2024

THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE

AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

TENTH ASSEMBLY

Standing Committee on Health and Community Wellbeing - Report 11
Inquiry into Recovery Plan for Nursing and Midwifery Workers

Government Response

Presented by
Rachel Stephen-Smith MLA
Minister for Health
June 2024

ACT Government | ACT Health

Government Response to Standing Committee on Health and Community Wellbeing Report 11- Inquiry into Recovery Plan for Nursing and Midwifery Workers.

Introduction

The Australian Capital Territory's (ACT) public health services deliver health care to the ACT population and the surrounding NSW region and nurses and midwives are integral to the health and wellbeing of these communities. The ACT Government supports the valuable contribution that this workforce provides to Canberrans.

This response acknowledges, notes and responds to the Standing Committee on Health and Community Wellbeing Report 11 - Inquiry into Recovery Plan for Nursing and Midwifery Workers (The Report). The Report provides 20 recommendations. These have been reviewed and a response has been made on current and projected activity for each recommendation.

Background

The Clerk of the Legislative Assembly wrote to the Minister for Health on 3 August 2022 to notify that e-petition No 19-22 - Recovery Plan for nursing and midwifery workers.

The Standing Committee on Health and Community Wellbeing (Standing Committee) resolved to inquire and report on the petition. Public and private hearings were held on 14 and 20 June 2023, with evidence heard from 19 witnesses, including Government submissions.

The Standing Committee handed down the Report on 20 February 2024.

Response to Inquiry Recommendations

The ACT Government Response to the recommendations addresses the themes of nursing and midwifery employment models and conditions, workforce data and planning, staffing arrangements, scope of practice, skills and training, and workplace culture and safety.

This response articulates the ACT Government's commitment to the nursing and midwifery workforce, and the resolution that all partners across the healthcare sector must work in collaboration. The ACT Government acknowledges it has a vital contribution to make to the proposed implementation of changes proposed in The Report's recommendations, whilst recognising that there is a shared responsibility across the health sector to address them.

Recommendation 1

The committee recommends that the ACT Government negotiate salaries for nurses and midwives in the next enterprise bargaining agreement that recognise their comparatively high skill levels and will remain competitive with renumeration offered by other states and territories in Australia and considers how to remain competitive with other high-employment sectors in the ACT.

The ACT Government agrees with this recommendation and is taking actions to address these matters.

The ACT Government recognises the critical importance of recognition of nurses and midwives through negotiation of the ACT Public Sector Nursing and Midwifery Enterprise Agreement (NMEA) 2023-2026, which has commenced the access/ballot period as of 5 June 2024. The new NMEA is proposed to include the standard ACT Public Sector wage increases and increases to leave entitlements as negotiated through the common core negotiations in keeping with the Government's commitment to providing more beneficial outcomes for employees.

Additionally, an annual $750 per annum allowance, and a one-off transition allowance of $2000 is provided to increase access to professional development opportunities for nurses and midwives. These measures in combination with the significant investment in mandated minimum nurse/midwife ratios will ensure the ACT health system continues to be an attractive and competitive workplace for nurses and midwives.

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare data for 2021-22 demonstrate that the ACT remains the third highest paying jurisdiction for public hospital nurses with an average salary of $118,958.

Recommendation 2

The committee recommends that the ACT Government, in partnership with a broad range of stakeholders, identify and centralise, from current national and local health workforce strategies, goals and driving actions that are relevant to nurses and midwives to develop a single workforce plan.

This recommendation is existing ACT Government policy.

Canberra Health Services (CHS) has a current Nurses and Midwives Workforce Plan and will be developing a new plan in 2024 with broader stakeholders as proposed. A unified plan with identified goals, strategies, actions and timelines would support a cohesive and collaborative approach.

There is significant work being undertaken collectively at both the Australian and ACT Government levels through partnerships with multiple stakeholders to address nursing and midwifery workforce issues which are impacting the workforce nationally and internationally.

The 2022-23 ACT Budget provided investment for system-wide initiatives to address workforce planning and ensure our health workforce is sustainable into the future. This builds on a range of dedicated investments for workforce planning and supports that assist each profession and speciality area of the health workforce in the ACT.

In the 2022-23 ACT Budget investments included more than $12 million for Maternity in Focus with a focus on workforce planning as part of this investment; $8.75 million over four years in the wellbeing and recovery fund; $6.5 million in embedding a positive safety culture in the ACT public health system and more than $50 million over four years to implement phase 1 of ratios.

The *ACT Health Services Plan 2022-2030*[1] provides specific actions to develop nursing and midwifery workforce action plans to ensure recruitment, retention and career pathways are established to support the growing workforce. The action items will be informed by the hierarchy of work being undertaken at both the Commonwealth and ACT jurisdictional levels as detailed below.

The *ACT Health Workforce Strategy 2023-2032*[2] was released on 4 May 2023. The Strategy sets out the Territory-wide approach to building a sustainable health workforce and will support the Territory and surrounding regions to predict and respond to workforce challenges.

The Strategy includes eight strategic priorities which focus on building the foundations to attract, retain and sustain a health workforce in the ACT. From creating exciting career pathways and investing in data intelligence, to ensuring a culturally safe environment for our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce, the intent is that these priorities will deliver the ACT's collective ambition to be the most capable health workforce in Australia. The 2024-2026 Action Plan to support the ACT Health Workforce Strategy 2023-2032 is currently being drafted.

