

# Clinical Care Standards

## Frequently asked questions for clinicians

Clinical care standards play an important role in delivering appropriate care and reducing unwarranted variation. They identify and define the care patients should be offered for a specific clinical condition in line with current best evidence.

### What is a clinical care standard?

A clinical care standard is a nationally agreed statement on the care patients should be offered by health professionals and health services for a specific clinical condition in line with current best evidence. Each clinical care standard contains a set of up to ten quality statements that describe succinctly the key aspects of care that a patient should be offered for a specific clinical condition or defined part of a clinical pathway

### Why are clinical care standards needed?

We know that appropriate variations in care occur due to a person's particular illness or choices, but unwarranted variation in care can occur when there is:

- underuse of care (where the benefits of a treatment or procedure clearly outweigh any potential harm from its use, but it is not used)
- overuse of care (when a treatment or procedure is widely used, but the evidence of its benefits are limited or missing)
- misuse of care (when the care provided to a person is not based on their values and preferences, and the risks and benefits of alternative treatments have not been fully explained to them).

Clinical care standards play an important role in guiding the delivery of appropriate care and reducing unwarranted variation, as they identify and define the care people can expect to be offered or receive, regardless of where they are treated in Australia.

Each clinical care standard, in conjunction with clinical guidelines on which it is based, should contribute to improvements in care outlined in the National Safety and Quality Health Service (NSQHS) Standards.

**Quality statements** describe high priority areas for quality improvement. They are identified based on areas of current variation, information about what we know works in terms of treatments, procedures and processes, and what care should be offered to a patient.

**Indicators** accompany the quality statements to assist local health services to monitor how well they implement the care described in the clinical care standard. They are NOT a set of targets or mandatory indicators for performance management.

## **Are clinical care standards the same as clinical guidelines?**

No, they are not. The clinical care standards are succinct statements on key areas of clinical practice for a specific condition where there is evidence of variation from best practice. They are based on evidence contained in clinical guidelines. Clinical guidelines detail all aspects of treatment and care for a specific condition. They are broader and extensive.

## **How are clinical care standards developed?**

In developing the clinical care standards, the Commission uses the most up-to-date clinical guidelines and standards, information about gaps between evidence and practice, the professional expertise of clinicians and researchers, and consideration of issues important to consumers.

Each clinical care standard is developed by a topic working group who consider processes and the most current evidence, have expertise and knowledge of the issues affecting the appropriate delivery of care, and consider issues that are important to consumers.

A public consultation process is also conducted on the draft Clinical Care Standards and associated documents before finalisation.

Further information on the membership for each topic working group can be found on the Commission's website.

## **How are topics selected to become a clinical care standard?**

When selecting topics for clinical care standard development, the Commission is guided by national data on current clinical practice and areas of unwarranted variation, advice from its advisory committees, and consideration of:

- The potential to reduce unwarranted variation in care (whether it is overuse, misuse or underuse)
- The availability of high quality, current clinical practice guidelines, standards or evidence available for a clinical practice area
- Opportunities to take action to reduce the risk of harm and improve clinical outcomes and experiences for consumers
- The potential to measure improvements in clinical outcomes
- Priorities for the commission and its key stakeholders.

## **How does the Commission manage conflict of interests?**

All topic working group members are required to disclose financial, personal and professional interests that could, or could be perceived to influence a decision made, or advice given to the Commission. Disclosures are required every time the topic working group members meet and the information is managed in line with the Commission's Policy on Disclosure of Interests.

## **Who are the clinical care standards for?**

Everyone:

- Patients, their families, carers and consumers
- Health care professionals
- Health service managers
- Health care planners.

## **What does a clinical care standard mean for a consumer?**

The clinical care standards help people to know what care to expect for a particular clinical condition and to help them to make informed decisions about treatment in collaboration with their health professional.

## **What does a clinical care standard mean for a healthcare professional?**

The clinical care standards provide guidance to health professionals so they can deliver and have informed discussions about treatment options with their patients.

## **What do clinical care standards mean for health services?**

The clinical care standards set out the components of care that health services can use to support and monitor improvement in their hospitals and other services where the clinical care standard is applicable.

## **What is the difference between clinical care standards and National Safety and Quality Health Service (NSQHS) Standards?**

The clinical care standards provide guidance on appropriate care (e.g. a treatment, process or procedure) that a patient should receive for a specific clinical condition.

The NSQHS Standards set out the minimum performance expectations, processes and structures that should be in place for a health service (e.g. hospital, aged-care service, day surgeries, etc.) to provide safe and high quality care.

Relevant NSQHS Standards that relate to the clinical care standard include the:

- Governance for Safety and Quality Standard– in particular Action 1.27 and 1.28
- Partnering with Consumers Standard.

Used together, the clinical care standards and the NSQHS Standards aim to ensure people will receive safe, high quality appropriate care.

## **Is the use of the indicators compulsory?**

Monitoring quality of care is an effective way of identifying areas that require improvement. Organisations are likely to have mechanisms in place that monitor the care provided. The suggested indicators are not compulsory. However, if additional measures are needed then the suggested indicators can be used.

## **How to get involved?**

Each draft clinical care standard goes through a public consultation process and the feedback from this process is used to further improve each clinical care standard.

To hear more about the clinical care standards, you can sign up to the Commission Twitter account @ACSQHC or to the Commission's newsletters. You can also contact the clinical care standards team at [ccs@safetyandquality.gov.au](mailto:ccs@safetyandquality.gov.au).

More information is available at [www.safetyandquality.gov.au/ccs](http://www.safetyandquality.gov.au/ccs)