



ANMF (Vic Branch) Policy

Work clothing for nurses and midwives

1. Introduction

The Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (Victorian Branch) (ANMF (Vic Branch)) recognises that some nurses and midwives working in healthcare environments and other industries may be required to wear work clothing during the course of their work. This required work clothing may create a risk to their health and safety.

Illnesses and injuries caused or exacerbated by uniforms are unnecessary and preventable.

A limited or inappropriate range of clothing is an occupational health and safety hazard potentially resulting in:

- Chafing, rashes and dermatitis from inappropriate choice of fabrics.
- Injury caused when uniforms do not allow the range of movement required for patient handling and other activities.
- Injury caused when uniforms cause the nurse/midwife to adopt awkward postures and techniques.
- Increased risk of injury from the wearing of jewellery and lanyards.
- Increased risk of slips, trips and falls from inappropriate footwear.
- Exposure to ultraviolet (UV) radiation.

2. Objective

The ANMF (Vic Branch) objective is to outline the expectations of the ANMF (Vic Branch) surrounding work clothes for nurses and midwives, and to maintain standards related to safety and professional appearance.

3. Scope

This policy applies to ANMF (Vic Branch) members, and all nurses and midwives eligible for ANMF (Vic Branch) membership, in Victorian healthcare environments and other industries.

4. Definitions

Work clothing: incorporates a uniform, footwear, stockings and items including lanyards, duress alarms and ID tags.

5. Policy

- 5.1. Under the Victorian Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004, all employees have a right to perform their work in an environment that is safe and without risks to health.
- 5.2. In general, where nurses and midwives provide direct patient care, work clothing should:
 - 5.2.1. Allow for free movement of limbs and joints, examples of which include action backs in shirts, pleated skirts, trousers, and culottes.
 - 5.2.2. Be made from fabrics that are appropriate to the work environment. Generally, this means shirts made from cotton or cotton / polyester blends and skirts / culottes / trousers made from natural or blended fabrics. 100% polyester fabrics are not

- appropriate, particularly for shirts as the inadequate circulation of air reduces the evaporation of perspiration.
- 5.2.3. Products purchased should be of high quality and free from any practices of exploitation of workers throughout the supply chain.
 - 5.2.4. Be made from fabrics that are easily laundered and maintained.
 - 5.2.5. Allow for adequate storage and attachment points for commonly carried items, such as pagers, keys, ID tags and duress alarms.
 - 5.2.5. Allow for a range of uniform options to accommodate seasonal conditions, different body shapes and personal preferences.
 - 5.2.6 Be consistent with OHS needs having been assessed through a risk identification and management approach, including the particular work environment in which they are to be worn.
- 5.3. The wearing of Lanyards is not recommended due to the inherent risks associated, but where provided these should have triple safety release detachment points to provide release upon being pulled or caught on an item.
 - 5.4. Identification badges should have rounded edges and be able to be released when pulled or caught on an item.
 - 5.5. Foot wear should allow for stability, comfort, be non-slip and well fitted. Shoes should be sturdy, low heeled and protect the foot. Where special footwear is being considered for specific work areas, a risk assessment should be carried out and a podiatrist consulted.
 - 5.6. Discrimination matters must be considered when selecting uniforms. For example, nurses and midwives should not be directly or indirectly disadvantaged because of sex, pregnancy or cultural background. Uniform options suitable for pregnant nurses and midwives need to be provided, and fabrics and uniform costs should be similar for male and female uniforms.
 - 5.7. Where work clothing is not provided and a work clothing criteria has been established, a corporate uniform with hospital logo available to meet taxation law requirements should be provided.

6. Key Elements

6.1 Employers

- 6.1.1 Employers have a duty under the OHS Act 2004 to consult with HSRs on matters which may affect health and safety, and this extends to the choice of work clothing for nurses and midwives.
- 6.1.2 In selection of uniforms, employers have a duty to identify potential risks associated with work clothing to ensure that the uniform options do not create or increase occupational health and safety risks.
- 6.1.3 In selection of uniforms employers should ensure all work clothing is ethically sourced from accredited clothing brands that obey the law and where all workers throughout the supply chain receive fair wages and decent working conditions

6.2 Consultation and representation

- 6.2.1 All clothing choices should be made in consultation with Health and Safety Representatives (HSRs) and employees.
- 6.2.2 Managers should ensure that the reasons for uniform choices are documented. This documentation should demonstrate that uniforms are consistent with OHS needs, and should record the outcome of consultations.

6.3 Instruction, education and training

Employers should include as part of OHS induction and training the need to assess the risk of injuries that can be caused by the wearing of some items, including jewellery, inappropriate lanyards and other equipment.

6.4 Rights of nurses

These include:

6.4.1 Consultation during the selection of uniforms process and developing uniform policies. This consultation must include HSR's representing nurses' and midwives' designated work groups.

6.4.2 Wearing of clothing that is consistent with occupational health and safety and environmental needs.

6.4.3 Making of informed choices about their work clothing.

6.4.4 A discrimination free work environment which covers the appropriate selection and choice of mandatory uniforms including non-gender specific uniform requirements.

7. Relevant legislation

- Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004
- Occupational Health and Safety Regulations 2007
- Equal Opportunity Act 2010 (Vic)

8. Relevant guidance

- ANMF (Vic Branch) Occupational Health & Safety Policy
- ANMF (Vic Branch) Safe Patient Handling Policy