The ACT Government has recognised that midwives are the largest maternity workforce in the ACT and the commitment to this valuable profession is reflected in *Maternity in Focus: The ACT Public Maternity System Plan 2022-2032*[3].

The Minister for Health hosted a Midwifery Roundtable on 7 September 2023 with representation from the ACT Health Directorate (ACTHD), Canberra Health Services (CHS) which included North Canberra Hospital (NCH) and the Centenary Hospital for Women and Children, the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF) ACT Branch, the Australian College of Midwives (ACM), and the University of Canberra (UC). Participants discussed the current climate of midwifery workforce challenges. From this roundtable, a collaborative working group was created.

The working group identified key items to progress, including rostering practices, compliance with the ACT Public Sector Nursing and Midwifery Enterprise Agreement 2020-2022, further development of continuity of midwifery care, review of legislation that is applicable to the protection of midwives, enabling endorsed midwives to work to their full scope of practice within the public health system, and admission rights for endorsed privately practicing midwives in the public health setting.

The *ACT Mental Health Workforce Strategy 2023-2033*[4] comprises a 10-year Framework for Change including shorter-term action frameworks and work plans. The Strategy sits under the broader work

[1] ACT Health Services Plan 2022 to 2030

[2] ACT Health Workforce Strategy 2023-2032

[3] Maternity in Focus - The Public Maternity System Plan 2022-2032 (act.gov.au)

[4] Office for Mental Health and Wellbeing Workforce Strategy 2023–2033 (act.gov.au)

being undertaken on the *National Mental Health Workforce Strategy 2022-2032*[5] and the ACT Health Workforce Strategy. Strategic workforce actions identified within this Strategy include investing in workforce planning and intelligence, embracing diversity and culture of respect to deliver a safe and welcoming workplace, rewarding careers with a focus on career pathways, mobility of the workforce, professional development, credentialing, and qualification pathways. A focus on stepping into the future through identifying innovative models of care and service delivery and advocating for workforce reform is also identified.

A collaborative Mental Health Nursing Roundtable and subsequent quarterly community of practice (CoP) is being planned for 2024 by mental health stakeholders across the ACT. The aim is to understand the practice and strategic environment of mental health nurses, explore and embed a mental health nursing professional identity and voice and strengthen sector wide networks, collaborations and partnerships, and develop a strategic plan for the profession in the ACT.

Additional national work that the ACT is heavily involved in include:

- Maternity workforce review project – a collaboration between Queensland, Northern Territory and the ACT, this work reflects the importance of recognising the specialist workforce required to provide high level maternity services.
- National Nursing Workforce Strategy[6] – the Australian Government work considers long-term strategic reform to allow nurses to work to their full scope of practice and provide for the needs of the Australian community into the future.
- Midwifery Futures project (2023-2024)[7] – funded by the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia (NMBA) working in collaboration with the Australia and New Zealand Council of Chief Nursing and Midwifery Officers of (ANZCCNMO). The Midwifery Futures project aims to review the current state of Australia's midwifery workforce and to generate information to support policy and regulatory change to enhance midwifery service provision.
- Unleashing the Potential of our Health Workforce – Scope of Practice Review[8] is considering available evidence about health professionals' ability to deliver on their full scope of practice in primary care.

The ACTHD is actively engaged in local consultations associated with this work and has encouraged and promoted participation of nurses in the ACT through local networks.

The ACTHD will continue to work with stakeholders to progress nursing and midwifery specific workforce initiatives informed by the work being undertaken at both Australian and ACT

[5] National Mental Health Workforce Strategy 2022–2032 | Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care

[6] National Nursing Workforce Strategy | Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care

[7] Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia - Midwifery Futures: The Australian Midwifery Workforce Project (nursingmidwiferyboard.gov.au)

[8] Unleashing the Potential of our Health Workforce – Scope of Practice Review | Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care

Government levels. The complexity of health services delivery across all sectors in the ACT will require further work to explore solidifying a single nursing and midwifery workforce plan.

Recommendation 3

The committee recommends that the ACT Government collect robust data to inform workforce planning.

The ACT Government agrees to this recommendation and has strategies in place to address it and supports the need for further development in data collection to inform workforce planning.

The ACT Government recognises the critical importance of robust data to inform health workforce planning.

The Commonwealth Chief Nursing and Midwifery Officer as part of the National Nursing Workforce Strategy will be releasing Nurse Workforce Supply and Demand Data, which will provide the ACT access to timely, ACT specific data. Currently the data is with the Health Chief Executive Forum (HCEF) for review, after which it will progress to the Health Ministers Meeting prior to public release. Both these groups have meetings in the coming months.

The effective use of data is a core feature of evidence-based health policy as identified within the ACT Health Services Plan. The ACT Health Services Plan explores key areas of demand for the ACT public health system over the next ten years, identified through forecast activity and other analysis and will be used in conjunction with workforce data to understand workforce needs into the future. The ACT Digital Health Strategy 2019-2029[9] provides strategic direction for the overall management of data arising from the provision of public health services in the ACT. Both these items are critical to further inform workforce planning.

The *ACT Health Workforce Strategy 2023-2032* acknowledges that, currently, health workforce data collection in the ACT is inconsistent and insufficient to provide health planners with a clear understanding of the current workforce, support anecdotal reports of service gaps, or deliver holistic, robust workforce plans. The Strategy also acknowledges that providing clear, consistent, high-quality data on the ACT health workforce will enable stakeholders across the ACT health system to forecast health workforce trends or identify emerging areas of workforce shortage, and to proactively manage the utility of the health workforce through the redesign of models of care or health service provision.

