acn@acn.edu.au)

t 02 9745 7500

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