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| Guide to Endorsed Midwives prescribing arrangements in Victoria |
| A guide document for endorsed midwives and consumers |
| OFFICIAL |

# Background

As of March 2024, there are 197 Midwives in Victoria who have a Scheduled Medicines Endorsement. This cohort of midwives are authorised to prescribe Schedule 2, 3, 4 and 8 medicines.

Whilst the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia (NMBA) initially developed a formulary to guide the scope of practice prescribing in 2010, they ceased publishing in 2019. In the absence of an alternative, Victorian midwives were constrained in the medicines that they could prescribe.

For the purposes of this document, and for consistency with Australian Health Practitioners Regulation Agency (Ahpra) and NMBA documentation, the term endorsed midwife is used.

# What has changed?

Endorsed midwives, in all areas of practice, are now able to prescribe medicines relevant to midwifery practice within the scope of their professional practice, without being constrained by the formulary.

Midwives practice in different settings, including the home, private practice, community, public and private hospitals, birth centres, clinics or health units spread across metropolitan, regional and rural areas.

# What is a midwife’s scope of practice?

Midwives are autonomous health practitioners who work collaboratively with other health professionals in the delivery of accessible, quality maternity care to women and babies under their care.

A midwife’s scope of practice refers to the range of roles, responsibilities, activities and interventions that a midwife is educated, trained and authorised to perform within the context of their profession.

Midwives provide a range of maternity services, including antenatal education and management, management of birth, and post birth care and support. Aside from maternity practice, midwifery activities include women’s health, sexual and reproductive health, and child and family health care. They use their knowledge to provide advice, assessment, health education, diagnostic review, emotional and wellbeing support, and manage referrals to other health professionals as needed.

# What does scheduled medicines endorsement for midwives mean?

Scheduled Medicines Endorsement for midwives under section 94 of the *Health Practitioner Regulation National Law* (the National Law), indicates that the endorsed midwife is qualified to prescribe Schedule 2, 3, 4 and 8 medicines appropriate for midwifery practice across pregnancy, labour, birth and post-natal care. With extended scope into sexual and reproductive health care.

# Are all midwives in Victoria able to prescribe medicines?

No, only midwives whose registration is endorsed under section 94 of the National Law (**endorsed midwives**) are authorised under section 13(1)(bc) of the *Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981* (the Act), to obtain, possess, use, sell, or supply Schedule 2, 3, 4, or 8 medicines in accordance with their practice as midwives. This cohort, called endorsed midwives, are authorised to prescribe.

To be an endorsed midwife, a midwife must currently be able to demonstrate[[1]](#footnote-2) all of the following:

* current general registration as a midwife in Australia, with no conditions or undertakings relating to unsatisfactory professional performance or unprofessional conduct,
* the equivalent of three years’ full-time clinical practice (5,000 hours) in the past six years, post initial midwifery registration,
* evidence of successful completion of an NMBA-approved program of study leading to endorsement for scheduled medicines; or evidence of successful completion of a program that is substantially equivalent to an NMBA-approved program of study leading to endorsement for scheduled medicines as determined by the NMBA.

Find out more about the NMBA requirements and guidelines at: <http://www.nursingmidwiferyboard.gov.au/>.

Clients of endorsed midwives can receive a Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) rebate for eligible medicines prescribed as a part of midwifery practice.

# Is prescribing by endorsed midwives safe?

Yes, prescribing by endorsed midwives is a safe and regulated practice.

## Education and continuing professional development (CPD)

Endorsed midwives completed an NMBA approved program of study that educates and develops knowledge and skills in prescribing medicines for midwifery practice.

Endorsed midwives are also required to undertake 10 additional hours of CPD relevant to context of practice, prescribing and administration of medicines, diagnostic investigations, consultation and referral annually. This is in addition to the annual 20 hours requirement of CPD for registered midwives.

## Consultation and referral

The Australian College of Midwives’ National Midwifery Guidelines for Consultation and Referral, updated regularly, is designed to ensure safe and quality midwifery care. The guidelines include topics on management and clinical decision-making skills, understanding on the timings of commencement and discontinuation of care, and comprehensive and accurate documentation of care.

