Canberra Health Services

Consultation Paper

Undergraduate Student of Nursing and Midwifery Role Implementation Pilot - 2023

Nursing Midwifery and Patient Support Services

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## Introduction

Canberra Health Services (CHS) is focussed on the delivery of high quality, effective, person centred care. It provides acute, sub-acute, primary and community‐based health services to the Australian Capital Territory (ACT)—a catchment of approximately 400, 000 people. It also services the surrounding Southern New South Wales region which includes the Bega Valley, Bombala, Cooma-Monaro, Eurobodalla, Goulburn, Mulwaree, Palerang, Queanbeyan, Snowy River, Upper Lachlan Shire and the Yass Valley.

CHS administers a range of publicly funded health facilities, programs and services including but not limited to:

* **The Canberra Hospital:** a modern 600-bed tertiary hospital providing trauma services and most major medical and surgical sub-specialty services.
* **University of Canberra Hospital Specialist Centre for Rehabilitation, Recovery and Research**: a dedicated and purpose-built rehabilitation facility, with 140 inpatient beds, 75-day places and additional outpatient services.
* **Mental Health, Justice Health, Alcohol and Drug Services:** provide a range of health services from prevention and treatment through to recovery and maintenance at a number of locations and in varied environments for people suffering from mental health issues.
* **Dhulwa Secure Mental Health Unit:** a purpose designed and built facility providing clinical programs and treatment options for people suffering from acute mental health issues.
* **Six community health centres:** providing a range of general and specialist health services to people of all ages.
* **Five Walk-in Centres:** which provide free treatment for minor illness and injury.
* A range of **community based** health services including early childhood services, youth and women’s health, dental health, mental health and alcohol and drug services.

CHS is a partner in teaching with the Australian National University, the University of Canberra and the Australian Catholic University.

The current organisational chart and the recent[Annual Report](https://health.act.gov.au/about-our-health-system/data-and-publications/reports/annual-reports)andthe ACT Government [Budget Papers](http://apps.treasury.act.gov.au/budget)provide more detail about CHS.

ACT Minister of Health, Rachel Stephen-Smith, the ACT Chief Nurse and Midwifery Officer, Anthony Dombkins and the Executive Director of Nursing and Midwifery, Kellie Lang at CHS have been working together with the ACT Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF) to develop an Undergraduate Student Nurse and Midwife (USN/M) role which works under the direct supervision of a Registered Nurse or Midwife as part of a multi-disciplinary healthcare team, providing care to our community.

The USN/M workforce is anticipated to support Registered Nurses and Midwives by providing fundamental care activities, enabling RNs, ENs and Midwives to work to the full scope of their role. Implementation the role also supports recruitment and retention of Registered Nurses and Midwives by way of direct placement in the CHS Transition to Practice Program (TTPP).

Information from Victoria Health’s implementation of a paid student role, along with published research reports significant benefits for students working as part of the health team while developing their skills and acumen in the practice of nursing or midwifery. Health consumers also report benefits of students providing timely, supportive care activities including companionship and comfort, enhancing their recovery experience.

The role is envisaged to attract nursing and midwifery students registered with the Australian Health Practitioners Regulation Agency (AHPRA) in a Bachelor of Nursing or Midwifery Degree approved by the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Accreditation Council (ANMAC).

The nursing workforce mostly impacted by this change include Registered (RN) and Enrolled Nurses (EN), Midwives and Assistants in Nursing (AIN). Other health professionals including medicine and allied health professionals may be impacted.

## Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to present the Position Description and Core Duties and Exclusions Lists of the USN and USM roles, and provide an outline of the employment, development, and wellbeing framework around the role.

A parallel consultation process is also underway to standardise the core duties of the AIN, ensuring clarity for staff and health consumers about the duties of both roles which are similar in nature, although the USN/M is able to perform more care activities aligned with the undergraduate program of study in preparation for an RN or Midwife role.

