



ANMF (Vic Branch) Policy

Mental health nursing

Preamble

The Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (Victorian Branch) [ANMF (Vic Branch)] promotes holistic health care and the integration of mental health services into the general health and community sector.

These services should be seen as an integral component of existing nursing services. Patient care should be provided according to each individual's specific needs and requirements.

The ANMF (Vic Branch) views mental health nursing as a specialised area of nursing practice, underpinned by both comprehensive undergraduate nursing education and postgraduate mental health nursing education.

Position

It is the position of the ANMF (Vic Branch) that:

1. Mental health nurses work across a wide range of settings, including inpatient, community health, forensic, consumer organisations, general practice and other primary health environments. Mental health nurses are registered health practitioners, with a unique scope of nursing practice and should never fall below 2/3 of the work force composition within mental health sectors.
2. Undergraduate and post graduate mental health nurse education should be consistent with the core values and principles outlined by the Mental Health Nurse Education Taskforce 2008 (MHNeT):
 - mental health is an essential foundation for all practicing nurses;
 - multiple paradigms of care should be adopted in approaches to mental health, such as health promotion, prevention, early intervention, illness management, and recovery; and
 - a strong relationship exists between theory, evidence and practice.
3. The development and maintenance of an effective mental health nursing workforce is critical. To achieve this, all nurses require a sound undergraduate foundation in mental health nursing, with access to postgraduate specialisation for those electing to work in mental health settings.
4. Undergraduate comprehensive nursing education and enrolled nursing curricula should, as a minimum, contain the MHNeT 'principles for mental health in pre-registration nursing curricula' and 'benchmarks for inclusion of mental health content' as established by the national taskforce to ensure that all nurses are prepared as competent beginners in mental health practice.

Curricula must be contemporary, inclusive of recovery-oriented principles, promoting autonomy and developing an understanding of self-determination theory / choice and relevant to the practice of nursing.

5. The ANMF (Vic Branch) will continue lobbying for increased graduate year places to accommodate nurses seeking the speciality of mental health nursing and for nurses seeking post graduate mental health education.
6. The ANMF (Vic Branch) recognises the importance of postgraduate education and training for nurses who work in mental health settings. It will continue to pursue opportunities for such nurses to have access to recognised postgraduate mental health nursing education inclusive of scholarships and other funding mechanisms to support nurses to provide mental health nursing care.
7. The ANMF (Vic Branch) supports the National Mental Health Strategy, which aims to:
 - a. promote the mental health of the Australian community and, where possible, prevent the development of mental health problems and mental disorders;
 - b. reduce the impact of mental disorders on individuals, families and the community; and
 - c. assure the rights of people with mental illness.
8. This Strategy needs to be adequately resourced, with ongoing workforce planning. Further, resources need to be dedicated to all aspects of the mental health / mental illness continuum, as the cost – financial and otherwise – to the individual, their family and to society in general – is significant. An under-resourced system cannot be expected to be effective.
9. Recognising that people with serious mental illness often live with comorbid physical illness, it is essential that communities have access nursing care, including specialist mental health nursing care. For this reason, the ANMF (Vic Branch) opposes all moves to substitute mental health nurses with either other health practitioners or unregulated workforces.
10. The ANMF (Vic Branch) maintains that employers should provide transition programs for all comprehensively educated nurses (RNs and ENs) on initial employment in mental health services.
11. Any mental health patient who requires “one to one” nursing care will be cared for by appropriately qualified registered nurses. That nurse must always be additional to unit EFT.
12. Members should alert the ANMF (Vic Branch) of organisational factors, such as inadequate financial and human resources and inadequate skill mix, which may prevent nurses from fulfilling their duty of care and the provision of a safe working environment.

Note: the term “patient” is used generically in this position statement. ANMF (Vic Branch) recognises that people accessing mental health care have a range of preferences regarding terminology used, therefore, the branch supports people being able to determine the same.