



ANZSOM
The Australian and New Zealand
Society of Occupational Medicine Inc

Competency Standards for Occupational Health Nurses

FEBRUARY 2023

GOOD WORK — SAFE WORKPLACES — HEALTHY WORKERS

Published by the Australian and New Zealand Society of Occupational Medicine (ANZSOM) Inc February 2023

For review by February 2025

Referencing citation:

Australian and New Zealand Society of Occupational Medicine (2023). Competency Standards for Occupational Health Nurses.

Correspondence:

Correspondence concerning this document should be addressed to

Secretariat, ANZSOM

Suite 8, 150 Chestnut Street, Cremorne 3121 Victoria, Australia

secretariat@anzsom.org.au



Contents

Contents	3
Foreword	4
Introduction	5
Competency standards for occupational health nurses.....	10
Domain 1: Legislation, standards, codes of practice and guidelines.....	11
Domain 2: Principles of occupational health nursing.....	12
Domain 3: Collaboration and communication	13
Domain 4: Prevention of work-related illness and injury.....	14
Domain 5: Managing injury and illness and return to work.....	15
Domain 6: Promoting worker health and wellbeing	16
Domain 7: Quality and continuous improvement.....	17
References.....	18

Foreword

Occupational Health Nurse Competency Standards were first developed for the Australian context in 1991 by the Australian College of Occupational Health Nurses (ACOHN). ACOHN merged with the Australian and New Zealand Society of Occupational Medicine (ANZSOM) in 2008, and while the structures and processes for implementing the competency standards were unable to be sustained, the commitment to competency standards as a basis for good practice has remained strong among the nursing membership.

The current project to review and re-establish the standards reflects this commitment and the continuing value of occupational health nursing in supporting ANZSOM's vision for Good Work - Safe Workplaces - Healthy Workers.

The review began with a workshop at the 2018 ANZSOM Annual Scientific Meeting, with delegates endeavouring to understand the status of occupational health nursing and how competency standards or practice standards could help support those in practice and support the sustainability of the profession.

Ongoing work undertaken by the ANZSOM Nurse Strategy Group has drawn on partnerships with the Australian Institute of Health and Safety, including the Body of Knowledge. The work has also been informed by consultation with tertiary education providers, other professional societies and similar initiatives being undertaken overseas, such as in New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States. ANZSOM wishes to acknowledge all these contributions and looks forward to working with stakeholders to sustain a vibrant occupational health nurse profession into the future.



Sally Kane

ANZSOM Nurse Liaison Officer

In the spirit of reconciliation, ANZSOM acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea and community. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging, and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Introduction

Occupational health nurses (OHNs) specialise in caring for the health and wellbeing of people at work. In this role, they also work with employers to ensure work practices and the work environment are protective of workers' health.

Occupational health nurses often work as part of a multidisciplinary team including generalist OHS practitioners, medical practitioners, allied health professionals, return to work coordinators and human resources advisors/managers. The combination of nursing and occupational health expertise means that OHNs bring a valuable set of skills to workplaces including clinical skills, highly developed communication and problem-solving skills and the ability to work effectively in a team to optimise outcomes for workers and employers.

Occupational and environmental health nursing practice is dynamic and recognizes socio-cultural, community, economic, political, technological, and ecological influences and the impact of policy issues.

Scope of the OHN role

Many OHN roles fall within the category of clinical and occupational health professional practice, characterised by delivering direct care to employed individuals and providing occupational health interventions and advice in a wide variety of workplace/industry settings including construction, retail, oil and gas, the emergency services, health services, the armed forces, and a range of corporate environments.

OHN careers may evolve into management and leadership positions in occupational health, drawing on clinical and occupational health experience and the coordination of the multidisciplinary team. They can also play an important role in providing others with learning and development opportunities. In senior leadership roles, OHN leaders may be involved in managing services or operations (Figure 1).

The specific skills and experience developed aligns with the requirements of the work environments so that clinical care and professional occupational health service and advice is adapted to meet the workers' and employer's needs.