## Current workforce model

The current nursing and midwifery workforce is comprised of Registered and Enrolled Nurses and Midwives who undertake work as part of a multi-professional team providing nursing and midwifery care in accordance with NMBA Standards of Practice to the ACT and surrounding NSW community.

During the COVID-19 Pandemic USN’s worked within limited duties supporting COVID testing and vaccination of the ACT community 2021. This version of the role is no longer required and has been re-developed to provide a wider level of care activities across all health settings.

## Rationale for change

Nursing and Midwifery students gain clinical experience during non-paid student placements as part of undergraduate education requirements prior to registration. It’s common for nursing students to be employed as Assistants in Nursing in the ACT and across many states as part of an unregistered workforce. They work within limited core duties in acute, sub-acute, community settings and nursing homes.

The USN/M role is beneficial for the delivery of safe, appropriate nursing and midwifery care and will enhance an undergraduate’s learning and skills competency through practical experience, ensuring they are more “work ready” on completion of undergraduate studies.

The role also offers CHS significant cost savings by way of less AIN agency use and will provide more care activities than the current AIN role. In addition, the intention to offer permanent employment into the RN and Midwifery Transition to Practice Programs provides job stability for USN/Ms and enables CHS to meet health service demands now and in the future.

Opportunities from the introduction of the Registered Undergraduate Student of Nursing (RUSoN) role in Victoria were identified as:

* The role being above standard nurse to patient ratios – RUSoNs are more able to spend greater time with each patient than existing staff to provide companionship and support for patients.
* For staff, it is an additional resource to support the provision of high-quality, personalised care for every patient, and contributes to workload management.
* For health services, it provides an effective strategy to improve the working environment for staff while continuing to improve the responsiveness and quality of services.
* For the community, it means a quality public health system, and more efficient and effective expenditure of the healthcare dollar.

The Victoria Department of Health and Human services funded two pilots exploring the RUSoN role, findings demonstrated:

* Improved patient centred care
* Improved RUSON knowledge and confidence in patient care and work readiness
* Improved staff morale
* Improved patient flow
* More organised wards
* Time for breaks
* RUSoN intention to return to the health services as a graduate

Implications for no change include ongoing workforce shortfalls, high labour costs associated with AIN agency staff and higher risk of students selecting other healthcare employers, reducing capacity of CHS to meet nursing and midwifery service requirements and potentially reducing access to health services for the community.

## Future model

Within the ACT Public Service Nursing and Midwifery Enterprise Agreement 2020-2022 the definition for an Undergraduate Student Nurse or Midwife is:

*23.1 An Undergraduate Student Nurse/Midwife (USN/M) means an employee in their second or later year of full-time study who is entered on the student register (for the nursing or midwifery profession) in an approved program under the Health Practitioner National Regulation Law (ACT) Act 2010.*

The USN/M will work in paid employment as part of the healthcare team, assisting RNs and Midwives with care interventions and activities in accordance with the care plan and under the delegation and supervision of qualified and experienced RN/M. The Core Duties and Exclusion List clearly defines the activities suitable for USNs and USMs separately. The roles are additional to the registered workforce and not considered as part of nurse to patient ratios.

The following documents are presented for consultation and feedback:

* A draft USN Position Description and Selection Criteria – Attachment A
* A draft USN Duties and Exclusions List - Attachment B
* A draft USM Position Description and Selection Criteria – Attachment C
* A Draft USM Duties and Exclusions List – Attachment D

The new role will be piloted in areas where current AIN vacancies exist and affected areas will be provided information and education about the role and how the USN/M will work within the multi-disciplinary team.

### Implementation of the future model

Implementation of a pilot program will commence in July 2023 for a period of 6 months and will be evaluated at the end. Planning towards the pilot program includes the following:

**Employment Model**

Students of Nursing and Midwifery currently enrolled in second or later year of full-time study and entered on the student register (for the nursing or midwifery profession) in an approved program under the Health Practitioner National Regulation Law (ACT) Act 2010.

A USN/M must maintain their academic obligations in the Bachelor of Nursing/Midwifery and remain an active student throughout their employment.

