

Industrial Action: Your Essential Guide

Taking industrial action is always a last resort for the Association and for nurses and midwives. It is always a difficult choice but it is important to take a stand for safe patient care. Doing this is easier if you know how to respond to questions and everyone sticks together.

Remember the Government is likely to take legal action to scare you into not taking action.

Rely only on information from the Association

In times of industrial action, managers are often instructed to direct you not to take action. Many nurse managers support the action, but those who don't may try to spread misinformation or persuade you that your ward or unit shouldn't take action. Phone 8595 1234 or check www.nswnma.asn.au for the true story.

You have a professional obligation to take action to protect patient safety

Life-preserving services will be maintained during the strike. You have a right to take action to stand up for safer patient care and a professional obligation to speak out when there are systemic problems.

If you are rostered to work during the period that your Branch has decided will be the strike period for your hospital/service and you participate in the strike action your pay can be docked for the period that you do not work. If you are not rostered to work (including if you have swapped your shift to take action), your pay cannot be docked for joining the action. Management may decide to require medical certificates for sick leave on the day of action.

Don't listen to the doomsayers

Don't be swayed by statements designed to stop our profession improving the ratios system, like "the Association's claim won't help our ward", "the claim costs too much" or "where will the additional nurses come from?"

In 2011 you won the first phase of guaranteed, minimum nurse to patient ratios and 1,580 FTE extra nurses. Now the Government needs to see your strength of feeling so it will agree to a second phase.

The Association's claim is backed by academic research and members' input. After months of talking and lobbying but no genuine negotiations, there's no choice but to escalate the action.

Don't get into arguments

Always be polite to your colleagues and manager, but firm. Work as a group to decide who will take action and who will stay at work. Only Association members will be protected if they take action.

If you are bullied or threatened

It is against the law for anyone to threaten or bully you about taking industrial action. If you are threatened, respond: "Please excuse me whilst I ask another staff member to be my witness to this conversation/call the Association for support" and make a diary note immediately.

Phone if you need support

You are not alone. Phone 8595 1234, go to www.nswnma.asn.au, or ask your Branch Officials. Some hospital managers are refusing to allow Association staff to enter wards/units. This is a tactic to try to block you getting information and to divide our profession.

Management reduces services all the time

Our action is to reduce staffing to current night duty levels. It's no different than management deciding to reduce services.