Figure 1. Scope of Occupational Health Nurse practice

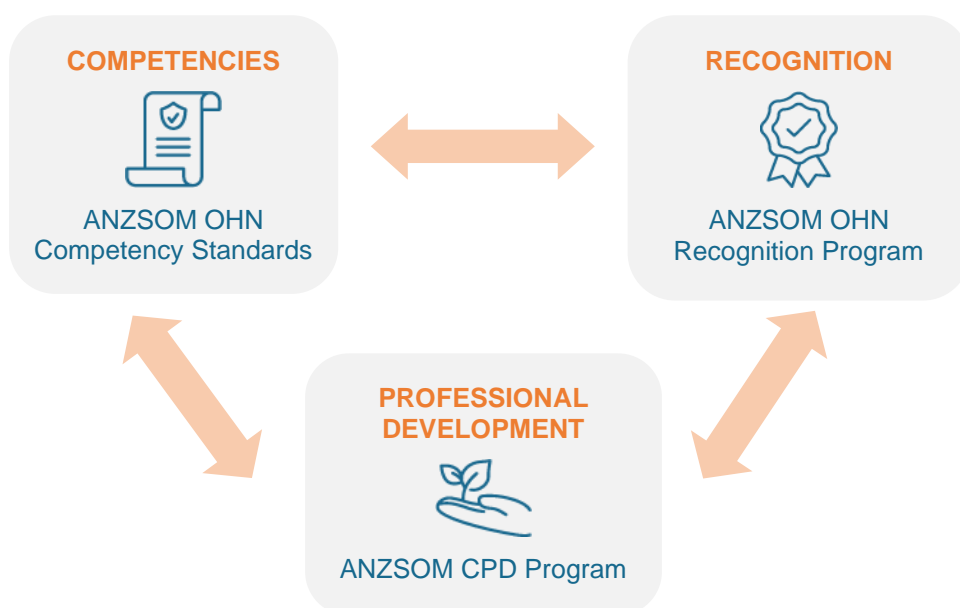


A framework for OHN career development

The Australian New Zealand Society of Occupational Medicine (ANZSOM) is committed to supporting OHNs in their chosen career path and to maintaining the practice, knowledge, and competence of occupational health nurses.

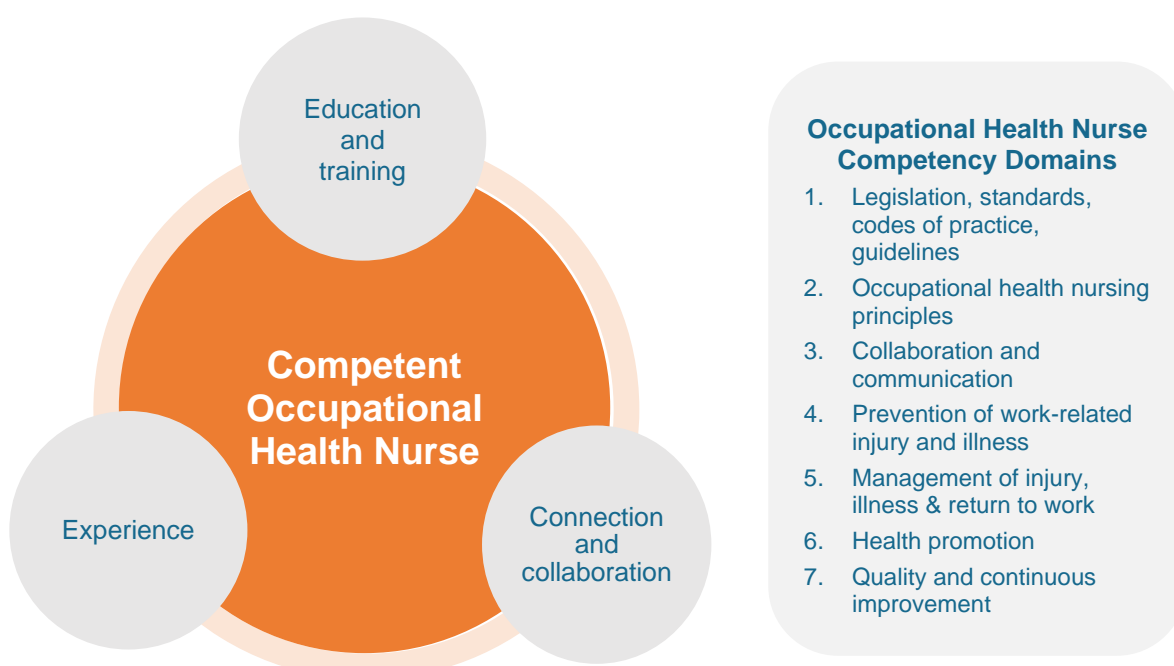
ANZSOM has therefore established a framework in which competency, recognition and continuing education are combined to help build a vibrant profession that contributes to our Vision for a society where the highest value is placed on good work, safe workplaces, and healthy workers (Figure 2).

Figure 2. ANZSOM Professional Framework for Occupational Health Nurses



ANZSOM recognises that the competency of an occupational health nurse is built through their education and training, as well as through their work experience and their collaboration and connections, such as made through their memberships to professional societies such as ANZOM (Figure 3).

Figure 3. Development of a competent occupational health nurse



The ANZSOM Occupational Health Nurse Competency Standards have been established to:

- Contribute to the maintenance of professional standards and promote safe occupational health nursing practice
- Form the basis for recognition of OHN under the ANZSOM OHN Recognition Program
- Inform curriculum requirements for training courses relevant to occupational health nursing
- Inform the development of continuing education activities for occupational health nurses by ANZSOM and other organisations
- Inform development of position descriptions for employment purposes

This document outlines the broad areas of competency that might be expected for an individual to fulfill an occupational health nurse role, while acknowledging that the competencies which occupational health nurses are able to demonstrate at any particular time will depend on their current job functions. This reflects the diversity of settings and the variety of factors which influence the practice of occupational health nursing.

