

Developing a national strategic approach to maternity services

18 June 2018

The Australian Primary Health Care Nurses Association (APNA) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the consultation for developing a national strategic approach to maternity services. We are providing this submission on behalf of our membership, Australian primary health care nurses.

Primary health care nursing refers to nursing that takes place within a range of primary health care settings, each sharing the characteristic that they are part of the first level of contact with the health system. Primary health care nurses are skilled, regulated and trusted health professionals who work in partnership with their local communities to prevent illness and promote health across the lifespan. In Australia, nurse practitioners, registered nurses (RN) and enrolled nurses (EN) practice in primary health care in a range of clinical and non-clinical roles, in urban, rural and remote settings.

APNA Submission

Can you in one or a few brief sentences provide what you think would be an overarching key outcome statement for the NSAMS?

Improved access for all women prenatal, antenatal and post natal, through maternity models of care that consider their unique requirements and situation, with best use of local primary and tertiary services and workforce.

What do you think are the three or four key gaps or issues for maternity services in Australia? Of these which is most important to you?

1. The potential and value of engaging the midwifery workforce in general practice is poorly acknowledged or currently inadequately remunerated. Funding could be directed towards the Australian Primary Health Care Nurses Association (APNA) and the Australian College of Midwives (ACM) to develop a joint campaign about the benefits and value of engaging the midwifery workforce. Additional incentives for midwifery services such as funding for antenatal clinics is also needed to support the workforce to provide optimal care to patients.
2. The Strategy indicates that national workforce issues are being addressed by the National Nursing and Midwifery Education Advisory Network (NNMEAN). However it appears that NNMEAN has now been disbanded so it is unclear who will undertake this important work.

3. Indemnity insurance issues for privately practicing midwives in relation to home births requires clarity. With increasing numbers of women choosing to deliver at home there is a need to ensure adequately trained, qualified, accredited and insured professionals are accessible to provide home-birthing options to patients.

*What four to six key improvements would you like to see in maternity services in Australia?
Please consider these from a national perspective.*

1. Review of funding mechanisms to ensure midwives are adequately and respectfully funded to provide shared care maternity services in general practice (preconception, antenatal and post natal).
2. Currently midwives cannot upload to the My Health Record unless they are also a registered nurse (RN). Legislative changes are required to allow midwives to access and upload to the My Health Record to ensure a universal access point for continuity of care nationally for pregnant women and their newborns.
3. The immune changes of pregnancy put pregnant women at higher risk of some vaccine preventable diseases. Midwives and practice nurses play a critical role in ensuring appropriate immunisation of pregnant women. Recognition and continued support for midwives and practice nurses to provide influenza and pertussis vaccinations to pregnant women is essential to maternity services across the country.

Are there specific strategies that you could suggest for rural and remote services and/or, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and/or, women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds?

1. There is an opportunity to better utilise midwives in general practice across the country. Midwives can provide maternity services, such as assessment and education, over extended periods of time. This can help to alleviate GP workloads particularly in busy rural practices. Given there are predicted workforce shortages for midwives, better utilisation of the workforce may also encourage midwives in general practice to continue their midwifery registration and continuing professional development to provide service access for pregnant women in their local region.

A review of funding to encourage best use of the midwifery workforce in general practice is needed. Currently there is a small MBS rebate for a midwife, practice nurse or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health practitioner to provide antenatal services “on behalf of the GP”. However this model fails to acknowledge the skill base and experience of midwives as health professionals. In addition, the MBS item cannot be claimed if the GP also has a consultation with the patient on the same occasion as a midwife. For example, a pregnant client must see a midwife on a different occasion to the GP for the MBS item to be claimed. Unfortunately this current funding model does not encourage the provision of a midwife shared care model in general practice.

2. Greater use of information technology platforms such as Telehealth provides an opportunity for health professionals such as midwives in general practice and tertiary settings to provide continuity of care.

How will success be measured or how will we know if strategies are being successful?

To ensure optimal success, a clear strategy development, implementation and evaluation plan should be developed with adequate resourcing and timeframes. It is disappointing that the previous strategy was not evaluated as key learnings from previous strategies should inform the way forward.

The evaluation plan should detail specific data collection sources and methods such the utilising MBS and My Health Record data.

About APNA

The Australian Primary Health Care Nurses Association (APNA) is the peak professional body for nurses working in primary health care. APNA champions the role of primary health care nurses; to advance professional recognition, ensure workforce sustainability, nurture leadership in health, and optimise the role of nurses in patient-centred care.

APNA is bold, vibrant and future-focused. We reflect the views of our membership and the broader profession by bringing together nurses from across Australia to represent, advocate, promote and celebrate the achievements of nurses in primary health care.

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