

Scope of practice

Scope of practice is a term that refers to the legal and/or professional limits of duties you are expected to perform in your role. Each professional discipline and role will have a different scope of practice. This is determined by legislation, professional bodies and/or your organisation. Queensland Health provides 'specific mandatory professional stream requirements' for six different roles: medical practitioners, nursing and midwifery, dental, allied health and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health practitioners. Regardless of the organisation you work in, most roles require that you hold certain qualifications that demonstrate your level and type of expertise and the scope of your practice. The [Australian Health Practitioners Regulation Agency](#) (AHPRA) can provide guidance to relevant professional groups.

It is your responsibility to understand and work within your scope of practice. For instance, if you are a nurse, you should be aware of the [Professional Codes and Standards for Nurses and Midwives \(Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia, 2018\)](#). These documents clearly articulate the limits of practice for the different classifications of nurses. For example, within the nursing profession, only [Registered Nurses](#) (as opposed to enrolled nurses) are able to comprehensively assess individuals/groups, interpret assessment data, formulate and document a plan of care, evaluate client responses/information for the purposes of making changes to a care plan, and delegate activities from the care plan [Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia, 2018](#).

Within your work environment you may become exposed to a variety of knowledge and skills. The application of some of these may be outside of your scope of practice. It is imperative that you are able to identify when such knowledge/skills fall outside of your scope of practice and that you only perform duties that are within your area of professional expertise, organisational role, and/or legal limits. Acting outside of your scope of practice will breach your duty of care, professional and organisational requirements, and may place your consumers and colleagues at risk. There are serious repercussions for acting outside of your scope of practice which can include disciplinary measures in your workplace, ineligibility to be registered with your professional body, and/or legal action.

In some cases, the responsibility for assessing and managing consumers who are identified as having a heightened level of risk must be escalated to senior clinicians, or staff with specialised knowledge (e.g. Psychiatrists, Forensic Liaison Officers). It is essential that you familiarise yourself with triggers and pathways for escalation in your work group.

For non clinical staff, a full clinical assessment and management plan is generally outside of the scope of practice. However, non clinical staff such as lived experience workers, peer workers, support workers, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workers, and therapy aides can provide vital information to clinicians on risk, observations that could contribute to assessment, and can support the follow through of management plans.

If you have any doubt about whether a duty you are about to perform is within or outside your scope of practice, you should discuss this with your line manager, supervisor, or professional representative before proceeding.