In addition to the broad competencies defined in the standards, occupational health nurses may be required to attain knowledge and skills in specific areas of clinical practice such as spirometry, audiometry, vaccination etc. These additional skills maybe required for individual workplaces or settings and will be informed by the requirements of the job description of the OHN. These skills will still fit within the broad framework of the Competency standards.

The standards are presented in seven domains based on the following structure:

Domain Title: The domain title is a short statement of the competency category.

Competencies: These describe the specific competencies in terms of the knowledge, understanding and application of the competency domain as it relates to the OHN practice setting.

Description: The description expands on the title and states the broad application of knowledge and skills in the workplace. It may also note relationships with other domains.

Context of these standards

These standards apply within the context of the general standards and codes as defined by the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Board. These include:

- Registered Nurse Standards of Practice General Standards for Practice
<https://www.nursingmidwiferyboard.gov.au/documents/default.aspx?record=WD16%2f19524&dbid=AP&chksum=R5Pkrn8yVpb9bJvtpTRe8w%3d%3d>
- Code of Professional Conduct for Nurses in Australia
<https://www.nursingmidwiferyboard.gov.au/documents/default.aspx?record=WD17%2f23849&dbid=AP&chksum=ki92NMPa9thp9f9ZhTQNJg%3d%3d>
- International Code of Ethics for Nurses

The ANZSOM OHN standards are in addition to and do not override a nurse's obligation to comply with the general standards and codes. Refer Figure 4.

Figure 4. Standards and codes relevant to registered nurses in Australia

Code of Professional Ethics for Nurses	
1.	Nurses practise in a safe and competent manner
2.	Nurses practise in accordance with the standards of the profession and broader health system
3.	Nurses practise and conduct themselves in accordance with laws relevant to the profession and practice of nursing
4.	Nurses respect the dignity, culture, ethnicity, values, and beliefs of people receiving care and treatment, and of their colleagues
5.	Nurses treat personal information obtained in a professional capacity as private and confidential
6.	Nurses provide impartial, honest, and accurate information in relation to nursing care and health care products
7.	Nurses support the health, wellbeing and informed decision-making of people requiring or receiving care
8.	Nurses promote and preserve the trust and privilege inherent in the relationship between nurses and people receiving care
9.	Nurses maintain and build on the community's trust and confidence in the nursing profession
10.	Nurses practise nursing reflectively and ethically
Registered nurse standards for practice consist of the following seven standards	
1.	Thinks critically and analyses nursing practice
2.	Engages in therapeutic and professional relationships
3.	Maintains the capability for practice
4.	Comprehensively conducts assessments
5.	Develops a plan for nursing practice
6.	Provides safe, appropriate, and responsive quality nursing practice
7.	Evaluates outcomes to inform nursing practice
Code of Conduct for Nurses	
1.	Legal compliance Nurses respect and adhere to their professional obligations under the National Law and abide by relevant laws.
2.	Practise safely, effectively, and collaboratively Nurses provide safe, person-centred, and evidence-based practice for the health and wellbeing of people and, in partnership with the person, promote shared decision-making and care delivery between the person, nominated partners, family, friends and health professionals.
3.	Cultural practice and respectful relationships Nurses engage with people as individuals in a culturally safe and respectful way, foster open and honest professional relationships, and adhere to their obligations about privacy and confidentiality.

4. Professional behaviour

Nurses embody integrity, honesty, respect, and compassion.

5. Research in health

Nurses recognise the vital role of research to inform quality healthcare and policy development, conduct research ethically and support the decision-making of people who participate in research.

6. Health and wellbeing

Nurses promote health and wellbeing for people and their families, colleagues, the broader community, and themselves and in a way that addresses health inequality.

7. Teaching, supervising, and assessing

Nurses commit to teaching, supervising, and assessing students and other nurses, to develop the nursing workforce across all contexts of practice.

Competency standards for occupational health nurses

Domain 1: Legislation, standards, codes of practice and guidelines

- 1.1 The OHN demonstrates a broad and current knowledge of the Acts, regulations, standards, codes of practice, and guidelines relevant to their practice and practice setting.
- 1.2 The OHN demonstrates application of relevant Acts, regulations, standards codes of practice, and guidelines to their practice and practice setting.

Domain 2: Principles of occupational health nursing

- 2.1 The OHN demonstrates an understanding of the concept of whole person health and how their role as an OHN contributes to the achievement of this within their practice setting.
- 2.2 The OHN demonstrates an understanding of the principles of occupational health nurse practice and the application within their work setting.

