

## KEY ACTIONS

for health service organisations  
and accrediting agencies

### Fact sheet 11:

# Applicability of Clinical Care Standards

This fact sheet explains the relationship between the [National Safety and Quality Health Service \(NSQHS\) Standards](#) and the [Clinical Care Standards](#) developed by the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care (the Commission). It provides guidance for health service organisations, clinicians and assessors.

## Clinical Care Standards

A clinical care standard contains a small number of quality statements that describe the care patients should be offered by health professionals and health services for a specific clinical condition, or defined clinical pathway, in line with current best evidence.

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

Clinical care standards focus on key areas for quality improvement and aim to improve healthcare outcomes by ensuring that:

- Patients and the community understand the care that is recommended and their healthcare choices
- Clinicians know best practice care and the actions required to achieve this
- Health service organisations monitor performance and, with clinicians, take action to improve care.

## Requirements of the NSQHS Standards

Implementing clinical care standards can help organisations meet actions in the [NSQHS Standards](#) including:

- **Action 1.01c** – setting priorities and strategic directions for safe and high-quality clinical care and communicating them to the workforce and the community and monitoring organisational safety and quality performance

- **Action 1.27b** – implementing processes that support clinicians' use of the best available evidence, including relevant clinical care standards developed by the Commission
- **Action 1.28** – monitoring variation in practice and health outcomes compared with similar health service organisations or with best practice.

## Mandated clinical care standards

- All health service organisations that prescribe, dispense or administer antimicrobials are required to implement the [Antimicrobial Stewardship Clinical Care Standard \(Action 3.18d\)](#).
- All health service organisations that provide services to patients who have cognitive impairment or are at risk of developing delirium are required to implement the [Delirium Clinical Care Standard \(Action 5.29a\)](#).
- All health service organisations that provide colonoscopy services are required to implement the [Colonoscopy Clinical Care Standard](#) (as detailed in [Advisory AS18/12](#)).

**Advisories** available on the Commission's website outline specific requirements for organisations and accrediting agencies in relation to clinical care standards and the NSQHS Standards.

## Other relevant clinical care standards

To comply with [Action 1.27b](#), health service organisations are expected to identify relevant clinical care standards and implement those that will reduce risk to patients, improve quality, and address areas of unwarranted variation from best practice, according to their local quality improvement priorities.



Clinical care standards can also be used as part of a health service organisation's approach to improving the appropriateness of clinical care when responding to variation ([Action 1.28](#)).

Specific consideration should include areas of care with:

- High risk to patients
- High morbidity, mortality or patient dissatisfaction
- Clinical risks identified in the service's risk register
- Evidence that overuse or underuse of an intervention is increasing risk to patients
- Unwarranted variation in processes or outcomes (see [Australian Atlas of Healthcare Variation](#) and [User Guide for Reviewing Clinical Variation](#)).

Health service organisations should apply a risk management approach when reviewing clinical care standards and determining priorities and implementation strategies for their service ([Action 1.10](#)).

## Implementing clinical care standards

When implementing a clinical care standard, health service organisations, together with clinicians, should:

- Identify elements of the clinical care standard where improvement and measurement may be required
- Identify which clinical care standard indicators and/or local indicators will most effectively measure and monitor relevant processes, outcomes and planned improvements
- Develop, document and implement processes and protocols to guide clinical practice as described in the clinical care standard
- Provide easy access to the clinical care standard, relevant data, and guidance to support implementation
- Monitor progress of clinical care standard implementation in relevant clinical and quality meetings and take action in response to identified issues.

## Indicators

Clinical care standards include indicators to support local implementation and quality improvement. The indicators are intended to measure the care described in the quality statements to provide services with a tool to monitor variation, clinical risk, and to prioritise quality improvement activity.

Use of the clinical care standard indicators is recommended and can be used to demonstrate compliance with the NSQHS standards. The indicator data should be fed back to relevant clinicians and management and where suitable to consumers to drive quality improvement.

Services are not required to use all the clinical care standard indicators. Services should prioritise their resources to focus on measurement that is expected to be most beneficial to local quality improvement. Data collection may be ongoing or through periodic audits. Services may also use other indicators to monitor implementation of the clinical care standards.

## Assessing compliance

Assessors should confirm that organisations have:

- Implemented the applicable mandatory clinical care standards (Antimicrobial Stewardship, Delirium and Colonoscopy) in line with the relevant advisories
- Identified relevant clinical care standards for implementation based on the scope of clinical services, potential to reduce risk and need to address unwarranted variation, and quality improvement priorities of their service.

Where health service organisations are implementing a clinical care standard, there should be evidence that the health service organisation has:

- Identified the elements of the clinical care standard for monitoring and improvement based on their circumstances
- Developed processes and protocols in line with the care described in the relevant quality statements
- Provided clinicians with access to relevant clinical care standards, policies or procedures, and supporting tools for implementation
- Implemented the care set out in the relevant quality statements and supporting information (as detailed in the 'what this means' section)
- Identified appropriate indicators to monitor implementation of the relevant quality statements.

## Questions?

For more information, please visit: [safetyandquality.gov.au/standards/nsqhsstandards](https://safetyandquality.gov.au/standards/nsqhsstandards).

You can also email the Safety and Quality Advice Centre at: [AdviceCentre@safetyandquality.gov.au](mailto:AdviceCentre@safetyandquality.gov.au) or call 1800 304 056.