The ACTHD has invested in building its health workforce data capability with the commitment to two ongoing full time equivalent positions funded in 2023-24 to focus on health workforce data. This capability will be supported by a data modelling partnership with the Australian National University National Centre for Health Workforce Studies and the Capital Health Network.

Workforce stability is being addressed through the implementation of whole of government policy and modern work practices to increase secure work, recruit to address known leave patterns and

[9] Digital Health Strategy 2019-2029.pdf (act.gov.au)

decrease reliance on overtime and premium labour. The 2022-23 ACT Budget included $2.4 million for the first phase of delivering a modern rostering system at CHS, to continue building functions that support contemporary workforce practices.

Early actions for implementation of the ACT Health Workforce Strategy include data analytics on the ACT health workforce and the commitment to improving transparent, publicly available health workforce data to enable workforce planning to occur across the ACT. Data on ACT health workforce was released on the ACTHD website in July 2023. ACT Health Workforce Statistics[10] are published annually and provide information to inform ACT health workforce planning.

The *ACT Mental Health Workforce Strategy 2023-2033: Framework for Action* including 2024 Work Plan set out strategic actions to address the requirement for workforce data. This 10-year Framework identifies and delivers four key priorities for workforce reform including data-driven planning and will result in a comprehensive data set for the mental health workforce in the ACT which is well managed and fully utilised to inform service planning, design, and delivery.

CHS is developing robust data to provide workforce analytics which support sound decisions and actions within the CHS Nurses and Midwives Workforce Plan. The need to review the supporting technological infrastructure to support this and ensure robust systems to easily report and analyse data has been identified.

Recommendation 4

The committee recommends that the ACT Government provide measures and timelines for actions identified in any future published workforce plans.

The ACT Government agrees to this recommendation and will consider it in future workforce plans.

The ACT Government recognises the need to provide measures and timelines in future published workforce plans and is developing action plans and timelines for the ACT Health Workforce Strategies. The importance of measures and timeframes for actions as accountability measures to ensure progress against agreed actions and the need to follow project management methodology is acknowledged.

Recommendation 5

The committee recommends that the ACT Government prioritise nurses and midwives through the Territory's Skilled Migration Program.

This recommendation is existing ACT Government policy.

[10] ACT Health System-Wide Data | Health

The ACT Government acknowledges the role of ethical international recruitment to support nursing and midwifery workforce demand as part of a larger narrative to address health workforce. International recruitment is a supplement to the education and training of nursing and midwifery workforce locally. The ACT Government continues to work with our educational partners and health services to optimise on opportunities to train and support clinical placement for nursing and midwifery students locally.

The ACT Government has supported the nursing and midwifery workforce by nominating eligible migrants over the past three years.

Through the ACT nominated Migration Program, the ACT can nominate migrants in areas of skills need. ACT nomination triggers a formal visa invitation by the Commonwealth Department of Home Affairs for a migrant to apply for a skilled visa. Depending on demand, the number of invitations issued for occupations identified as experiencing skills shortages may be capped. In recognition of the critical shortages experienced in nursing occupations, these occupations are being prioritised with registered nurses having the second highest cap of all occupations on the Critical Skills List.

In the 2022-23 financial year, all eligible migrants who expressed an interest in applying for ACT nomination with a nominated occupation as nurse were invited to apply, with 198 nominations for enrolled and registered nurses.

In the 2023-24 financial year, the Commonwealth reduced the annual allocation for the ACT nominated migration program from 4,050 in 2022-23 to 1,200, a reduction of 70 per cent. Priority will be given to determine how best to ensure critical occupations, such as nurses and midwives are considered, however, our capacity to continue to deliver on this priority is limited by the reduced allocation, the applications we receive and the points they obtain through the Canberra matrix.

CHS has recruited international nurses and midwives through the Nursing and Midwifery Workforce Unit (including the recent bulk recruitment activity in NZ and Ireland/UK) under Visa subclasses 186 (Permanent Residency), 482 (Temporary Skill Shortage) and 494 (Regional Temporary). This recruitment is separate to the Territory's Skilled Migration Program (subclasses 491 and 190). Outside of the mentioned bulk recruitment, CHS would prefer to be able to recruit overseas nurses and midwives in excess of the current cap as the opportunities arise.

CHS offers dedicated accommodation support, hospital welcome and orientation days and ongoing professional development and wellbeing support to newly arrived overseas nurses and midwives. Additionally, CHS also offers regular connection in clinical areas and social events, supporting integration into the wider community and linking people with similar culture networks where possible.

Recommendation 6

The committee recommends that the ACT Government collaboratively and constructively engage with the ACT Branch of the Australian and Midwifery Federation in order to develop and implement, through the ACT Public Sector Nursing and Midwifery Enterprise Agreement, an agreed set of positive practice environment standards for nursing and midwifery in the ACT.

This recommendation is agreed in principle, noting components of positive practice environment standards are addressed within existing ACT Government policy, with an ongoing commitment to work closely with the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation to continue this work.

ACTHD has a strong ongoing working relationship with the ACT branch of the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF) with many platforms of engagement. Through future ACT Public Sector Nursing and Enterprise Agreement negotiations, the ACT government welcomes ongoing collaboration and commits to continue to provide safe work environments and opportunities for nurses and midwives. The ACT Government agrees to explore and consider the Queensland positive practice environment standards.

