

**AUSTRALIAN COMMISSION  
ON SAFETY AND QUALITY IN HEALTH CARE**



# **Exemplar practice**

## **Policy for recognising exemplar practice in health service organisations**

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### Introduction

The Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care (the Commission) released the National Safety and Quality Health Service (NSQHS) Standards (second edition) in November 2017 for implementation by health service organisations from January 2019. To support the implementation of the NSQHS Standards (2nd ed.) Commission reviewed the Australian Health Service Safety and Quality Accreditation (AHSSQA) Scheme in 2018 and agreed on a number of strategies, which are discussed in the document [Review of the Australian Health Service Safety and Quality Accreditation Scheme: Improving the reliability of health service organisation accreditation processes](#).

Following the review, the Commission modified the rating scale for assessment to 'met', 'met with recommendations' and 'not met'. The rating of 'met with merit' was discontinued. However, to facilitate the identification and sharing of information on safe and high-quality practice between organisations managing similar issues, a mechanism has been established for the recognition of exemplar practice.

The purpose of recognition is threefold: acknowledging exemplar practice provides positive feedback to the health service organisation, as well as to the specific department and the staff contributing to that exemplar practice. It also provides motivation for other departments in the same health service organisation to apply similar practices in their area, if relevant, to achieve notable safe and good-quality care. Finally, by identifying and sharing information about exemplar practice, good practice can be spread to other health service organisations. Where health service organisations agree to publish their contact details, organisations looking to implement change can contact and discuss their experiences and obtain guidance for managing similar issues.

The Commission has a fact sheet discussing exemplar practice – [Fact Sheet 5: Recognising exemplar practice in health service organisations](#). This policy document supplements the information in the fact sheet.

### Scope

This policy is to guide accrediting agencies, health service organisations and internal Commission staff regarding the process of recognising exemplar practice in health service organisations following their assessment to the NSQHS Standards (2nd ed.).

### Purpose

To outline the principles and process for recognising exemplar practice in health service organisations that have been assessed to the NSQHS Standards (2nd ed.).

### Date for next review

Three years from the last review.

## Resources

This policy links with:

- [National Safety and Quality Health Service Standards \(second edition\)](#)
- [Review of the Australian Health Service Safety and Quality Accreditation Scheme: Improving the reliability of health service organisation accreditation processes](#)
- [Fact Sheet 5: Recognising exemplar practice in health service organisations](#)
- [NSQHS Standards Exemplar Practice Nomination Form](#) for Accrediting Agencies
- [NSQHS Standards Exemplar Practice Supporting Evidence Form](#) for Health Service Organisations
- NSQHS Standards Accreditation – Application for exemplar practice register (TRIM: D19-9478) – internal use only.

# Principles for recognising exemplar practice

The primary aim of the NSQHS Standards is to protect the public from harm and to improve the quality of health service provision. The NSQHS Standards outline safety and quality outcomes that a health service organisation must achieve, while allowing health service organisations the flexibility to decide how to achieve these outcomes in a way that is appropriate for their context.

All hospitals and day procedure services are required to implement the NSQHS Standards.

The Commission's principles for the recognition of exemplar practice by health service organisations are outlined below.

## Defining exemplar practice

Exemplar practice is practice that is commendable and successfully addresses a safety and quality problem in a way that is unique to the circumstances and the issue. It represents model practices that are best practice or evidence-based, innovative, sustained and measured. It is practice that is substantially higher than the general satisfactory level of achievement for the relevant standard and actions being assessed.

To be determined as an example of exemplar practice, a health service organisation should be able to demonstrate that the initiative under consideration meets the following criteria. The initiative is:

- Designed to address a significant safety and quality issue
- Evidence-based or best practice
- Reflects patient-centred care
- Clearly communicated to all relevant parties
- Built into day-to-day operations
- Routinely measured
- Sustainable
- Being appropriately evaluated
- Improving patient outcomes and/or in the safety and quality of care.

## Independent assessment of exemplar practice

The identification of exemplar practice is initially made by assessors of a health service organisation. This is followed by a nomination by the accrediting agency to the Commission. If the health service organisation wishes the nomination to be pursued, the Commission will assess the nomination and may accept it for recognition. The Commission does not accept nominations directly from health service organisations.

## Eligibility

To be eligible for a nomination for recognition of exemplar practice, health service organisations need to have been assessed to the NSQHS Standards (2nd ed.) and awarded accreditation with all actions rated 'met'.

