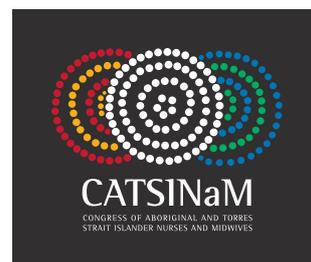# NURSES AND MIDWIVES SUPPORTING THE HEALTH OF OUR COMMUNITY

Federal Election Priorities 2019

INTRODUCTION

The following peak nursing and midwifery bodies present an agreed position on how nurses and midwives can positively impact the health and wellbeing of the Australian community:

- Australian College of Mental Health Nurses
- CRANA*plus*
- Australian Primary Health Care Nurses Association
- Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation
- Congress of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nurses and Midwives
- Australian College of Nursing
- Australian College of Nurse Practitioners
- Australian College of Midwives
- Council of Deans of Nursing and Midwifery

Nurses and midwives have a robust regulatory framework that ensures the public is protected. All nurses and midwives must be enabled to practice to the full extent of their education and registration. Working as the primary carer or as a part of a team, they provide evidence-based, cost-effective, comprehensive health care. Nurses and midwives have the ability to provide care across many areas of our community where essential healthcare is not currently available. However system and funding barriers prevent them from practising in all areas of community need. There are currently 374,216 nurses and midwives on the Register with general/provisional registration to practice but only 323,122 nurses and midwives are employed in the workforce[1].

A three-year global campaign (2018-2020), *Nursing Now*, aims to improve health by raising the profile and status of nursing worldwide[2]. Run in collaboration with the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the International Council of Nurses, *Nursing Now* seeks to empower nurses to take their place at the heart of tackling 21st century health challenges and maximise their contribution to achieving universal health coverage. With universal health coverage, all people have access to needed health services (including prevention, promotion, treatment, rehabilitation and palliation) of sufficient quality to be effective, while also ensuring the use of these services does not expose the user to financial hardship[3].

The *Nursing Now* campaign is underpinned by the World Health Organisation's Triple Impact Report, which highlights that universal health coverage cannot possibly be achieved without strengthening nursing globally[4]. While this involves increasing the number of nurses, the more crucial issue is making sure their contribution is properly understood and enabling them to work to their full potential. The report argues that increasing the number of nurses, and developing nursing, will also have the wider triple impact of improving health, promoting gender equality and supporting economic growth.

In 2016, the WHO recommended that midwife-led continuity-of-care models should be accessible for all pregnant women, especially where there are pre-existing 'well-functioning midwifery programmes', such as those available in Australia[5]. A 2018 Cochrane systematic review identified that midwifery-led care for pregnant women reduces pre-term birth and perinatal death. Pre-term birth (before 37 weeks gestation) is the main contributor to newborn death and can have long term health implications for surviving infants. The clear benefit identified to avoid pre-term birth and perinatal death was all women having access to midwife-led continuity models of care, when compared to other models of care[6].

The implementation of nursing and midwifery models and nurse and midwife-led services will improve access to health care for all Australians.

KEY ISSUES

Australia's stillbirth rates have not changed in over two decades[7]

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women continue to have poorer maternity outcomes than non-Indigenous women[8]

Australia has an increasing rate of birth intervention[9]

Despite the evidence identifying the benefits, less than 8% of women have access to midwife-led continuity of care[10]

High rates of perinatal depression with one in ten women experiencing depression during pregnancy and one in seven women in the year following birth[11]

Australia has an ageing population with an insufficient and largely unqualified aged care workforce[12]

Australia has a crisis in care in aged care services resulting in the current *Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety*[13]

Australia has increasing rates of chronic diseases, which are now the leading cause of illness, disability and death in Australia (87% of all deaths in 2015)[14]

Almost three million avoidable hospital emergency department presentations in the last financial year, were people who should have been seen in primary healthcare[15]

Australia has increasing rates of mental health problems: 62% of all presentations to general practice relate to mental health[16]; people with a mental illness live between 14-23 years less than the general population[17]; Australia's Indigenous populations have poorer mental health and physical health outcomes than the general population[18]

Australians living in rural, regional and remote locations have the same needs as those in the city but poorer access to health care[19]

ACTIONS

Nurses and midwives believe urgent action is needed to address whole of life issues to improve the health of all Australians.

The peak nursing and midwifery bodies call upon political parties to better recognise and utilise the nursing and midwifery workforces by committing to the following actions:

- Increase health care access for the community by funding nurse and midwife-led models of care, to enable the provision of more comprehensive health services;

- Review health care funding models to remove structural and financial barriers thereby enabling the community to access nurse and midwife-led services and allowing nurses and midwives to work to their full scope of practice;

- Increase access for women to midwife-led continuity of care models;

- Further invest in the development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nursing and midwifery workforces;

- Utilise the nursing and midwifery workforces to significantly improve health promotion, increase preventative health care measures, and facilitate better access to primary health care;

- Increase Medicare access and rebates for care provided by nurse practitioners and participating midwives;

- Adopt the recommendations of the MBS Taskforce Review's Nurse Practitioner Reference Group Report and Participating Midwife Reference Group Report;[20]

- Implement standards for staff numbers and skills mix which meet the needs of older people requiring community and residential aged care;

- Ensure nationally consistent educational preparation, qualification and regulation for community and residential aged care workers;

- Further develop and fund nurse and midwife-led health care services in rural and remote locations;

- Better utilise telehealth systems to enable nurses and midwives to participate in collegial discussion for clinical decision making to benefit those for whom they provide care.

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