The ACT Government's commitment to safe work environments for nurses and midwives is demonstrated by:

1. Mandated Minimum Nurse/Midwife to patient ratios

   In the 2020 election, the Government committed to mandating minimum Nurse/Midwife to Patient Ratios. Phase One Mandated Minimum Nurse/Midwife to Patient Ratios commenced on 1 February 2022.

   The areas included in Phase One Mandated Minimum Nurse/Midwife to Patient Ratios were inpatient General Medical, General Surgical, Adult Mental Health Units, Acute Aged Care Ward.

   Recommendations arising from the impact evaluation for future improvements are being considered as a part of the implementation for the next phase of the project. Phase Two Mandated Minimum Nurse/Midwife to Patient Ratio identified areas include Maternity, Critical Care, Perioperative, Mental Health and Cancer Services. The proposal for Maternity Services includes counting the baby as a part of the ratio. This recognises that the baby is a patient as well as the mother, further providing nurses and midwives with an accurate workload management tool that is supportive of providing safe patient care. Phase two of ratios is included in the ACT Public Sector Nursing and Enterprise Agreement currently in the access/ballot period.

2. Next Steps Towards a Safe Culture

   The Nurses and Midwives Towards a Safer Culture (TASC) 'Next Steps' Strategy continues to develop and implement an agreed set of positive practice environment standards for nursing and midwifery in the ACT in collaboration with the ACT Branch of the ANMF. Driven by the recommendations and priority actions identified in the Nursing Midwifery TASC 'First Steps', the 'Next Steps' strategy continues to navigate the implementation of strategies that address the

physical, psychological and cultural safety of nurses, midwives and carers to reduce and manage their exposure to occupational violence.

A refresh of the rollout of the "Be kind and respectful to our Nurses and Midwives" campaign is currently underway. Additionally, the "Safe Workplace Design" for future infrastructure builds will ensure the design of safe physical work environments and adherence to nursing and midwifery ratios that will further support positive practice standards.

The ACT Government has committed to undertaking a comprehensive roster review which will seek to improve outcomes for nurses and midwives as a component of the ACT Public Sector Nursing and Midwifery Enterprise Agreement 2023-2026. The review which will be jointly led by the ANMF and the Territory, will be able to consider varied approaches to rostering. Rostering improvements will directly impact on the safety and wellbeing of nurses and midwives.

3. Collaborative Practice

The ACT Government acknowledges that interprofessional collaboration coupled with health professionals who can work autonomously to their full scope in clinical practice enhances the standard of care delivered to patients and that job satisfaction increases for health care professionals.

ACTHD is actively engaged in the consultation for the Australian Government funded *Unleashing the Potential of our Health Workforce – Scope of Practice Review*. This project aims to support nurses and midwives to work to their full scope of practice.

This initiative recognises the importance of both professions to deliver high level clinical care autonomously whilst also supporting a collaborative approach to practice. The ACT Health Workforce Strategy 2023 – 2032 considers barriers to professionals working to the top of their scope, with a goal of reducing such barriers.

For example, the ACTHD Nurse Practitioner Project has identified and is progressing work to address ACT legislative barriers which limit Nurse Practitioners (NPs) from working to their full scope of practice.

4. Nurses and midwives in the ACT are involved in a range of research being undertaken across ACT health services.

The ACT Government published Better Together: A strategic plan for research in the ACT health systems 2022-2030[(11)] in July 2022 in recognition of the need for high quality research to support optimal health and wellbeing for the ACT community.

ACTHD and University of Canberra SYNERGY Nursing and Midwifery Research Centre demonstrates the ACT Government's recognition of the need to support a research culture in ACT health services. SYNERGY contributes to the quality, articulation and recognition of the nursing and midwifery professions and the translation of research findings into practice,

[11] Better together - A strategic plan for research in the ACT health system 2022–2030

education and policy. SYNERGY provides a Research Internship Program, regular research educational opportunities, and Innovation Scholarships.

Canberra Health Services launched its first Research Strategy 2021-2025[12] in November 2021.

The Canberra Health Annual Research Meeting (CHARM) is held annually and connects researchers, students, clinicians, policy makers, consumers, carers, industry, administrators, leaders and partners in the ACT's health system to explore and demonstrate the contribution of research to a learning health system.

5. Nursing and Midwifery Leadership

Nurses and midwives in the ACT hold leadership positions across the health sector. The ACT Public Service Work Level Standards: Nurse and Midwife[13] define nurse and midwife leadership roles across ACT health positions. Additionally, ACTHD and CHS employ nurses and midwifes in identified executive positions who lead nursing and midwifery work and workforce in the ACT.

The ACT Government has provided and continues to support leadership training for CHS nurses and midwives through the Nursing and Midwifery Scholarship Program.

This work provides a foundation for nurses and midwives to work in safe environments, allowing professional development, providing an opportunity for collaborative and autonomous practice, actively being involved in decision making and governance, opportunities to lead and participate in research and innovation while enabling leadership at all levels.

Recommendation 7

The committee recommends that the ACT Government implement a trial of fixed-day rosters for nurses that assigns work for the same hours and days each week and considers what rostering changes can assist midwives that is consistent with midwife led continuity of care.

The ACT Government notes this recommendation and has commenced work in consideration of it.

