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4.1 Practice nursing in Australia

Nursing in general practice is a dynamic and vibrant area of the nursing profession. It offers a diverse range of experiences and provides the opportunity to be part of a clinical team caring for the varied primary care needs of the community. Nursing in general practice represents a shift from a hospital-based environment to a small business environment located in the local community.

A practice nurse is a registered nurse or an enrolled nurse (Division 1 and 2 in Victoria) who is employed by, or whose services are otherwise retained by, a general practice.

In 2007 approximately 58% of practices employed one or more general practice nurses¹ and at the end of June 2008 it was estimated that there were over 8,000 general practice nurses in Australia.

Practice nurses work collaboratively with general practitioners providing a range of services, including chronic disease management and population health activities. Their role is diverse and influenced by factors such as the practice population, nurses' qualifications, practice structure, professional standards and national incentives and programs.

Nurses are core members of the general practice team enabling practices to meet the diverse and complex health care needs of an ageing population, with increasing rates of chronic disease and illness.

The growing burden of chronic disease and patient demand has increased GP workloads. Nurses in general practice work collaboratively with GPs to provide efficient and effective health care to all patients.

A range of Australian and international literature identifies some of the benefits nurses can bring to a practice. These include:

- improved health outcomes in chronic illness²
- assistance in primary-acute sector integration
- better coordination of care
- increased workforce capacity
- provision of practical and professional support to GPs
- enhancement of the range of services available to people attending the practice³
- improvement in the ability of the practice to adapt to change⁴

Further information on the role of nurses and the value their role brings to general practice is provided in section 3.3.

4.2 The Nursing in General Practice Program

The NiGP Program is one of the major change management programs managed by the Australian General Practice Network and has been at the forefront of the transition of general practice to include a significantly larger proportion of practice nurses and a much more multidisciplinary team approach to primary health care. It has been fundamental to the role of the Network and is a very successful program supporting workforce solutions for general practice – complementing the educational opportunities available through scholarships. Our program has supported more general practices to employ nurses, and provided a broad range of support services to practice nurses to enhance and expand their role and retain their expertise in general practice.

The Australian Government has been supporting the work of practice nurses through a range of programs.

In its 2001-2002 Federal Budget, the Australian Government provided funding of \$104.3 million over four years for incentives to encourage general practices in rural areas and other areas of high workforce needs to employ more nurses. The practice nurse initiative had three components:

1. a Practice Incentive Payment (PIP) to encourage eligible practices to employ more nurses
2. funding for the provision of ongoing training and support of all nurses working in general practice
3. a Scholarship Scheme to support nurses to re-enter the workforce, and to provide funding for nurses currently employed to refresh their skills.

Additional initiatives were introduced in 2004 as part of the government's *Strengthening Medicare* package, including:

- two new MBS items for services provided by general practice nurses for and on behalf of a general practitioner for immunisation and wound care services
- extension of the PIP practice nurse incentive to general practices in urban areas of workforce shortage
- an additional MBS item for Pap smears taken by practice nurses in regional, rural or remote areas.

The 2005–06 Federal Budget included two measures that contained components that together formed the Australian Government's *Nursing in General Practice Training and Support Initiative* ('the Initiative'). These components included:

- \$15.6 million (GST-exclusive) over four years for training and professional support for practice nurses under the *Additional Practice Nurses for Rural Australia and Other Areas of Need Measure* (a continuation of the 2001 Federal Budget measure)
- \$2.6 million (GST-exclusive) over four years to facilitate access to training and provide support for nurses in regional and rural areas to be points of referral for people experiencing domestic violence, as part of the \$75.7 million *Women's Safety Agenda* managed by the Australian Government Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaCSIA).

The key project for the Initiative in 2005–09 was the continuation of the *Divisions Network Nursing in General Practice* (NiGP) Program led by the Australian General Practice Network (AGPN) in conjunction with state based organisations (SBOs).

The objectives for the Nursing in General Practice Program were to:

1. build the capacity of general practice networks (formerly divisions) to deliver support services for nursing in general practice, in particular to recruit and retain nurses in general practice
2. broker, coordinate and fund education and professional development opportunities for nurses in general practice in collaboration with general practice networks across each state and territory.

The Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing established guidelines that set out how the NiGP Program was funded and how it would operate. To find out more about the Guidelines for the Division Network Nursing In General Practice program go to [http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/FC2EA2F5172BC69CCA25740500153F20/\\$File/guide.pdf](http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/FC2EA2F5172BC69CCA25740500153F20/$File/guide.pdf)

Further information regarding all these initiatives can be found on the Department of Health and Ageing website at Nursing in General Practice. <http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/work-pr-nigp>

Some of the key achievements for the AGPN in the leadership and support for the NiGP Program, and the continued role in provision of policy advice and promotion of the practice nurse role include:

- publication of the National Practice Nurse Workforce Survey Reports 2003 2005 & 2007, the only comprehensive national information and statistics regarding the general practice nursing workforce. The 2007 survey results revealed a 59% increase in the number of practice nurses employed in general practice 2005-2007 (n=7824), with 58% of general practices nationally employing one or more nurses.
- preparation of a position statement on the Nurse Practitioner in General Practice endorsed by the network, in response to discussions surrounding alternate models for health care workers. AGPN supports the role for nurse practitioners in the general practice setting, where the nurse practitioner works collaboratively with the GP and general practice team to enhance patient care.
- revision of the Business Case Models for Nursing in General Practice to reflect the introduction of the practice nurse and new chronic disease Medicare items.
- lobbying for the introduction of additional Medicare items for services provided by practice nurses on behalf of the GP, the extension of the Practice Incentives Program practice nurse payment to all practices, and the introduction of infrastructure grants to assist practices to accommodate additional team members.
- hosting a national forum for network members for nursing in general practice, to showcase nationally relevant NiGP initiatives and models, share knowledge, skills and resources, and coach and collaborate with members to build their capacity to support Nursing in General Practice.
- production of a range of promotional material for general practice nursing including posters and information brochures for consumers, practices and other nurses.
- provision of a Leadership and Development Program for practice nurses delivered through the University of New England.
- participation in a collaborative research project with the Australian National University to examine the role of nurses in general practice and identify ways of expanding or changing these roles to enhance primary health care delivery.
- management of the National Mentoring Pilot for Nurses in General Practice. AGPN in conjunction with the Australian Mentor Centre with funding from the Department of Health and Ageing conducted an 18 month pilot program. The pilot concluded in October 2008. The pilot program aimed to provide practice nurses with opportunities to engage in structured mentoring relationships, to enhance personal and professional development, and strengthen the nursing services provided in the general practice environment.
- development of an e-learning training package to support Medicare item 10997, this project was undertaken in partnership with Royal College of Nursing Australia and Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education. Medicare Item 10997 applies to the provision of monitoring and support to people with a chronic disease care plan by a practice nurse or registered Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Worker on behalf of a general practitioner. The e-learning package is designed to enhance the role of practice nurses and Aboriginal Health Workers providing this service, and to assist general practitioners to feel confident that practice nurses and registered Aboriginal Health Workers who successfully undertake the e-learning package are appropriately qualified and trained to provide monitoring and support for patients with a chronic disease care plan. The package consists of a foundation module and seven disease specific modules
- development of the Introduction to Nursing in General Practice Program. This program has been designed for registered and enrolled nurses who have maintained their registration but are not currently working in the nursing workforce. The program is designed to be delivered by network member organisations to provide information for individuals who are interested in gaining employment as a practice nurse. The program is designed to provide participants with an understanding of the diverse roles of the practice nurse and the context in which the practice nurse is employed.
- development of a comprehensive orientation program for nurses new to general practice. The intention is to provide the knowledge and skills required to assist in the transition to general practice nursing.
- developed a comprehensive Nursing in General Practice Orientation Manual for newly appointed network program officers to assist their role in the delivery of support services to practice nurses.

- produced a series of PowerPoint presentations for network members to compliment this National Recruitment and Orientation Resource. The presentations include speaker notes, and can be used to provide information sessions for GPs and practice staff, nurses interested in general practice and nurses new to general practice.
- national coordination and moderation for the University of the Sunshine Coast Graduate Certificate in Nursing (General Practice). This is a unique and exciting program that is designed specifically for practice nurses to develop knowledge and skills to assist them to practice competently within the challenging and constantly evolving general practice environment.
- promotion of the nursing in general practice program nationally and internationally through conference presentations, media articles and the establishment of networks with other key stakeholders.
- provision of expertise to other national general practice nursing projects including the development of competency standards for nurses in general practice, the revision of the Royal College of Nursing Australia guide for the general practice team, and the scholarship program for practice nurses administered by the Australian Practice Nurses Association.

Further information on these activities and other information on the AGPN National Nursing in General Practice Program is available at: www.agpn.com.au and follow the links to Nursing in General Practice.

At the time of revising this resource, AGPN is currently negotiating with the Department of Health and Ageing the key priorities for the AGPN National Nursing in General Practice Program for the next three years 2009-2012. Further information will be provided on the AGPN website as the program unfolds.

