



**NEW SOUTH WALES NURSES AND MIDWIVES' ASSOCIATION**  
**AUSTRALIAN NURSING AND MIDWIFERY FEDERATION NEW SOUTH WALES BRANCH**



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# **POLICY ON NURSES AND MIDWIVES UNIFORMS**

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**Re-Endorsed by Annual Conference 2018**

**NSW Nurses and Midwives' Association**  
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# Policy on Nurses and Midwives Uniforms

## THE NSW NURSES AND MIDWIVES' ASSOCIATION RECOGNISES THAT:

- Nurses and midwives have a legislated right to a safe and healthy workplace including the right to wear clothing that is consistent with their work health and safety (WHS) needs and the environment in which they work.
- Nurses and midwives have a right to the provision of uniforms which enable ready identification by the public and promote a professional public image.
- Illnesses and injuries caused or exacerbated by uniforms are an unnecessary and preventable cost burden on the health, aged care and community services industries and on nurses and midwives themselves.
- What nurses and midwives wear at work has a significant impact on their work health and safety risk. The most common work health and safety problems arising from a poor choice of uniforms include:
  - chafing, rashes and dermatitis from inappropriate choice of fabrics;
  - increased risk of injury caused when uniforms do not allow the range of movement required for safe manual handling and other activities;
  - increased risk of injury when modesty discourages nurses and midwives from using good working postures and techniques;
  - increased risk of slip, trip or fall and manual handling injuries from inappropriate footwear;
  - incorrect functioning of safety equipment such as duress alarms due to inadequate design of uniforms and lack of attachment points;
  - heat stress in extreme heat environments; and
  - work health and safety injuries resulting from the wearing of some jewellery.

## THE NSW NURSES AND MIDWIVES' ASSOCIATION ADOPTS THE POLICY THAT:

1. Uniforms must reflect the work that nurses and midwives do including the equipment/devices they need to carry, be consistent with nurses and midwives' work health and safety needs and be consistent with the environment in which they work.



2. Nurses and midwives and their WHS representatives must be consulted during the process of developing specifications for government contracts for uniforms, choosing organisational uniforms and developing uniform policies.
3. When selecting uniforms, potential WHS and infection control risks associated with uniforms should be identified and a risk assessment should be carried out to ensure that the preferred uniform options do not create or increase WHS and infection control risks.
4. The provision of uniform options including the provision of shorts is supported.
5. In general, uniforms of nurses and midwives providing direct patient care must meet the following criteria. Uniforms must:
  - 5.1 Allow for free movement of the limbs and joints (e.g. hips, legs, knees, arms and shoulders). Good examples include action backs in shirts, pleated skirts, culottes, shorts and trousers. Straight dresses and skirts are not appropriate for nurses and midwives providing direct patient care.
  - 5.2 Be made from fabrics appropriate to the Australian climate and sourced from local manufacturers where possible. Generally this will mean shirts made from cotton or cotton/polyester blends with high cotton content (at least 60%), and skirts/trousers made from natural or blended fabrics. 100% synthetic fabrics, such as 100% polyester, are not appropriate, particularly for shirts, since they do not allow adequate air circulation and evaporation of perspiration. However, polyester/viscose blends may be an acceptable and durable option for skirts, and trousers. Review of work health safety considerations throughout the supply chain is recommended to ensure manufacturing and distribution is performed under internationally recognised industrial and WHS laws.
  - 5.3 Allow the nurse or midwife to maintain modesty when working. Clothing that may gape between buttons should be avoided, as should straight dresses and skirts that not only limit movement but ride up when the wearer bends or sits. 100% polyester blouses that cling (from static) when the humidity is low or when the wearer perspires should not be used.
  - 5.4 Footwear should allow for foot stability and comfort. Shoes should be sturdy, low heeled, protect and cushion the foot and have slip resistant soles. When specialised footwear is being considered for specific work areas, a risk assessment should be carried out and a podiatrist may be consulted
  - 5.5 Allow for a range of uniform options to accommodate a range of seasonal conditions, different body shapes, cultural requirements and personal preferences.
  - 5.6 Allow for adequate storage and attachment points for commonly carried items, such as DECT telephones, mobile phones, pagers, keys, ID tags, proximity cards and duress alarms.
6. Discrimination issues must be considered when selecting uniforms. For example, nurses and midwives should not be directly or indirectly disadvantaged because of gender, pregnancy, size, cultural or religious background. Uniform options suitable for pregnant nurses and midwives must be provided, and fabrics and uniform costs should be similar for male and female uniforms.



7. Nurses and midwives must be provided with a reasonable range of uniform choices, affordable purchase and maintenance costs and, where uniforms are supplied by the employer, enough uniforms to cover the number of shifts worked.
8. Managers must ensure that the reasons for uniform choices are documented and where required, risk assessments conducted in consultation with workers and Health and Safety Representatives (HSR). The documentation should demonstrate that uniforms are consistent with work health and safety needs, and should record the outcome of consultation with employees and this Association on the issue.
9. Employers must include, as part of work health and safety training, the need to assess the risk of injuries that can be caused by the wearing of some jewellery.
10. Nurses not required to wear uniforms in areas identified as a known/possible risk should have a risk assessment completed.
11. In those clinical settings where nurses and midwives may not be required to wear uniforms an appropriate dress code
12. That the decision to direct nurses into uniforms in mental health and drug and alcohol areas is not to be left in the hands of one person, i.e. the DoN, and be approached in partnership with mental health nurses with regard to the therapeutic alliance with our consumers.
13. Professional dress requires input from nurses; our profession is identified by skill and qualification and our professional manner.

## NOTE

1. This policy should be read in conjunction with the following NSW Nurses and Midwives' Association policies: Work Health and Safety Policy and Hazardous Manual Tasks Policy.