Domain 3: Collaboration and communication

- 3.1 The OHN demonstrates an understanding of the internal and external collaborative partnerships that contribute to optimal outcomes for worker health and safety in their practice setting.
- 3.2 The OHN demonstrates the application of the collaborative process within their practice setting.

Domain 4: Prevention of work-related illness and injury

- 4.1 The OHN demonstrates understanding of a risk management approach to workplace injury and illness prevention.
- 4.2 The OHN demonstrates an understanding and application of the hierarchy of controls to the management of workplace hazards as relevant to their practice setting.
- 4.3 The OHN demonstrates understanding of the systems that support hazard identification and management in their practice setting.

Domain 5: Managing injury and illness and return to work

- 5.1 The OHN demonstrates understanding of the principles and practice of injury management and return to work, including the concept of early intervention.
- 5.2 The OHN demonstrates application of these principles as relevant to their practice setting.

Domain 6: Promoting worker health and wellbeing

- 6.1 The OHN demonstrates understanding of the principles of workplace health promotion.
- 6.2 The OHN demonstrates application of these principles through the planning, implementation and evaluation of health promotion programs or activities in their practice setting.

Domain 7: Quality and continuous improvement

- 7.1 The OHN demonstrates an understanding of the quality and continuous improvement principles and processes.
- 7.2 The OHN demonstrates application of these principles and processes throughout the scope of their practice.

Domain 1: Legislation, standards, codes of practice and guidelines

- | | |
|-----|--|
| 1.1 | The OHN demonstrates a broad and current knowledge of the Acts, regulations, standards, codes of practice, and guidelines relevant to their practice and practice setting. |
| 1.2 | The OHN demonstrates application of relevant Acts, regulations, standards, codes of practice, and guidelines to their practice and practice setting. |

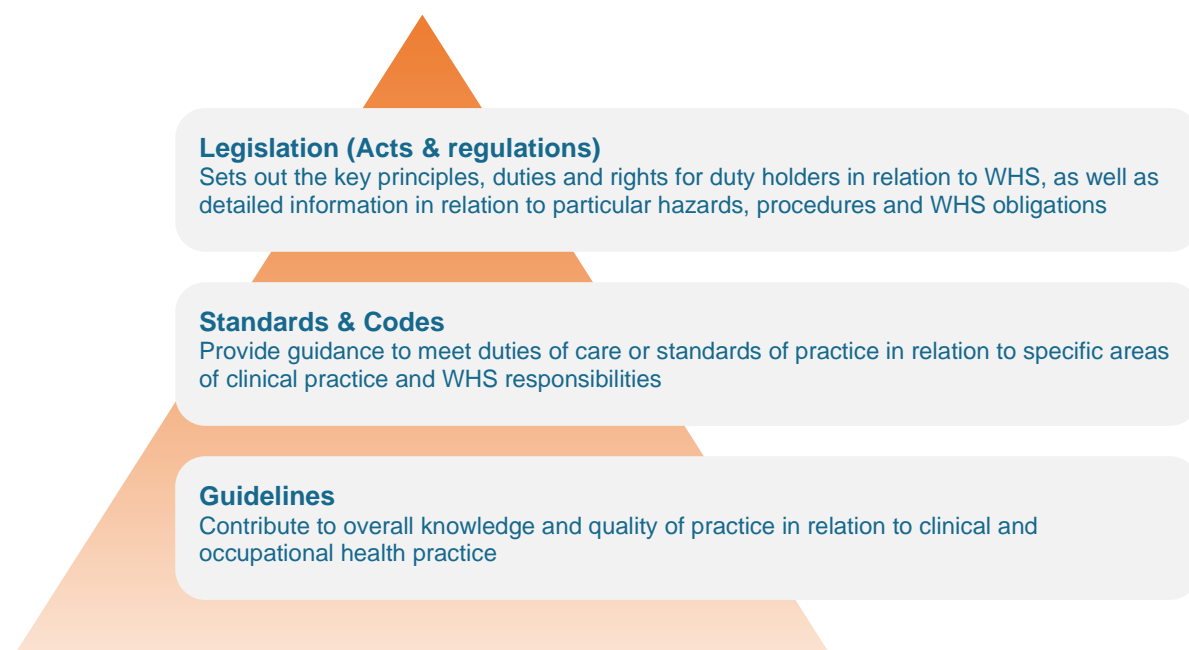
The overarching requirement for an OHN is to practice within the framework of the law and according to relevant standards, professional codes of practice and guidelines.

In addition to the requirements of the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia (NMBA), the OHN must have a broad knowledge and understanding of the laws that apply in the delivery of occupational health related programs and services for their practice setting. This includes the overarching WHS legislation as well as Commonwealth, State and Territory-specific Acts and regulations.

Specific standards, codes of practice and guidelines may also be applicable depending on the practice setting. These may include, for example, requirements in relation to drugs and alcohol monitoring, hazardous chemicals or noise exposure and hearing protection.