Endorsed midwives work collaboratively with other health professionals and may refer a consumer after seeking informed consent, should their condition require further assessment and treatment, to the most appropriate health professional.

Under section 129 of the National Law, a registered health professional should have appropriate professional indemnity insurance (PII) arrangements in place in relation to their professional practice. This encompasses all midwives, including self-employed and privately practising.

# How is prescribing by endorsed midwives regulated?

The regulation of prescribing by endorsed midwives is shared between the NMBA, Commonwealth agencies (under Commonwealth legislation), and States and Territories (under Drugs and Poisons Legislations and Regulations).

The NMBA’s national professional practice framework for all midwives includes:

* competency standards for registered midwives
* recency of practice registration standard, professional indemnity insurance, endorsed midwife notation, scheduled medicines endorsement and continuing professional development
* guidance specific to midwifery practice (home births)
* course accreditation standards for midwifery prescribing courses
* accreditation standards for professional practice review programs
* guidelines for scope of practice decisions
* professional boundaries and professional ethics guidance.

Find out more about the [NMBA regulatory framework](https://www.nursingmidwiferyboard.gov.au/Codes-Guidelines-Statements.aspx) <https://www.nursingmidwiferyboard.gov.au/Codes-Guidelines-Statements.aspx>

Commonwealth legislation for the regulation of prescribing by endorsed midwives includes:

* *Health Legislation Amendment (Midwives and Nurse Practitioners) Act 2010* (the Midwives and Nurse Practitioners Act) which provides for new arrangements to enhance and expand the role of midwives, allowing them to take a greater role in providing quality health care.
* *Health Practitioner Regulation National Law (Victoria) Act 2009* regulates various health practitioners in Victoria, including midwives, to ensure the safety and quality of health services across Australia.
* Health Insurance Act 1973 to enable appropriately qualified and experienced midwives to request appropriate diagnostic imaging and pathology services for which Medicare benefits may be paid.
* In Victoria, the *Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Act 1981* (amended by the Drugs, Poisons and Controlled Substances Amendment (Supply by Midwives) Act 2012) gives qualified midwives, having a Schedule Medicines Endorsement qualification, the authority to prescribe Schedule 2, 3, 4 and 8 medicines in accordance with a list of medicines approved by the Minister for Health.

# How can you tell which midwives are authorised to prescribe in Victoria?

Endorsed midwives who are authorised to prescribe have a Scheduled Medicines Endorsement on their registration certificate and against their name on the public register of all midwives maintained by Ahpra. The endorsement identifies that the endorsed midwife qualified to prescribe Scheduled Medicines and to provide associated services required for midwifery practice in accordance with relevant state and territory legislation.

Endorsed midwives with PBS authority will have a PBS prescriber number that is noted on prescriptions and anyone can check the public register to confirm if an individual has Scheduled Medicines Endorsement at: <http://www.ahpra.gov.au/Registration/Registers-of-Practitioners.aspx>

PBS rebates apply only to those medicines that are also on the PBS list approved for endorsed midwives. The PBS list is available at: <http://www.pbs.gov.au/browse/midwife>

# What do these changes mean for people receiving care from endorsed midwives? What are the benefits of prescribing by endorsed midwives for Victoria?

The Victorian Government is committed to consistently enhancing the healthcare system to guarantee that the community receives the highest quality of care, while prioritising their safety and improving their access to healthcare services.

A broader range of midwifery services and models will:

* improve timely access to medication
* increase optimal health outcomes for the mother and baby
* enable greater continuity of care
* improve utilisation of the skilled and knowledgeable midwifery workforce
* attract the midwifery workforce in continuing professional development
* increase midwifery workforce retention.

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1. Nursing and Midwifery Board, Guidelines: For Midwives applying for endorsement for scheduled medicines, [https://www.nursingmidwiferyboard.gov.au/Codes-Guidelines-Statements/Codes-Guidelines/Guidelines-for-Midwives-applying-for-endorsement-for-scheduled-medicines.aspx#](https://www.nursingmidwiferyboard.gov.au/Codes-Guidelines-Statements/Codes-Guidelines/Guidelines-for-Midwives-applying-for-endorsement-for-scheduled-medicines.aspx) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)