The USN/M will be employed with a temporary contract and must be available for a rotating shift roster which may include evenings, weekends and night duty.

Once the student becomes a registered practitioner with AHPRA, they will be offered permanent employment within the RN or Midwifery Transition to Practice Program. If ineligible for a permanent contract due to Working Visa restrictions the USN will be offered a place in the CHS Novice Nurse Program.

Access to leave while employed as a USN/M is assured, so the student can fulfill study requirements, including scheduled classwork and clinical placement.

Current students employed in AIN positions will be able to apply via internal Expression of Interest advertisement and transfer to a USN role while retaining their employment status. In addition, CHS will advertise externally and employ an additional 5-10 FTE for employment in current vacant positions.

Face to face orientation will be provided by the Nursing and Midwifery Resource Office (NMRO) for USN/Ms prior to placement in their allocated area. Over 2 study days, the USN/Ms will complete all mandatory and required training. Skills stations and competency assessments specific to the care activities of this role will also be provided to ensure students demonstrate safely performing the range of care activities outlined in the duty lists. Further information about Orientation and Education, including pilot evaluation is provided for comment/feedback (Attachment E).

CHS has a health and wellbeing framework for all staff and in addition to this, the USN/Ms will have regular catch ups with the Clinical Development Nurses from the NMRO. This team will provide follow up support, ensuring their health and wellbeing is prioritised. They will also provide advice and guidance for teams in the implementation areas.

USN/Ms will report to and receive support from the local ward/area nursing and midwifery leadership team who will provide progress reports to the NMRO and advise about any performance issues, ensuring early management of sub-standard care or behaviours.

CHS acknowledges introduction of a new role into the workforce affects people in different ways and will ensure staff and health consumers are supported throughout the process. Senior nurses and midwives have been provided information at the Senior Nurse Forums and are available to answer any questions or concerns raised during the pilot implementation period. The pilot will test the role and allow for feedback to identify improvements for the future.

### Related change processes

The Assistant in Nursing role has been updated to standardise the core duties and exclusions across CHS. The benefit of this is to ensure a consistency of practice across all CHS settings. Additionally, it will ensure staff are clear about the different core duties between the USN/M role and the AIN at CHS. A comparison of USN duties and proposed AIN duties is summarised in a table (Attachment F). The proposed AIN Position Description (Attachment G) and Core Duties and Exclusions List (Attachment H) is subject to a parallel consultation process and provided for information only. CHS acknowledges this is an additional change process for affected staff. Information sessions are planned to allow staff to ask questions and provide feedback about the updated AIN role duties and the USN/M role.

## Consultation methodology

This proposal provides more detail in relation to the USN/M roles. There are still details that need to be determined and your feedback, suggestions and questions will assist in further refining the roles.

Feedback can be provided via email to [karen.obrien@act.gov.au](mailto:karen.obrien@act.gov.au)

Feedback is due by **COB Friday 30 June, 2023**.

In particular we are seeking responses to the following questions:

1. Do you have any further suggestions for implementing the USN and USM roles at CHS?
2. Are there any suggestions about the employment, orientation and support model?
3. Do you have any concerns about the proposal so far, if so what are they?
4. Do you have any other feedback you would like to be considered in relation to the implementation pilot?

For any further information relating to the USN and USM roles and subsequent consultation process, please contact Karen O’Brien on 0468864717 or [karen.obrien@act.gov.au](mailto:karen.obrien@act.gov.au)

## References

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| **Document** | **Author** |
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| ACT Public Service Nursing and Midwifery Enterprise Agreement, 2020-2022 | ACT Public Service |
| USNM\_AIN Comparative Analysis Study | Meredith Leonard, ACT CNMO |
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| *Canberra Health Services Strategic Plan* | *CEO, Canberra Health Services* |
| *Recruitment policy* | *People & Culture, Canberra Health Services* |
| *People & Culture Our People Plan* | *People & Culture, Canberra Health Services* |
| *Nursing and Midwifery Workforce Plan* | *Nursing, Midwifery and Patient Support Services 2022-2024* |