



Health, environment and climate change position statement

1. Purpose

This position statement sets out the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF) position on health and the environment and the priority actions governments, employers, and nurses and midwives should take to mitigate the effects of climate change. It should be read with the ANMF position statement: *Primary healthcare*.

2. Definitions

Climate change refers to a change in climate attributed directly or indirectly to human activity that alters the composition of the global atmosphere and which is, in addition to natural climate variability, observed over comparable time periods.¹

3. Context

A healthy environment leads to improved population health and encourages people to make choices for better individual and family health.²

The World Health Organization describes climate change as ‘the single biggest health threat facing humanity’.³ Health professionals worldwide must respond to this threat.

4. Position

The ANMF recognises:

1. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are the traditional custodians of the lands and waters of Australia and have ‘cared for Country’ for thousands of years, practising sustainable environmental, natural resource and cultural heritage management activities.⁴
2. Individual and population health and wellbeing is inextricably linked to environmental health.
3. Climate change is occurring through human activities such as the large scale burning of fossil fuels for energy, and the international community, particularly the developed world, must take drastic action to reduce carbon dioxide emissions and transfer the reliance on fossil fuels to renewable energy sources.
4. The nursing and midwifery professions are grounded in science and provide the largest healthcare workforce so they are well placed to lead change in key areas of health policy and practice that impact environmental health and climate change.

¹ United Nations. 1992. *United Nations framework convention on climate change*. Geneva: UN. Available at <http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/convkp/conveng.pdf>.

² World Health Organization. 1986. *The Ottawa charter for health promotion*. Geneva: WHO Available at: https://www.euro.who.int/_data/assets/pdf_file/0004/129532/Ottawa_Charter.pdf.

³ World Health Organization. 2023. *Climate change and health*. Available at <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/climate-change-and-health>.

⁴ Australians Together. 2021. *The importance of land*. Available at <https://australiantogether.org.au/discover/indigenous-culture/the-importance-of-land/>.



The ANMF supports:

5. the *Global green and healthy hospitals* agenda which provides a framework to help health services reduce their environmental footprint and promote public and environmental health⁵
6. actions designed to address climate change and achieve net zero emissions by 2050
7. the right of nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing to participate in formulating and implementing policy and action plans to embed environmentally sustainable practices in their workplaces⁶
8. the right of nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing, without fear of victimisation, to bring to the attention of colleagues, employers, their professional and industrial organisations, and the public, evidenced-based information about the dangers of environmentally harmful practices and products
9. the adoption of sustainable procurement strategies that incorporate best practice environmental and social criteria and circular economy principles and strategies – reduce, reuse and recycle – wherever practicable
10. collaboration between nurses, midwives and medical industry manufacturers to eliminate superfluous packaging and products.

Government

It is the position of the ANMF that governments must:

11. take urgent action to implement non-fossil fuel sources of energy
12. take urgent action to prepare the health sector to deal with the health effects of climate change
13. encourage research to identify and quantify the negative health effects of climate change and the health benefits of climate change mitigation so the health sector can understand and best respond to emerging health conditions and create and optimise preventive health strategies
14. ensure climate change is recognised and treated as a public health issue
15. include environmental issues, climate change, and environmentally sustainable practice in undergraduate and postgraduate nursing and midwifery curricula so the current and future workforce is equipped to respond to health conditions related to climate change
16. ensure health, disability and aged care service accreditation standards require environmental impact assessments where appropriate and specify sustainable environmental standards for procurement, energy and water efficiency, and waste management
17. ensure that sustainable planning, design and construction is standard practice for developing new health care facilities and retrofitting existing facilities
18. require codes of practice for nurses and midwives to include responding to the environmental impact of healthcare delivery as a safety and quality measure.

⁵ For more information about *Global green and health hospitals* see <https://greenhospitals.org/goals>.

⁶ Assistant in nursing refers to all care workers however titled.



Health, aged care, disability and other relevant services

It is the position of the ANMF that all health, aged care, disability and other relevant services should:

19. identify and implement activities to mitigate their environmental impact
20. in collaboration with stakeholders, experts and other appropriate personnel, establish and draw on mechanisms that provide advice on:
 - best practice sustainable health care policy, practice and protocols
 - new and existing products to advance sustainability
 - how sustainability can and should be incorporated into all capital works projects
21. develop and annually report against an *Environmental management plan* with goals and targets to improve their environmental profile and reduce:
 - general and clinical waste and emissions
 - energy and water use
 - the use of single use and disposable products.

Employer responsibilities

It is the position of the ANMF that employers should:

22. endorse the *Global green and healthy hospitals* sustainability goals for leadership; chemicals; waste; energy; water; transport; food; pharmaceuticals; buildings; and procurement⁷
23. identify, facilitate, resource and implement environmentally sustainable practices that support the above goals
24. create mechanisms that empower nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing to fully participate in these change efforts and consult with them to ensure they have the resources they need to implement practice change
25. showcase the efforts and successes of nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing who successfully introduce environmentally sustainable workplace practices
26. involve nurses and midwives in risk assessments and emergency and surge workforce planning.

Nurse and midwife responsibilities

The ANMF encourages nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing to:

27. become informed on environmental issues so they can participate in the broader climate change debate and communicate with decision makers, community members and employers on the importance of implementing sustainable healthcare practices
28. actively participate in workplace forums to identify and implement sustainability initiatives.

5. Position statement management

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⁷ For more information about *Global green and healthy hospitals* see <https://greenhospitals.org/goals>.