The legislation, standards, codes of practice and guidelines will inform many of the subsequent domains contained in the OHN Competency Standards.

Figure 5. A hierarchy of legislative and professional compliance relevant to the practice of occupational health nursing

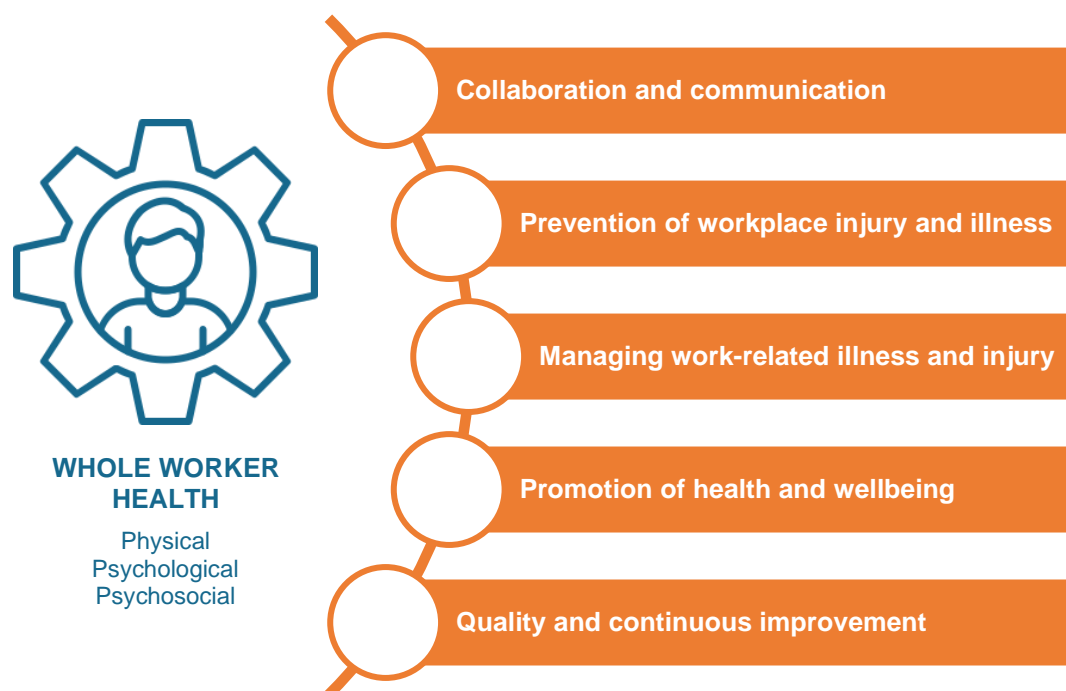


Domain 2: Principles of occupational health nursing

- 2.1 The OHN demonstrates an understanding of the concept of whole worker health and how their role as an OHN contributes to the achievement of this within their practice setting.
- 2.2 The OHN demonstrates an understanding of the principles of occupational health nurse practice and the application within their work setting.

OHN practice is defined by a number of key principles, which reflect the determinants of health in the workplace and more generally. These principles are underpinned by the concept of **whole worker health** in which consideration is given to the physical, psychological and psychosocial aspects, and addresses the impact of work on health and the impact of health on work. The practical application of these principles will be determined by the work setting and the nature of work, as well as the health status of the individual worker.

Figure 6. The principles of occupational health nursing practice



Domain 3: Collaboration and communication

- 3.1 The OHN demonstrates an understanding of the internal and external collaborative partnerships that contribute to optimal outcomes for worker health and safety in their practice setting.
- 3.2 The OHN demonstrates the application of the collaborative process within their practice setting.

Collaboration and teamwork are at the heart of OHN practice and quality of care. Collaborative practice is based on a foundation of worker-centred care, open and effective communication, mutual trust, shared decision making and accountability, with all parties respecting and valuing the knowledge that each brings to achieve a successful outcome for the worker and the workplace.

The OHN plays a key role in coordinating a holistic, multidisciplinary approach to delivery of safe, quality, and comprehensive occupational and environmental health programs and services.

