



POSITION STATEMENT

The Mātanga Tapuhi | Nurse Practitioner role in Aotearoa | New Zealand

The role of the Mātanga Tapuhi | Nurse Practitioner (NP) in Aotearoa was first established in 2001. This advanced highly skilled role provides comprehensive and expert-level healthcare to meet the health needs of health consumers and their whānau, while also reducing health inequities. Increasingly health consumers in Aotearoa are enrolling with an NP as their primary provider of healthcare or have their specialty care managed by an NP.

In Aotearoa, NPs work across all areas and specialties of the healthcare system. They have the legal authority under the Health Practitioners Competence Assurance Act (2003) to work as autonomous health professionals. NPs offer evidence-based healthcare and work in a blended nursing and medical sciences model. They have an advanced level of education and knowledge and as a minimum have gained a Master's Degree level of postgraduate education. NPs utilise expert clinical skills to complete comprehensive clinical assessments and physical examinations. They formulate differential diagnoses, order and interpret a wide range of investigations such as blood tests, X-rays, Ultrasound, MRI and CT scans. NPs make formal medical diagnoses and generate evidence-based treatment plans that include prescribing a wide range of pharmacological and non-pharmacological interventions. NPs provide preventative care, diagnose a wide range of health conditions, develop treatment plans, manage healthcare for health consumers all while being grounded within a holistic paradigm. This includes but is not limited to; managing acute illnesses, formulating complex diagnoses, completing mental health and competence assessments and managing multiple complex long-term conditions across the lifespan.

This means NPs may work independently with the general public as a lead care provider of healthcare. In many settings NPs also work collaboratively in teams and with other members of wider speciality multidisciplinary teams. NPs do not require medical supervision or oversight, as they have the legal authority to practice as autonomous practitioners. The level of care that NPs deliver is similar to that of a medical practitioner, and they provide many of the same services. NPs are accountable for their practice and are registered by the Nursing Council of New Zealand Aotearoa who are responsible for maintaining their competency standards. NPs offer and deliver proactive, responsive, innovative, effective and efficient healthcare that positively influences health outcomes.

In primary healthcare, like general practitioners, NPs are often the lead healthcare provider for health consumers and their whānau/families. In hospitals and specialist services, NPs manage complex specialist health conditions, refer to other specialist services, manage multifaceted health needs and admit and discharge people from hospital. NPs also offer specialist healthcare services in other community healthcare service teams such as community mental health and addictions services and aged care. Many NPs own their own medical centres/ are self-employed and provide NP led services. Other NPs work for the Public health service (Health New Zealand | Te Whatu Ora), non-governmental organisations, private businesses or for Māori



and iwi providers. Within the health system, the NP role is a highly skilled leadership role that actively collaborates with other health professionals and teams to promote health, drive positive health outcomes and prevent disease. They supervise and mentor a range of health professionals and many are involved in education and research.

On average it takes 8 to 9 years to become an NP through a rigorous and highly academic advanced clinical educational pathway. In Aotearoa, this is achieved by first completing a Bachelor of Nursing Degree and gaining registration as a registered nurse. As a registered nurse, the candidate then needs to develop and consolidate their skills, and knowledge, and gain clinical experience. This journey supports the advancement from a novice, to competent, to proficient and then enables an expert level to be reached. This developmental pathway is supported by completing postgraduate education to advance an individual's clinical skills further, develop greater clinical reasoning and critical thinking and build underpinning knowledge. To become an NP candidate, the individual is required to have been working in an expert-level clinical role, such as a nurse specialist or other senior expert clinical nursing role for a minimum of 3 years prior to completing the final NP preparation and registration.

The NP scope of practice is different to that of a specialist or advanced practice registered nursing role. A specialist registered nursing role is a role that provides expert care with advanced nursing knowledge. Specialist nurses complete further education and may have limited prescribing rights. Nurse specialist roles function within the margins of the specialty team and works within the registered nurse scope of practice. It is not an autonomous lead care provider role. Nurse specialists that wish to become NP candidates must complete a Master's of Nursing Degree and have their skills and advanced knowledge further developed and advanced within medical and nursing sciences. NP candidates need to apply for acceptance on the national Nurse Practitioner Training Programme (NPTP) or a tertiary-specific Nurse Practitioner candidacy programme. These are rigorous and advanced clinical education programmes. If the candidate meets the requirements, they must then undergo a challenging registration panel examination process with the Nursing Council of New Zealand Aotearoa. If successful, the NP candidate gains registration as an NP and moves into the new legal scope of practice for NPs. They are then able to practice independently as an autonomous lead provider of healthcare. NPs who have gained their NP qualifications outside of Aotearoa may be required to undertake further study to meet the required education and clinical standards for the NP in Aotearoa. It is mandatory that all overseas NPs complete the same rigorous and demanding registration examination process with the Nursing Council of New Zealand Aotearoa.

Across Aotearoa, NPs are the fastest-growing healthcare professional group and work in a wide variety of healthcare settings, often focusing on areas of the highest need. NPs are improving access to healthcare, providing choice to health consumers and are working towards creating more equitable health outcomes for the whole population.



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