## Conditions of recognition of exemplar practice

Recognition of exemplar practice will only be valid for the duration of a health service organisation's current accreditation cycle.

If the health service organisation received a subsequent nomination for exemplar practice at the next accreditation cycle, this will be assessed as a new application.

If a health service organisation has had exemplar practice recognised, but then has a high-risk incident or other safety and quality failure occur following accreditation, the Commission reserves the right to withdraw the recognition of exemplar practice.

## Recognition of exemplar practice

The Commission will advise the nominating accrediting agency, the health service organisation and the state or territory regulator of the outcome of the submission in writing. If the health service organisation's submission has been successful, the Commission will provide them with a Certificate of Exemplar Practice. This will constitute part of the Commission's formal recognition of exemplar practice.

The Commission will also publish information about the health service organisation's exemplar activities, with the health service organisation's approval. Information will be published on the [Commission's website](#), and may be presented in other forms of communication such as newsletters, social media channels and training information.

The health service organisation is encouraged to provide a link from its website and/or staff intranet to the Commission's web page on exemplar practice, as a way of indicating to the public and/or its workforce that the Commission has recognised its exemplar practice.

## Timeframe

The Commission will endeavour to assess submissions within 6-8 weeks of receiving supporting evidence from the nominated health service organisation. Where the matter involves highly technical or clinical matters, and expert advice is required in relation to the assessment of the nomination, the timeframe may be extended.

## Costs

Accrediting agencies and health service organisations are not required to pay any fees at any time to nominate exemplar practice or to have the nomination assessed, recognised or published on the Commission's website.

## Privacy and confidentiality

The Commission collects personal information when the information is necessary for, or directly related to, the Commission's functions or activities. All personal information is held and treated in accordance with the Australian Privacy Principles under the Privacy Act 1988 and the [Commission's Privacy Policy](#)

The Commission will retain information relating to a health service organisation's exemplar practice, including information about the contact officer and the details of the nomination. With a health service organisation's permission, the Commission will publish information about the organisation's exemplar practice on its website and in other forms of communication. This can include contact information, which may be a general enquiry email or phone number, at the discretion of the health service organisation, for the express purpose of other health service organisations discussing the exemplar practice directly with the service.

Until an assessment is complete and the health service organisation, the accrediting agency and the regulator have been informed of the outcome, information relating to a health service organisation's nomination for exemplar practice will be confidential.

## Process for recognising exemplar practice

The key steps in the process for recognising exemplar practice are outlined below. These include actions by assessors, accrediting agencies, the Commission, regulators and health service organisations.

### 1. Identification of exemplar practice by an assessor

During an accreditation assessment, assessors have the opportunity to identify exemplar practice in a health service organisation. Health service organisations that believe their activities may qualify for exemplar practice may wish to highlight these activities during the assessment.

Should an assessor identify an initiative at assessment that they consider represents a significantly higher than satisfactory level of achievement for the relevant standard and actions being assessed, they may consider nominating this for exemplar practice. Assessors should consider the definition of exemplar practice provided on page 5 of this policy when making their determination.

Assessors who believe a health service organisation may be eligible to be nominated for exemplar practice should provide a summary of the activities as part of their assessment report to the accrediting agency. This should include:

- A brief description of the exemplar practice (approximately 300 words)
- The service areas where the exemplar practice was identified
- The standard and action numbers that the exemplar practice relates to
- The contact details of the responsible officer for the area where the exemplar practice has been identified.

### 2. Nomination of exemplar practice by an accrediting agency

After an accrediting agency has reviewed a health service organisation's assessment report and awarded accreditation, the accrediting agency or the assessor on behalf of the accrediting agency may choose to submit a nomination for exemplar practice.

Accrediting agencies are required to:

- Notify the health service organisation of the intended submission
- Confirm contact details of the responsible officer for the area of the practice being recognised
- Complete the [Exemplar Practice Nomination form](#) for accrediting agencies on the Commission's website. This form requires the following information:
  - The name of the health service organisation
  - The health service organisation's unique identification number
  - Confirmation that all of the requirements of satisfactory performance are met by the health service organisation
  - A brief description of the exemplar practice (approximately 300 words)
  - The service areas where the exemplar practice was identified
  - The standard and action numbers that the exemplar practice relates to
  - The contact details of the responsible officer for the exemplar practice
  - The contact details for the member of staff at the accrediting agency submitting the nomination.