Figure 7. Collaboration in occupational health nursing practice



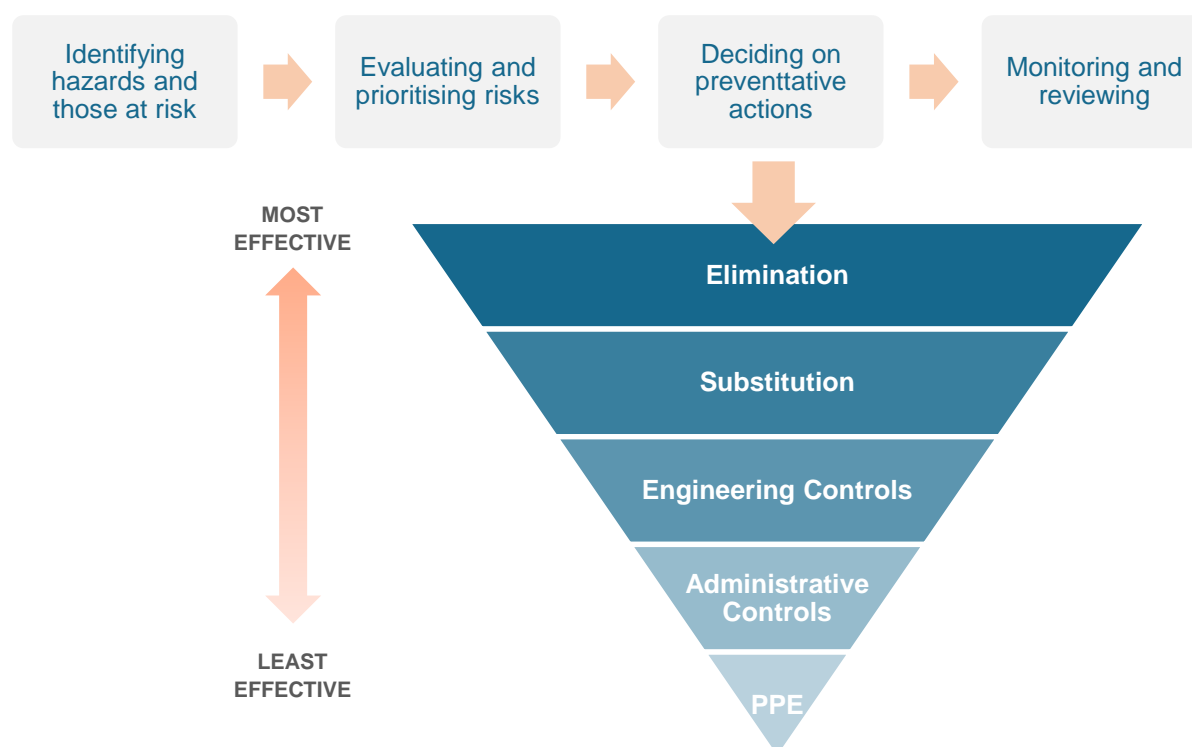
Domain 4: Prevention of work-related illness and injury

4.1	The OHN demonstrates understanding of a risk management approach to workplace injury and illness prevention.
4.2	The OHN demonstrates understanding and application of the hierarchy of controls to the management of workplace hazards as relevant to their practice setting.
4.3	The OHN demonstrates understanding of the systems that support hazard identification and management in their practice setting.

OHNs play a key role in the prevention of injury and illness in the workplace, working with the broader occupational health and safety team and other stakeholders to identify and manage workplace hazards through a risk management approach.

OHNs are involved in both the identification and management of workplace hazards according to the hierarchy of controls. Specific activities may include fitness for duty assessments, health surveillance, vaccination programs, manager and worker education (e.g., regarding hazard impacts on health, use of PPE), procedure development, ergonomic assessments, job task analysis, and implementation/management/coordination of programs such as environmental monitoring, physical conditioning and EAP programs. OHNs may also be involved in the management of systems to prevent workplace injury and illness including risk registers and health monitoring systems. In all these roles, the OHN draws on their clinical knowledge and understanding of the impacts of work on health and health on work, as well as the legislative obligations for work health and safety.

Figure 8. The role of the occupational health nurse may encompass all aspects of workplace injury and illness prevention¹



¹ The hierarchy of controls is applicable to both physical and psychological hazards. Refer [Safe Work Australia National guidance material 2019. Work-related psychological health and safety – A systematic approach to meeting your duties.](#)

Domain 5: Managing injury and illness and return to work

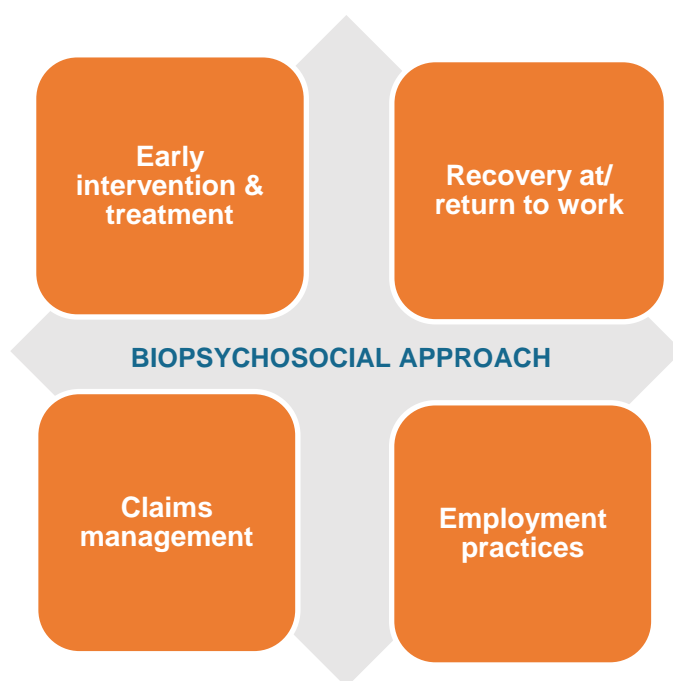
5.1	The OHN demonstrates understanding of the principles and practice of injury management and return to work, including the concept of early intervention.
5.2	The OHN demonstrates application of these principles and processes as relevant to their practice setting.

