

EXPLANATORY NOTE COCE DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Continuity of Care Experiences during COVID-19 pandemic 2020

1. PURPOSE

This explanatory note has been developed to assist Australian education providers address challenges that students might have in achieving the mandated number of continuity of care experiences as outlined in the *Midwife Accreditation Standards 2014* as a result of restrictions imposed during the COVID-19 pandemic.

2. BACKGROUND

ANMAC is responsible for the accreditation and monitoring of all nursing and midwifery education providers and programs of study where graduates are eligible to apply for registration or endorsement with the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia.

The *Midwife Accreditation Standards 2014* outline the minimum supervised midwifery practice experience requirements that a student must achieve in order to successfully complete a midwifery entry to practice program. Successful completion of an ANMAC accredited/NMBA approved program renders a graduate eligible to apply for registration as a midwife with NMBA.

The required Continuity of care experiences are described in Standard 8 of the *Midwife Accreditation Standards 2014* as follows:

Standard 8.11 (a) Experience in woman-centred care as part of continuity of care experiences. The student is supported to:

- i) establish, maintain and conclude a professional relationship while experiencing continuity with individual women through pregnancy, labour and birth, and the postnatal period, regardless of model of care
- ii) provide midwifery care within a professional practice setting and under the supervision of a midwife—in collaborative practice arrangements supervision by other relevant registered practitioners (for example, medical officer qualified in obstetrics, child health nurse or physiotherapist) may be appropriate
- iii) engage with a minimum of 10 women—engagement involves attending four antenatal visits, two postnatal visits and, for the majority of women, the labour and birth
- iv) maintain a record of each engagement incorporating regular reflection and review by the education or health service provider.

In order to prevent the rapid spread of COVID-19 in Australia during the current pandemic, the Government has imposed social distancing rules and travel restrictions. This has resulted in some health services suspending the student clinical placement agreements that are currently in place with education providers. In addition, some maternity service providers have imposed restrictions on the number of people that can be in attendance with women in the birthing suite. In some cases, the number is limited to the woman's partner and the midwife. This restriction may preclude students from attending labour and birth, including that of a woman they have been engaging with as part of their continuity of care experiences.

Education providers have requested advice from ANMAC in relation to students who are nearing the end of their programs and have not been able to achieve the required number continuity of care experiences because of the current COVID-19 pandemic.

3. APPLICATION

This explanatory note applies to all education providers offering ANMAC accredited/NMBA approved entry to practice midwife programs. It relates specifically to standard 8.11 (a).

N.B. The provisions of this explanatory note apply only during the period of the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions in Australia 2020.

4. RELEVANT DOCUMENTATION

The following documentation is relevant to this explanatory note:

- ANMAC Midwife Accreditation Standards (2014)

5. ASSUMPTIONS

This explanatory note assumes that students will have access to appropriate digital devices and sufficient mobile phone coverage to engage with women via phone or tablet.

The provisions of the explanatory note do not apply to students who do not have access to these resources e.g. located in remote or rural areas where phone connectivity is limited.

6. ADVICE TO EDUCATION PROVIDERS RE CONTINUITY OF CARE EXPERIENCES DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

In Standard criterion 8.11 (a), the Midwife Accreditation Standards state that woman-centred care is the focus of continuity of care experiences. The student is required to provide midwifery care under the supervision of a midwife.

The student must be supported to establish a professional relationship with a minimum of 10 individual women through pregnancy, labour and birth, and the post-natal period. This is regardless of model of care.

For each of the 10 women, the student must attend four antenatal visits and two postnatal visits. Recognising that for a variety of reasons students might not be able to attend labour and birth of all 10 women, the standards require that students **must attend a majority i.e. at least six (6) of the labour and births.**

The current COVID-19 restrictions have resulted in limited opportunities for some students to attend antenatal and postnatal clinics and to attend the labour and birth of their continuity of care women.

ANMAC recommends that education providers consider the following options for students to optimise their opportunities to meet the requirements for Standard 8.11 (a):

- students can attend ante and postnatal visits remotely via the use of their phone. This would require the agreement of all parties (woman, midwife, or obstetrician, and education provider)
- where students miss out on engaging with a woman during labour and birth experience due to precipitous birth or exclusion from birthing suite (or operating theatre in case of LSCS) because of COVID-19 distancing rules, the student could connect with the woman as soon as possible afterwards to discuss and reflect on her experience.

It is preferable that this interaction is face to face but in current circumstances, if the woman agrees, this could be via phone. ANMAC acknowledges that some women may not wish to participate in this immediately after the birth.

ANMAC reminds education providers that the Midwife Accreditation Standards 2014 are approved by NMBA as the standards that all entry to practice midwife programs must meet in order that graduates are eligible to apply for registration as a midwife in Australia.

Any amendments to the standards must be approved by the NMBA.

Date of ANMAC Board determination

22 April 2020

Date for Review

28 February 2021

Responsible Director: Director of Accreditation Services