

POSITION STATEMENT



ACCCN POSITION STATEMENT ON ADVANCED PRACTICE IN CRITICAL CARE (2021)

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

The Australian College of Critical Care Nurses Ltd. (ACCCN) is the peak professional nursing association representing critical care nurses throughout Australia. ACCCN supports initiatives to promote and enhance the role of all critical care nurses within the health professional team. This ACCCN *Position Statement on Advanced Practice Nursing in Critical Care* describes the level of practice expected of critical care nurses working at an advanced level. The statement provides a benchmark for health professionals, patients and carers, employers and other stakeholders to use to make informed judgements regarding the level of practice of nurses working at advanced level in the critical care context.

PRINCIPLES

This *Position Statement on Advanced Practice in Critical Care* builds upon the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia (NMBA), Registered Nurse Standards for Practice¹ and the ACCCN Practice Standards for Specialist Critical Care Nurses.² It also incorporates recent policy statements from key peak professional bodies, such as the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia (NMBA) *Nurse Practitioner Standards of Practice*,³ the Australian College of Nursing (ACN) white paper titled *A New Horizon for Health Services: Optimising Advanced Practice Nursing*,⁴ the International Council of Nurses (ICN) *Guidelines on Advanced Practice Nursing 2020*,⁵ and the Chief Nursing and Midwifery Officers, Australia guidance document titled *Advanced Nursing Practice, Guidelines for the Australian Context*.⁶

The ACCCN recognises that as regulated health professionals, Registered Nurses (RNs) are responsible for autonomous nursing practice within dynamic

systems, and in relationships with other health care professionals.¹ The term 'specialist' defines roles focused within a specific context, for example, a particular population or skill set. The ACCCN recognises that specialist nurses possess and can demonstrate in-depth knowledge, skills and expertise in their area of specialised nursing practice, developed by undertaking formal education, exposure to relevant clinical experience in their practice area and continuing professional development.^{6,7}

ACCCN further defines a critical care nurse specialist as: *"A registered nurse who provides competent and holistic care for the critically ill patient through the integration of advanced-level knowledge, skills and humanistic values. He or she demonstrates advanced problem solving and communication skills, and utilises these effectively in managing complex patient situations and coordinating health care activities within the critical care environment."*²

ACCCN recognises that specialisation alone does not characterise advanced practice.⁶

ADVANCED PRACTICE

The concept of advanced practice nursing has been developing for over three decades with considerable debate, which at times highlights lack of clarity or confusion around the term used to describe practice or roles at an advanced level. In 2020, following extensive consultation, the NMBA proposed a revised definition of advanced practice.⁸

The ACCCN endorses the NMBA definition of advanced practice as follows:

*"Nurses practising at an advanced practice level incorporate professional leadership, education, research and support of systems into their practice. Their practice includes relevant expertise, critical thinking, complex decision-making, autonomous practice and is effective and safe. They work within a generalist or specialist context and they are responsible and accountable in managing people who have complex healthcare requirements. Advanced practice in nursing is demonstrated by a level of practice and is not by a job title or level of remuneration. Advanced practice for the purpose of the nurse practitioner endorsement requires 5,000 hours of clinically-based advanced practice in the past six years."*⁸

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THE ADVANCED PRACTICE NURSE

The International Council of Nurses, *Guidelines on Advanced Practice Nursing 2020*,⁵ defines an advanced practice nurse as:

“One who has acquired, through additional education, the expert knowledge base, complex decision-making skills and clinical competencies for expanded nursing practice, the characteristics of which are shaped by the context in which they are credentialed to practice”.

Empirical research conducted in Australia has provided evidence that it is possible, from among over 70 position titles studied across the eight Australian jurisdictions, to delineate nurses working at an advanced practice level from other registered nurses.^{9,10} In this program of research, identification of nurses practicing at an advanced level was conducted using The Australian Advanced Practice Nursing Self-Appraisal Tool (The ADVANCE Tool).⁹ The ADVANCE Tool is grounded in evidence from a ten-year program of research and assesses levels of practice in relation to 5 practice areas: direct comprehensive care, support of systems, education, research and publication and professional leadership. Findings from the national survey of the Australian nursing workforce¹⁰ identified that registered nurses occupying the following positions fell within the advanced practice nurse definitional thresholds:

- Clinical Nurse Consultant (ACT, NSW, QLD, TAS, WA)
- Clinical Consultant (VIC)
- Clinical Nurse Specialist (WA)
- Nurse Clinical Practice Consultant (SA).

ACCCN recognises that nurses working to their full scope in these positions are practicing at an advanced practice level.

THE NURSE PRACTITIONER

The Nurse Practitioner (NP) is an advanced practice nurse whose registration has been endorsed by the NMBA under the *Health Practitioner Regulation National Law 2009* (the National Law).¹¹ Endorsement as a NP requires completion of prescribed education, minimum master's degree accredited by the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Accreditation

Council (ANMAC) and approved by the NMBA. Findings from the national survey of the Australian nursing workforce reported that in Australia, nurses endorsed as Nurse Practitioners across all eight jurisdictions exceed the advanced practice nurse domain thresholds.¹⁰

The ACCCN recognises the NP is a nursing role, built on nursing principles and philosophy, providing holistic nursing care within their regulated scope of practice. In addition to assumptions and characteristics of nurses working at an advance practice level, NP attributes are clinically focused, although NPs are capable and may also participate in research, education and leadership, as applied to clinical care. As part of providing care, NPs can order and interpret investigations to facilitate diagnosis and care planning; care that may involve initiation, titration or cessation of medications.³ The ACCCN recognises that the NP is not in competition with other healthcare professionals, including other advanced practice nursing roles, nor is the adoption of the domains of other healthcare practitioners viewed as the core of NP practice in critical care.

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Registered nurses working at an advanced practice level in critical care

The ACCCNs position is that nurses working at an advanced practice level in critical care:

- are registered nurses providing safe and competent patient care to critical or potentially critically ill patients;
- have roles or levels of practice which require formal education in critical care nursing beyond the preparation of the registered nurse (minimum required level is a master's degree or equivalent);
- have roles or levels of practice with increased levels of competency and capability that are measurable, beyond that expected of the specialist critical care nurse;
- demonstrate advanced clinical expertise, competency in leadership and facilitate translation of research to practice;

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- have acquired the ability to explain and apply the theoretical, empirical, ethical, legal and professional development required for advanced practice nursing;
- have defined competencies and standards which are periodically reviewed for maintaining currency in practice; and
- are influenced by the global, social, political, economic and technological milieu.

Adapted from the International Council of Nurses (ICN) *Guidelines on Advanced Practice Nursing 2020*.⁵

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