The ACT Government has committed to undertake a comprehensive roster review which will seek to improve outcomes for nurses and midwives as a component of the ACT Public Sector Nursing and Midwifery Enterprise Agreement 2023-2026 negotiations. The review, which will be jointly led by the ANMF and the Territory, will consider approaches such as that recommended by the review committee.

In March 2024 the ACTHD commenced a series of three Midwifery Rostering Workshops in collaboration with the ANMF and CHS as an outcome of the Midwifery roundtable to identify key issues within midwifery rostering practices and commence discussion towards identification and prioritisation of solutions.

[12] Canberra Health Services Research Strategy 2021–2025 (act.gov.au)

[13] Work Level Standards | Health (act.gov.au)

In 2021, under the Towards a Safer Culture 'The First Steps' Strategy, safe work practices were reviewed, and recommendations made to improve the safety of nurses and midwives against 'Schedule 8 - Rostering Guidelines and Efficiencies for rostering purposes' of the NMEA 2017-2019. Discussion papers on strengthening rostering guidelines for health services and staffing models were developed[14] and informed policy development of the health services.

CHS is working with the ANMF and the Midwifery Round Table to develop innovative rostering for the future.

Recommendation 8

The committee recommends that the ACT Government use baseline workforce data to enable the introduction of midwife-to-patient ratios for midwifery specific wards as soon as possible and ensure effective oversight of ratio compliance across the health system through the publication of compliance statistics.

The ACT Government agrees with this recommendation and has taken actions to address it.

The ACTHD Ratio Implementation Team has implemented Phase One of mandated minimum nurse-to-patient ratios. Implementation of Phase One occurred on February 1, 2022, across four inpatient settings within Canberra Health Services including general surgical, general medical, aged care and adult mental health. Phase Two areas and final ratio figures will be determined through the new NMEA. Once approved, Phase Two mandated minimum nurse/midwife-to-patient ratios will be implemented within ACT public health services. Maternity services inclusive of counting of the baby is included in Phase Two.

Baseline nursing and midwifery health workforce data has been used to determine the additional staffing requirements for the implementation of Phase Two. Effective oversight of the implementation of mandated minimum nurse/midwife-to-patient ratio project has been established during the governance of phase one of the ratios project with the development of compliance validation processes at both the health services and ACTHD level.

These validation processes allow for the publication of health service ratio compliance data on the ACTHD Mandated Minimum Nurse/Midwife to Patient Ratio Public Report webpage in line with the current ACT Public Sector Nursing and Midwifery Enterprise Agreement 2020-2022[(15)] and ACT Public Sector Nursing and Midwifery Safe Care Staffing Framework requirements.

[14] https://www.act.gov.au/directorates-and-agencies/act-health/strategies-programs-and-reports/strategies-and-plans/towards-a-safer-culture/safe-work-practices

[15] https://www.cmtedd.act.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0007/1891447/ACTPS-Nursing-and-Midwifery-Enterprise-Agreement-2020-2022-FINAL.pdf

Recommendation 9

The committee recommends that the ACT Government expand the continuity of midwifery care model, including building a freestanding birth centre, employment opportunities for midwives of all levels of experience and review the available options for out of hospital birth services.

This recommendation is agreed in principle, noting a number of elements reflect existing ACT Government policy.

The ACT Government recognises the importance of midwifery recruitment and retention and the necessity of job satisfaction, particularly in light of national workforce shortages. Understanding and managing recruitment and retention of midwives is critical to workforce planning, especially in relation to Continuity of Care Models.

Maternity in Focus: The ACT Public Maternity System Plan 2022-2032 (Maternity in Focus) was released in June 2022, and provides a ten year reform plan for the ACT public maternity system.

Maternity in Focus commits to at least 50 per cent of eligible women and pregnant people having access to a continuity of care model by 2028, and workforce planning is part of this commitment.

The Maternity in Focus – First Action Plan 2022-2025 and ACT Health Services Plan include actions relevant to this recommendation, including:

- Increasing access to midwife-led services, inclusive of a review of midwife-led services and identify opportunities for expanding models of care.
- Planning for future development of services in the northern regions of the ACT including maternity services.
- Planning for and commencing implementation of Phase Two of mandated minimum nursing and midwifery-patient ratios across the public health system, which includes maternity services and counting the baby.
- Developing nursing and midwifery workforce action plans to ensure appropriate recruitment, retention and career pathways to support the growing workforce.

Work is underway to lay the foundations for the implementation of maternity system reform. Maternity in Focus supports increasing and improving equity of access to publicly funded homebirth options. Two action items have been achieved in 2024, resulting in expanded eligibility for funded home birth, which is now available to women and pregnant people who are having their first baby and to ACT residents living within 30 minutes of the Canberra Hospital. CHS has out of hospital birth services available through their continuity of care program for women who meet the criteria.

The ACT Government has also committed to a feasibility study of a midwifery-led alongside or standalone birth centre as part of the work to design and develop the new northside hospital. CHS has joined a working group led by the ACTHD to undertake this feasibility study, which is due for completion mid-2024.

CHS has identified several initiatives aimed at improving the experience of new starters and undergraduate students to assist with offsetting the demand now and into the future. This includes

creation of the Undergraduate Student of Midwifery classification to enable students to work in the health service to the full scope of their capabilities with appropriate pay and conditions. In addition, from 2024 new graduates are able to commence work in the continuity team after only three months, rather than the previous requirement of 12 months working in the hospital birth suite.