OHNs play a role in various aspects of injury management and return to work for both work and non-work-related illness and injury. This role interfaces closely with injury prevention (Domain 4) through the identification and management of hazards linked to injuries and near misses, and through the process of early intervention.

Drawing on their clinical knowledge and informed by a psychosocial approach, the OHN works with other members of the health and safety team in the initial management of workplace illness/injury, as well as ongoing management of the worker's return to the workplace. They may also be involved in claims management. Referral and coordination with outside agencies and providers, including medical and rehabilitation specialists and allied health professionals, is part of the management process.

OHNs may be involved in the review of the job design/duties and physical environment to support the worker's return to work and manage risk. They may also manage the ongoing rehabilitation process. They will likely have an ongoing role in advising about employment management practices to prevent and manage workplace injuries.

Figure 9. Occupational health nurses may be involved various aspects of injury management



Domain 6: Promoting worker health and wellbeing

6.1	The OHN demonstrates understanding of the principles of workplace health promotion.
6.2	The OHN demonstrates application of these principles through the planning, implementation and evaluation of health promotion programs or activities in their practice setting.

The OHN contributes to the planning and implementation of health and wellbeing policies and programs within the workplace aimed at improving the general health and wellbeing of workers, addressing chronic disease risks and improving workplace culture.

Their role may include engaging with management to gain support for workplace health promotion, establishing the health promotion needs within the workplace, advising regarding health promotion priorities, designing and delivering appropriate activities, integrating with other relevant programs including work health and safety, and evaluating impacts and outcomes.

OHNs may also engage individually with workers. Successful conduct of this role will require knowledge and application of workplace health promotion principles and evidence.

Figure 10. Principles of workplace health promotion



Domain 7: Quality and continuous improvement

- 7.1 The OHN demonstrates an understanding of the quality and continuous improvement principles and processes.
- 7.2 The OHN demonstrates application of these principles and processes throughout the scope of their practice.

Quality and continuous improvement is fundamental to OHN practice and is embedded into all aspects of an OHN's role.

The process of identifying improvement opportunities, planning and delivering interventions or programs, and reviewing and measuring outcomes, forms the basis of the continuous improvement process, which is underpinned by requirements associated with legislation, practice standards and guidelines, as well as the goals of the individual workplace.

OHNs may be involved in setting of program performance goals, evaluation planning, data collection and collation, reporting and benchmarking. They will draw on current evidence and inform their own improvement through engagement with their peers and through participation in continuous professional development.

Figure 11. Quality and continuous improvement in occupational health nurse practice



References

- AAOHN Competencies. Workplace Health & Safety. 2015;63(11):484-492. Available from <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/2165079915607876> (United States)
- AAOHN. Occupational and Environmental Health Nurses Code of Ethics (2016). (United States)
- AAOHN. Standards of Occupational & Environmental Health Nursing (2012). (United States)
- AHPRA Nursing and Midwifery Board. Registered Nurses Standards of Practice (2016) Available from <https://www.nursingmidwiferyboard.gov.au/codes-guidelines-statements/professional-standards/registered-nurse-standards-for-practice.aspx>
- Aotearoa New Zealand Primary Health Care Nursing Standards of Practice (2019). Available from <https://www.nzno.org.nz/Portals/0/publications/Primary%20Health%20Care%20Nursing%20Standards%20of%20Practice%202019.pdf>
- Australian Institute of Health & Safety. Core Body of Knowledge for Generalist OHS Professional (2021). Available from <https://www.ohsbok.org.au/>
- Australian National Training Authority. Qualifications for Correctional Services. Available from https://training.gov.au/TrainingComponentFiles/NTIS/CSC98_3.pdf
- Coalition of National Nursing Organisations. National Nurse Credentialling Framework (2011). Available from http://www.connmo.org.au/images/PDF/CoNNO_Credentialling_Framework_FINAL.pdf
- COHNA/ACIIST. Occupational Health Nursing Practice Standards (2003). Available from <http://cohna-aciist.ca/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Occupational-Health-Nursing-Practice-Standards-2003.pdf> (Canada)
- College of Licensed Practical Nurses of Alberta. Collaborative Practice in Nursing (2019). Available from <https://www.clpna.com/2019/10/collaborative-practice-in-nursing-released-by-albertas-nursing-regulators/> (Canada)
- Competencies in Occupational and Environmental Health Nursing. Workplace Health & Safety. 2015;63(11):493-494. Available from <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/2165079915608192>
- Faculty of Occupational Health Nursing. Careers in OH Nursing: Guiding principles for nursing careers in Occupational Health. Available from <https://portal.fohn.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/06/FOHN-Career-Framework-singles.pdf> (United Kingdom)
- Health and Safety Association NZ. Building the Professions (2019). Available from <https://www.hfesnz.org.nz/assets/Buildingtheprofessions-HASANZHealthandSafetyWorkforcePipelineReport.pdf>
- Laloo D, Demou E, Kiran S, Gaffney M, Stevenson M, Macdonald EB. Core competencies for UK occupational health nurses: a Delphi study. *Occup Med (Lond)*. 2016 Nov 1;66(8):649-655.
- Loeppke R, Heron R, Bazas T, Beaumont D, Spanjaard H, Konicki DL, Eisenberg B, Todd H. Global Trends in Occupational Medicine: Results of the International Occupational Medicine Society Collaborative Survey. *J Occup Environ Med*. 2017 Mar;59(3):e13-e16.
- Licensed Practical/Vocational Nurses: A Place on the Team. Workplace Health & Safety. 2017;65(4):154-157. Available from <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/2165079917702913> (United States)