4.3 Strategies for supporting practices to recruit or retain the services of a practice nurse

The General practice networks are a focal point in coordinating the needs of general practitioners and their practices. Network member organisations are the best placed organisations to play a role in supporting general practitioners in the recruitment and provision of ongoing support of practice nurses. One of the findings of the recently completed Australian General Practice Nurse Study was that for many practices, network support – ranging from support and education for nurses to direct recruitment of nurses – was instrumental in their decision to employ a nurse.⁴

Network member organisations have a knowledge and understanding of the context in which practice nursing services are provided.

Network member organisations can support practices to employ or retain a practice nurse in a number of ways. The supports listed below are drawn from the AGPN *Demonstration Divisions Nursing in General Practice National Resource Kit* (see <http://www.generalpracticenursing.com.au/site/index.cfm?display=27434>)

The role of network member organisations includes:

- assessing the member practices in terms of the relevant barriers to practices employing a nurse
- developing strategies to overcome the barriers to uptake and enhance the contribution of nursing to general practice. These strategies may be to:
 - develop the business case for the actual and potential clinical contribution of the nurse to general practice and the relevant models of employment
 - involve practice nurses during the planning, implementation and evaluation phases of any new initiatives
 - support upskilling and refresher programs for practice nurses
 - foster regular networking activities, and provide regular information on current programs of interest
 - support clinical audit and practice management support
 - manage contracts or employ nurses on behalf of practices
- monitoring to enhance the capacity of nurses to work collaboratively as part of the team.

Benefits of network member organisation practice nurse support include:

- increased recognition and promotion of the general practice nurse workforce
- professional development opportunities
- overcoming the isolation experienced by practice nurses
- clarification of issues relating to supervision and mentoring
- increased satisfaction and pride in their work
- greater rapport and interaction amongst local nurses
- opportunities for nurses to vent frustrations and problems and to seek solutions amongst their peers and with Division representatives
- networking and opportunities to share experiences and knowledge
- dissemination of information pertinent to the general practice
- assistance in the implementation of the various DOHA Nursing in General Practice initiatives
- stronger links with the community through participation in divisional programs
- increased capacity for practice nurses to undertake extended roles in chronic disease management and preventive/population health programs
- the opportunity to have a collective voice through participation in practice nurse networks.

Network members may also provide support by:

- assisting with recruitment of a practice nurse
- running an Introduction to General Practice Program for nurses interested in general practice
- establishing a register of nurses interested in working or contracting a nurse to work in a practice
- development and dissemination of local community and referral information.
- trial a nurse programs
- network employed practice nurse programs
- supporting practices with direct employment
- supporting contract services and links with community services
- examining flexible models of service such as home visiting or off-site nursing services for those practices who do not have space to employ a nurse

For further information refer to the AGPN *Demonstration Divisions Nursing in General Practice National Resource Kit* at <http://www.generalpracticenursing.com.au/site/index.cfm?display=27434>

Nursing in General Practice Information Kit

Network member organisations may also find useful information in a nursing in general practice information kit that has been distributed to every Australian general practice, state based organisation and key nursing and general practice organisations.

The information kit aims to provide the general practice team with guidance on roles and responsibilities, legislative, regulatory, employment and human resource support information to assist general practices to effectively include a nurse within their general practice team.

The information kit may be downloaded from Royal College of Nursing, Australia (RCNA) <http://www.rcna.org.au> or nigp@health.gov.au to request a copy.

4.4 Strategies for supporting practice nurses

Network member organisations also play an important role in the provision of ongoing support for general practice nurses. This includes the provision of:

- on-going education and professional development
- networking opportunities
- assistance with orientation and induction
- information updates
- mentoring support.

Further information regarding the role of network member organisations in general practice nurse support can be found at <http://www.generalpracticenursing.com.au/site/index.cfm> or visit the website of your state and/or local branch of the network at <http://www.agpn.com.au/site/index.cfm?module=DIVISION>

4.5 Resources and support available

The Australian Government supports the work of general practice nurses through a range of programs. Information about the role of the general practice nurse and information about the programs supporting their work is outlined below.

Department of Health and Ageing

For more information on the practice nurse role, including frameworks to describe the role, refer to the following documents:

- Competency Standards for Nursing in General Practice <http://www.anf.org.au/nurses%5Fgp/>
- Nursing in General Practice - a guide for the general practice team <http://www.rcna.org.au/Default.aspx?SiteSearchID=360&ID=/results>
- General Practice Nursing in Australia - by the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) and Royal College of Nursing, Australia (RCNA) http://www.racgp.org.au/AM/Template.cfm?Section=General_Practice_Nurses&Template=/CM/ContentDisplay.cfm&ContentID=10179
- AGPN National Practice Nurse Workforce Survey Report 2007 http://www.generalpracticenursing.com.au/site/content.cfm?page_id=32208¤t_category_code=4059

Other Australian Government nursing in general practice initiatives

The Initiative and NiGP Program complement and support a range of other Australian Government initiatives aimed at encouraging increased utilisation of practice nurses services, such as:

