



Australian College of Nursing

COVID-19 NURSING WORKFORCE SOLUTIONS

EXPERT ADVISORY GROUP



ACN FIGHTS FOR NURSES

STATEMENT OF ACTION

Australian College of Nursing Statement on the professional response to COVID-19

STATEMENT

The Australian College of Nursing (ACN) calls on the Australian Government to immediately remove barriers to nurses delivering care in the community and to enable funding and resources that will allow nurses to provide care for people in their homes and via telehealth. This action is urgently required to avoid Emergency Department presentations, hospital admissions and to face and respond to the threat of COVID-19.

Australia's 385,000 nurses, including up to 50,000 advanced practice nurses and nurse practitioners, are the largest component of the clinical health workforce and, as such, are critical to the integrated health system response to COVID-19. Nurses working in hospitals will support the sick who need acute care. However, we know that this demand could surge very quickly, overwhelming and burdening the hospital system and all staff providing health care. Nurses working in the community, within the primary health care sector, will not only be managing the overflow of people from hospitals and/or those refused hospital admissions. They will also be reducing the spread of infection, managing chronic conditions and keeping our most vulnerable and at-risk people out of hospitals to support social distancing or self-isolation.

While the recent announcements around expansions of telehealth are welcomed, it is not the only solution. ACN recognises that face-to-face consultation is still necessary in many cases to provide high quality health care in the community.

CONTEXT

With the emerging threat to the health and wellbeing of Australians due to COVID-19, nurses must immediately be funded and enabled to deliver care to their full scope of practice^{1,2}. The nursing role, particularly in the community, is vital to prevent the healthcare system from being overwhelmed. Under the [National Partnership On COVID-19 Response 2020](#) the Commonwealth and the States agreed that people at risk from COVID-19 should have access to "essential health care in a way that reduces their potential exposure to infection"³.

If funded appropriately, nurses can facilitate this essential health care by coordinating and delivering expert clinical care, particularly for those living with complex chronic disease, in individuals' homes. This must include nurses working in all community and primary health care settings (including residential aged care facilities, community health, non-government organisations etc.), not just those working in General Practice. It is essential that we enable nurses to undertake home visits and telehealth consultations to provide the collaborative care required to keep the community safe and help people to avoid hospital attendance both during business hours and after hours.

As part of this response, it is critical that we leverage our registered nurses and nurse practitioners to provide tertiary level care in the community, something they are trained and educated to do, but currently inadequately funded to provide. This will ease the burden of demand-driven COVID-19 health care system congestion and optimise outcomes for our most at-risk, by reducing potential exposure to infection while maintaining access to health care.

The coming weeks and months will present unique challenges to delivering health care and maintaining the health and well-being of Australians. This unprecedented operating environment will require all nurses to deliver care to their full scope of practice. Current funding models prevent nurses delivering care that is critical to supporting complex and co-morbid consumers in the community. Without access to care in the community, patients will default to Emergency Departments and acute care services. This will lead to increased morbidity and mortality for these patients, greater challenges in containment of COVID-19 and increased burden for Emergency Departments.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For nurses to optimally contribute to the COVID-19 pandemic response in line with the [National Partnership On COVID-19 Response 2020](#), the following actions are immediately required by the Commonwealth:

1. In relation to nurse practitioners, either
 - a. Immediately implement the [14 recommendations of the Medicare Review Taskforce - Nurse Practitioner Reference Group Report](#)⁴ enabling nurse practitioners to provide emergent care to the broader community, including residential aged care, or
 - b. Provide nurse practitioners immediate access to the same item numbers that general practitioners currently have access to and remove the requirement under [Health Insurance \(Midwife and Nurse Practitioner\) Determination 2011](#) for general practitioner collaboration. This will reinforce the delivery of emergent care to the broader community, including residential aged care.
2. Amend Section 84AAF of the [National Health Act 1953](#) to provide registered nurses with access to Medicare Provider Numbers.
3. Provide registered nurses with access to the existing nurse practitioner Medicare item numbers:
 - 82200 - professional attendance short
 - 82205 - professional attendance <20 minutes
 - 82210 - professional attendance ≥20 minutes
 - 82215 - professional attendance ≥40 minutes
 with a 100% loading for after hours and in-home consultations.

4. Work collaboratively with the Australian College of Nursing to determine the need for additional Medicare item numbers and funding of nursing services as the pandemic unfolds.

REFERENCES

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