Information submitted in the form is only accessible by the Commission.

### 3. Provision of further evidence to support the nomination

The Commission will undertake an initial review of a nomination of exemplar practice to determine if it has merit, and then contact the relevant state or territory regulator to seek support for the nomination.

Where the nomination is supported by the regulator or the regulator does not have a position on the nomination, the Commission will contact the health service organisation for further information. Should the regulator not support the nomination the Commission will notify the nominating accrediting agency.

The health service organisation will then be invited to provide further information to support the nomination to the Commission. The health service organisation may decline to proceed with the nomination, in which case no further action will be taken.

If the health service organisation agrees to provide additional information, it should complete the [Exemplar Practice Supporting Evidence form](#) for health service organisations, found on the Commission's website.

The additional information collected will be used by the Commission to assess the nomination.

Health service organisations need to provide the following information:

- Background information about the exemplar practice:
  - The issues that provided a catalyst for change
  - The resulting changes in practice that addressed the identified problem
  - The improvements achieved in the safety and/or quality of care; and/or in patient outcomes
  - How the initiative is patient-centred
- Details on implementation:
  - How the improvement has been implemented in all relevant areas of the organisation
  - How the practices have been communicated to all relevant parties e.g. the workforce and where relevant, the community
  - How the improvement is built into day-to-day operations; and how the improvement is or can be sustained
- Details on evaluation:
  - The measures used to evaluate the improvement
  - Evaluation data that shows the positive change in safe and quality care, and/or in patient outcomes
- Additional relevant material may be submitted to support the nomination such as policy documents; education resources; audits of compliance; or communication material developed for the workforce, patients and carers. However, it is not a requirement of the application process to submit supporting material to substantiate all claims.
- Confirm contact details of the responsible officer for the area of the practice being recognised.

The health service organisation will be asked if it agrees to information about the exemplar practice, if recognised, being published on the Commission's website, in other Commission publications or social media channels.

Information submitted by the health service organisation will only be accessed by nominated Commission representatives and technical experts who may be invited by the Commission to assess the nomination. All technical experts will be required to sign confidentiality agreements.

## 4. Assessment of the nomination

On receipt of the additional information from the health service organisation, the Commission will assess the submission against the criteria for exemplar practice. Assessment will not involve site visits by the Commission. However, the Commission may seek additional input from the health service organisation or technical experts.

The Commission will assess the nomination of exemplar practice against the following criteria:

- The initiative is designed to address a significant safety and quality issue
- The initiative is evidence-based or best-practice.
- The initiative reflects patient-centred care
- There has been clear communication about the initiative to all relevant parties
- The initiative is built into day-to-day operations, if relevant
- The initiative is routinely measured
- The initiative is sustainable
- The initiative is being and will continue to be appropriately evaluated
- There has been demonstrated improvement in patient outcomes and/or in the safety and quality of care that can be attributed to the initiative.

The submission, supporting evidence or supplementary information provided must demonstrate that each of the above criteria are met in order to be accepted as an example of exemplar practice.

## 5. Notification of assessment outcome

Following the assessment, the Commission will inform the health service organisation, the regulator and the nominating accrediting agency of the outcome, in writing.

If the organisation is unsuccessful, the Commission will notify the health service organisation and provide reasons for the decision. It will also notify the accrediting agency of the outcome of the nomination.

The Commission's decision is final. There is no appeal process for recognition of exemplar practice.

## 6. Publication of information on exemplar practice

Once assessed and recognised as exemplar practice, and with the health service organisation's permission, the Commission will publish information on its website.

The Commission will prepare a summary of the initiative based on information in the submission and may invite the health service organisation to provide images that support the text, for example, photographs, a figure or table or an illustration of the improvement. Images need to be original with the intellectual property (IP) held by the health service organisation. Where the IP is not held by the health service organisation, it will be the health service organisation's responsibility to obtain permission for the use of the images.

If the health service organisation agrees to being contacted by other organisations about the exemplar practice, the summary can include contact details. Ideally this would include a generic email address to avoid the issue of staff changeover, but could also include the name and phone number of the relevant officer.

The information about the exemplar practice will remain on the website for the duration of the health service organisation's accreditation cycle, unless the health service organisation or the regulator requests its removal prior to this, or if there is another reason for its early removal. Removal of information is at the discretion of the Commission.