Recommendation 10

The committee recommends that the ACT Government conduct another anonymous workplace survey within 12 months of the transition of Calvary Public Hospital Bruce to Canberra Health Services, to gauge the satisfaction of the workforce, and publicly release a summary of the results.

This recommendation is existing ACT Government policy.

The ACT Government committed to supporting the workforce during the transition of Calvary Public Hospital Bruce to Canberra Health Services and in doing so, strengthen the workforce.

CHS conducted a workplace culture survey in November 2023 which included North Canberra Hospital staff. The next survey will take place in late 2024. CHS received survey results in late December 2023 and commenced the internal roll out of the results in January 2024. All quantitative results were uploaded to the CHS intranet page. A summary of the results was publicly released in February 2024.

Recommendation 11

The committee recommends that the ACT Government expand support programs for nurses and midwives to include compulsory clinical supervision and specialised grief and trauma counselling for healthcare workers.

Components of this recommendation reflect existing ACT Government policy.

The ACT Clinical Supervision Framework for ACT Nurses and Midwives[16] (the Framework) is a foundational document which guides the implementation and sustainability of effective Clinical Supervision (CS) for ACT nurses and midwives. The framework provides the vision for all nurses and midwives (in clinical and non-clinical roles) to access CS at all stages of career development.

The Framework provides a standardised approach for the implementation, delivery, and evaluation of CS and is embedded in the Nurses and Midwives Towards a Safer Culture (NM TASC) 'Next Steps' Strategy as a strategic, sustainable support program to improve workforce wellbeing. The Framework is informing and guiding development and implementation of organisation-specific policy, procedures, and systems across CHS and ACTHD to enable access to effective CS.

[16] Clinical Supervision Framework for ACT Nurses and Midwives

The NM TASC project team in partnership with the CHS Workforce Culture and Leadership team is utilising the Well-Being Index (Australia) App to collect objective data on the impact of clinical supervision on nurses and midwives.

The CS Framework introduces six integrated core principles to guide the operationalisation of effective CS – trust, structure, choice, clarity, learning and quality. The inclusion of choice to attend CS is an intentional core principle that mitigates the compulsory/mandatory requirements.

CHS notes that while not mandatory, clinical supervision is implemented and encouraged for all nurses and midwives within CHS. EAP services also include the availability of grief and trauma counselling for all staff.

Recommendation 12

The committee recommends that the ACT Government supports and enables all nurses and midwives who have undertaken, or wish to undertake, endorsement with the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia, to complete endorsement, work to full scope of practice, and are in the appropriate employment positions to do so.

The ACT Government agrees with this recommendation and is in the process of consultation to support its implementation.

Endorsement for a nurse and midwife identifies those with additional qualifications and specific expertise who meet requirements of a relevant registration standard.[17] For example, endorsements may allow a nurse practitioner or midwife to prescribe scheduled medicines.

The ACTHD Nurse Practitioner Project has identified and is progressing work to address ACT legislative barriers which limit Nurse Practitioners from working to their full scope of practice.

The legislative changes will result in significant benefits for Nurse Practitioners, employers, other health practitioners and the ACT community by increasing choice in, and access to, high quality healthcare.

Legislative changes proposed are those which currently limit the NPs' ability to provide the following services within their scope of practice:

a. authorise driver licence medicals;

b. authorise Medical Certificates on Cause of Death (MCCD);

c. witness non-written health directions in the absence of a medical practitioner; and

d. authorise medical documentation required under Workers' Compensation and Comcare legislation.

[17] Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia - Endorsements and Notations (nursingmidwiferyboard.gov.au)

An ACT Government cross-directorate Nurse Practitioner Taskforce is being facilitated by ACTHD to consider and progress recommended legislative changes which will result in NPs being able to work to their full scope of practice.

The ACT Government values the contribution of midwives' evidence-based care in improving outcomes for women and birthing people and their babies. To facilitate public sector midwives to work to their full scope of practice a Governance Framework to support prescribing and the ordering of diagnostics by endorsed midwifes in the public sector has been developed by ACTHD. Scope of clinical practice, a credentialing pathway and associated policy reform are being considered to enable endorsed midwives employed within CHS to extend their scope of practice.

The Health Practitioner Regulation National Law (section 94) enables midwives endorsed by the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia (NMBA) to prescribe scheduled medicines and order diagnostics in accordance with relevant state and territory legislation. Endorsed midwives use extended skills, experience and knowledge in assessment, planning, implementation, diagnosis and evaluation of care delivered. This incorporates endorsement for scheduled medicines, the capacity to provide associated services, refer and order diagnostic investigations.

The scope of practice for midwives in Australia is clearly defined and, in partnership with the National Midwifery Guidelines for Consultation and Referral, provides a framework for safe midwifery.[18]

CHS is consulting about new processes which enable endorsed midwives to work at the top of their scope.

Recommendation 13

The committee recommends that the ACT Government remove barriers to nurse and midwifery full scope of practice by recognising skills obtained through prior knowledge and learning in the workplace.

This recommendation is existing ACT Government policy.

The ACT Government recognises the importance for the mobility of nurses and midwives within our public health system to readily and easily have transferrable skills recognised. The ACT Health Workforce Strategy 2023–2032 identifies the need to identify barriers to professionals working to the top of their scope and to identify barriers and opportunities to increase the flexibility and mobility of staff across the health services.