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH). Hierarchy of Controls. Available from <https://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/hierarchy/default.html> (United States)

New Zealand Occupational Health Nurses' Association (NZOHNA). Competencies for practicing as an occupational and environmental health nurse in New Zealand (2004).

Nursing and Midwifery Board. Revised registration standards and standards for practice (2016). Available from <https://www.nursingmidwiferyboard.gov.au/News/2016-02-01-revised-standards.aspx>

Nursing & Midwifery Council. Part 3: Standards for post-registration education programmes (2021). Available from <https://www.nmc.org.uk/globalassets/sitedocuments/post-registration/final-documents/part-3-standards-for-post-registration-education-programmes.pdf>

Nursing & Midwifery Council. Standards of proficiency for community nursing specialist practice qualifications (2021). Available from <https://www.nmc.org.uk/globalassets/sitedocuments/post-registration/final-documents/standards-of-proficiency-for-community-nursing-specialist-pr....pdf>

Nursing & Midwifery Council. Standards of proficiency for specialist community public health nursing (2021). Available from <https://www.nmc.org.uk/globalassets/sitedocuments/post-registration/final-documents/standards-of-proficiency-for-specialist-community-public-health-nursing-.pdf>

NZOHNA Education and Career Pathway Project Team. Proposed Framework for OHN Standards of Nursing Practice for Registered Nurses in Aotearoa New Zealand (2021). Available from <https://www.nzohna.org.nz/assets/Uploads/Education-Project/OHN-FRAMEWORK-DOCUMENT-2.pdf>

Safe Work Australia. Work-related psychological health and safety – A systematic approach to meeting your duties, National guidance material (2019). Available from https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/system/files/documents/1911/work-related_psychological_health_and_safety_a_systematic_approach_to_meeting_your_duties.pdf

Standards of Occupational and Environmental Health Nursing. Workplace Health & Safety. 2012;60(3):97-103. Available from <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/216507991206000301> (United States)

State Insurance Regulatory Authority (SIRA). Workers compensation guide for allied health practitioners. Available from <https://www.sira.nsw.gov.au/resources-library/workers-compensation-resources/publications/health-professionals-for-workers-compensation/workers-compensation-guide-for-allied-health-practitioners>

The Federation of Occupational Health Nurses within the European Union (FOHNEU). Core Curriculum (3rd edition 2014). Available from https://fohneu.org/images/pdf/CORE-CURRICULUM_2014.pdf

The National Nursing Education Taskforce. The National Specialisation Framework for Nursing and Midwifery (2006) Available from http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/nnnet/downloads/recsp_spec_framework.pdf

Victorian Government, Health and Human Services. Allied health: credentialling, competency and capability framework (revised edition), Section 2: Competency (2016). Available from <https://www.health.vic.gov.au/publications/resource-kit-2-competency-allied-health>

What Works Wellbeing. Five principles for effective action on workplace wellbeing (2020). Available from <https://whatworkswellbeing.org/resources/five-principles-to-improve-workplace-wellbeing/>

World Health Organization. Regional Office for Europe & WHO European Centre for Environment and Health. (2001). The role of the occupational health nurse in workplace health management. Copenhagen: WHO Regional Office for Europe. Available from <https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/108433>

Comcare, Intervene early and know the warning signs <https://www.comcare.gov.au/safe-healthy-work/healthy-workplace/intervene-early>