- Medical Benefits Schedule (MBS) items for practice nurses providing immunisation, wound care, Pap screening and women's health checks, antenatal care, chronic disease monitoring and support and healthy kids checks : <http://www.health.gov.au/internet/mbsonline/publishing.nsf/Content/Medicare-Benefits-Schedule-MBS-1>
- the practice nurse Practice Incentives Program (PIP) incentive for rural Australian and urban areas of workforce shortage <http://www.medicareaustralia.gov.au/provider/incentives/pip/index.jsp>
- the Enhanced Primary Care Program including MBS chronic disease management items which include the provision for GPs to be assisted by practice nurses, Aboriginal Health Workers(AHWs) and other health professionals in providing services for which these items may be claimed: www.health.gov.au/epc
- practice nurse scholarships for education and professional development, delivered by the Australian Practice Nurses Association: <http://www.apna.asn.au/displaycommon.cfm?an=1&subarticlenbr=5>

4.6 Where to find further information

Australian General Practice Network
www.agpn.com.au

Australian Nursing Federation
www.anf.org.au

Australian Rural Nurses & Midwives
http://www.rcna.org.au/chapters/rural_faculty

Australian Practice Nurses Association
www.apna.asn.au

Australian Nursing and Midwifery Council
www.anmc.org.au

Royal College of Nursing, Australia
www.rcna.org.au

Council of Remote Area Nurses of Australia
www.crana.org.au

Department of Health and Ageing
<http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/work-pr-nigp>

4.7 Acronyms

AAPM	Australian Association of Practice Managers Ltd
ACCHS	Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services
ACIR	Australian Childhood Immunisation Register
AGPN	Australian General Practice Network Ltd
AHW	Aboriginal Health Worker
AMA	Australian Medical Association
AMS	Aboriginal Medical Service
ANF	Australian Nursing Federation
ANMC	Australian Nursing and Midwifery Council
APNA	Australian Practice Nurses Association
AWA	Australian Workplace Agreement
BOMHI	Better Outcomes in Mental Healthcare Initiative
BGL	Blood Glucose Level
BSL	Blood Sugar Level
BMI	Body Mass Index
CDM	Chronic Disease Management
CRANA	Council of Remote Area Nurses of Australia
DoHA	Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing
EN	Enrolled Nurse (Division 2 Registered Nurse Victoria)
EPC	Enhanced Primary Care
GP	General Practitioner
GPII	General Practice Immunisation Incentive
GPLO	GP Liaison Officer
GPMP	GP Management Plan
HREOC	Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission
HMR	Home Medications Review
IM / IT	Information Management / Information Technology
FaCSIA	Australian Government Department of Families, Community

Services and Indigenous Affairs

FTE	Full-time equivalent
MAHS	More Allied Health Services
MBS	Medicare Benefits Schedule
NACCHO	National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation
NAPSA	Notional Agreement Preserving State Awards
NiGP	Nursing in General Practice
NMRA	Nursing and midwifery regulatory authority
NPS	National Prescribing Service
PBS	Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme
PC	Primary Care
PHC	Primary Health Care

SECTION FOUR: For Network Member Organisations

PHCRIS	Primary Health Care Research and Information Service
PI	Performance Indicator
PIP	Practice Incentives Program
PN	Practice Nurse
PN PIP	Practice Nurse incentive under the Practice Incentives Program
RACGP	Royal Australian College of General Practitioners
RCNA	Royal College of Nursing Australia
RMMR	Residential Medication Management Review
RN	Registered Nurse (Division 1 Registered Nurse Victoria)
RRMA	Rural, Remote and Metropolitan Areas Classification
SBO	State Based Organisation
SIP	Service Incentive Payment
SWPE	Standard Whole Patient Equivalent

For more acronyms commonly used in Australian general practice and primary health care:

Primary Health Care Research & Information Service
<http://www.phcris.org.au/products/acronyms.php>

4.8 Endnotes

- 1 Australian Divisions of General Practice, 2008. National Practice Nurse Workforce Survey 2007. ADGP Canberra.
- 2 Wagner et al. Organising Care for Patients with Chronic Illness, *The Millbank Quarterly*, 1996; 74 (4) 511-534
- 3 Watts et al. General Practice Nursing in Australia, RACGP/RCNA, 2004, cited in AGPN, Demonstration Divisions Resource Kit, 2005.
- 4 Phillips CB, Pearce CM, Dwan KM, Hall S, Porritt J, Yates R, Kijakovic M, Sibbald B. Charting New Roles for Australian General Practice Nurses: Abridged Report of the Australian General Practice Nurses Study. Canberra: Australian Primary Health Care Institute, 2008.