CHS recognises those working at CHS may have expertise or prior learning. Recognition of Prior Learning is the formal recognition of learning experiences obtained to avoid unnecessary duplication and re-completion of training/education/learning.

Recognition of Prior Learning aims to ensure a rigorous and well-documented process has been undertaken when granting an employee exemption from one or more training/education activity

[18] National-Midwifery-Guidelines-for-Consultation-and-Referral-4th-Edition-(2021).pdf (midwives.org.au)

requirements within CHS. Once approved, the staff member can work to the full scope of practice that they have been trained for.

Recommendation 14

The committee recommends that the ACT Government support the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia's ongoing work in allowing registered nurses who meet endorsement standards to be able to prescribe.

The ACT Government notes this recommendation.

ACTHD provided input to the Nursing & Midwifery Board of Australia (NMBA) consultations on the Consultation Regulation Impact Statement for Registered Nurse Prescribing in July 2023. Outcomes of this consultation are pending.

The opportunity for registered nurses who have met endorsement standards to prescribe is another opportunity for nurses to practice to their full scope and capacity to support optimal health service delivery to the ACT community. ACTHD will continue to engage with the NMBA on this matter.

Recommendation 15

The committee recommends that the ACT Government review the Medicines, Poisons and Therapeutic Goods Regulation 2008 to expand the scope of what ACT nurses and midwives may prescribe so that it aligns with the full extent of nursing and midwifery care.

The ACT Government notes this recommendation.

In the ACT, health practitioners' ability to prescribe, dispense and administer medicines is regulated through the Medicines, Poisons and Therapeutic Goods Regulation 2008 (ACT).

The Health Legislation Amendment (Removal of Requirement for a Collaborative Arrangement) Bill 2024[19] (the Bill) was tabled in federal parliament on 20 March 2024. The Bill removes the requirement for NPs and midwives to enter a collaborative arrangement with a medical practitioner as a prerequisite to providing services subsidised by the Medicare Benefits Schedule and to prescribe certain medicines on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme. This follows an independent review of collaborative arrangements, as recommended by the Medicare Benefits Schedule Review Taskforce.[20]

[19] ParlInfo - Health Legislation Amendment (Removal of Requirement for a Collaborative Arrangement) Bill 2024 (aph.gov.au)

[20] An MBS for the 21st Century Recommendations, Learnings and Ideas for the Future (health.gov.au)

It will be important for the ACT Government to assess if there are any local regulatory barriers remaining to endorsed nurses and midwives that limit their ability to prescribe medicine where it is within their scope of practice once this amendment bill is finalised.

Legislation introduced into the ACT Legislative Assembly on 10 April 2024 will increase the range of health practitioners who can prescribe or supply abortion medication.

The *Health (Improved Abortion Access) Amendment Bill 2024* will remove barriers to nurse practitioners and authorised midwives prescribing abortion medication, which can currently only be done by doctors. Reform of the TGA requirements means MS-2 Step can now be prescribed by any healthcare practitioner. This Bill follows changes made by the Therapeutic Good Administration August 2023 to remove restrictions on health professionals who prescribe and dispense the abortifacient MS-2 Step (mifepristone and misoprostol).

The amendments in the Bill will build on the ACT Government's ongoing work to ensure access to timely and safe abortions in the ACT, whilst supporting inclusion of NPs and authorised (endorsed) midwives to work to their full scope of practice.

Recommendation 16

The committee recommends that the ACT Government safeguard senior clinical midwifery roles (level 2, team leading clinical roles) with a mandatory minimum amount of clinical experience to protect patient care and midwives.

The ACT Government agrees in principle to this recommendation.

The ACT Government recognises the importance of senior clinical midwifery roles as crucial for ensuring high-quality patient care and support for midwives in their practice.

The Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia (NMBA) provides guidance on the scope of practice and capabilities of midwives, which includes the protection of public safety by setting standards, codes and guidelines for professional and safe practice.[21]

For senior clinical midwifery roles, such as level 2 midwives, it is essential to have a certain amount of clinical experience. This experience helps to ensure that these senior midwives are well-equipped to handle the complexities of patient care and the leadership responsibilities that come with these roles. CHS recommends a minimum of four years post graduate experience before being appointed in Level 2 Registered Nurse/Midwifery position.

Opportunities are provided to Registered Nurse/Midwives to take on Team Leader roles with the support of senior staff. These roles provide necessary development of skills and knowledge for the future attainment of a level 2 nurse/midwife role. Team Leaders are not currently required to have a minimum of four years' experience as this would limit the opportunity available.

[21] Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia - Fact sheet: Scope of practice and capabilities of midwives (nursingmidwiferyboard.gov.au)

Recommendation 17

The committee recommends that the ACT Government protect education roles from being re-allocated to patient-care loading, including Clinical Development Midwives and other midwifery educators, to ensure that these supports/teaching roles are constantly safe-guarded.

The ACT Government notes this recommendation.

The ACT Government recognises the importance of education roles in nursing and midwifery. These roles are imperative to support, guide and share knowledge to assist with staff skill and educational development.

It is noted that safe staffing needs to be achieved for both staff and patients. As a result, if shortages occur an assessment is undertaken, with decisions made to ensure safe staffing is maintained as the paramount concern, which may result in staff being moved from educational roles to clinical roles.

With current nurse and midwife shortages internationally, full staffing can be challenging. CHS is continuing to work to address workforce shortages.

Phase One of mandated minimum nurse/midwife-to-patient ratios in the current NMEA includes general matters that a Nurse/Midwife Educator will not be rostered and should not be used as part of normal day-to-day business to meet a ratio. This is alongside the inclusion of a supernumerary team leader in each area with ratios to ensure support and supervision is available to teams. Further, Schedule 10 of the NMEA sets out that where a nurse or midwife in the educator position is used to meet a ratio (for example, short-notice backfill), this will be reported through the monthly reporting mechanism.

Recommendation 18

The committee recommends that the ACT Government investigate and implement policies that help ease the financial burden of study for nursing and midwifery students and provide financial incentives for them to work in the ACT public health sector.

This recommendation is existing ACT Government policy.

The ACT Government announced the Nursing, Midwifery and Allied Health Study Incentive Program[22] in November 2023 as a financial incentive to attract and retain students studying nursing, midwifery and allied health tertiary qualifications in the ACT.

The program consists of two separate payments: Cost of Living Stipend of up to $3000 per annum to eligible students over three years to ease cost of living pressures while studying; and Placement Support Grants of up to $1000 per annum to eligible students to provide financial support during

[22] Nursing, Midwifery and Allied Health Study Incentive Program | Health (act.gov.au)

their clinical placements. The Program is administered by the University of Canberra and the Australian Catholic University.

The Australian Government recently announced the introduction of Commonwealth Prac Payments to address placement poverty, which will provide support to nursing and midwifery students while undertaking mandatory workplace placements. Eligible students will receive $319.50 per week while undertaking clinical placement, which will be means tested, but is in addition to any income support the student may also receive.

The ACT Secondary School to Registered Nurse Articulation Pathway provides opportunities for secondary school students interested in pursuing a career in nursing for study and employment in the field. Secondary school students are advised of the different levels of nursing jobs available through school outreach activities and work experience placements.

ACTHD has facilitated an agreement between local nursing education providers and CHS that students on the articulation pathway are guaranteed employment at each nursing qualification exit point, as an Assistant in Nursing, Enrolled Nurse or Registered Nurse, including the opportunity to gain paid work in one tier of nursing as they pursue the next. Additionally, once qualified as an Enrolled Nurse who then undertakes study to become a Registered Nurse, participants would be eligible for a ACTHD nursing scholarship to support their studies, subject to eligibility criteria.

The Undergraduate Student of Nursing/Midwifery pilot program has also been implemented by CHS in consultation with the ANMF and ACTHD. It is anticipated that the CHS report on the pilot program will be released shortly.

Recommendation 19

The committee recommends that the ACT Government introduce X-ray and other imaging in all ACT walk-in centres.

This recommendation is agreed in principle, noting that the availability of accessible imaging services associated with Walk-in Centres is existing ACT Government policy.

The *ACT Health Services Plan 2022-2030* includes actions to establish imaging services at Weston Creek and identify other opportunities to improve access to community-based medical imaging services. CHS opened the Weston Creek Imaging Service co-located at the Weston Creek Walk-in Centre in May 2023.

CHS is currently undertaking a tender for Medical Imaging service provision including to support Walk-in Centres through the Medicare Urgent Care Clinic Network initiative. The ACT's Walk-in Centres joining the Medicare Urgent Care Clinic Network supports the expansion of imaging service availability free to Walk-in Centre patients, either at or in close proximity to all five Walk-in Centres.

Recommendation 20

The committee recommends that the ACT Government continue to monitor levels of employment of nurses and midwives at North Canberra Hospital and include this data in their annual reports.

The ACT Government notes this recommendation.

The ACT Government acknowledges the need for ongoing workforce data for nurses and midwives across the public health service and for inclusion in annual reports. CHS is developing workforce reporting which includes North Canberra Hospital now they are formally managed and operated within CHS.

Summary

The ACT Government greatly respects the nursing and midwifery professions and will continue to lead the way across the nation to support and strengthen them.

The Government acknowledges the recommendations identified through Report 11- Inquiry into Recovery Plan for Nursing and Midwifery Workers (see Table A) and in response to the recommendations the ACT Government recognises the significant work already in progress. The ACT Government accepts the key role it plays to progress this important work whilst having a shared responsibility with our key stakeholders across the system to advance the recommendations.

Table A

Recommendation	Response
Recommendation 1	Agreed
Recommendation 2	Existing government policy
Recommendation 3	Agreed
Recommendation 4	Agreed
Recommendation 5	Existing government policy
Recommendation 6	Agreed in principle
Recommendation 7	Noted
Recommendation 8	Agreed
Recommendation 9	Agreed in principle
Recommendation 10	Existing government policy
Recommendation 11	Existing government policy
Recommendation 12	Agreed
Recommendation 13	Existing government policy
Recommendation 14	Noted
Recommendation 15	Noted
Recommendation 16	Agreed in principle
Recommendation 17	Noted
Recommendation 18	Existing government policy

Recommendation 19	Agreed in principle
Recommendation 20	Noted

Acknowledgment of Country

We acknowledge the Ngunnawal people as traditional custodians of the ACT and recognise any other people or families with connection to the lands of the ACT and region. We acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of this city and this region.

Accessibility

If you have difficulty reading a standard printed document and would like an alternative format, please phone 13 22 81.

If English is not your first language and you need the Translating and Interpreting Service (TIS), please call 13 14 50.

For further accessibility information, visit: www.health.act.gov.au/accessibility

www.health.act.gov.au | Phone: 132281