

POLICY STATEMENT ON GENDER EQUALITY AND HEALTH



Endorsed

30 November 2022

The United Nations maintains that gender inequalities are still deep-rooted in every society. Women and girls suffer from lack of access to decent work and face occupational segregation and gender wage gaps. In many situations, they are denied access to basic education and health care, and are victims of violence and discrimination. Women are under-represented in political and economic decision-making processes.¹

Gender² equality means equal outcomes for women, men and gender diverse persons. This may mean equal treatment or treatment that is different but which is considered equivalent in terms of rights, obligations, benefits and opportunities.

Gender inequality³ hinders progress to fulfill each person's right to health as well as the achievement of universal health coverage. Gender inequality often disproportionately affects women, girls and gender diverse persons in societies where they may have a lower status, restrictions on mobility, lack of decision-making autonomy, limited access to finances, lower literacy rates, discriminatory attitudes, including those of health care providers, and exposure to gender based violence. Gender equity is the process of achieving gender equality. Gender equity recognises that women, girls and gender diverse persons are often not in the same 'starting position' as men and boys and gender equity measures are needed to level the playing field.

The Commonwealth Nurses and Midwives Federation is committed to promoting equal opportunity for women, men and gender diverse persons in employment, education, and social environments in which the rights and dignity of all persons are equal and respected.

¹ United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *Gender equality and women's empowerment*. Available from <https://sdgs.un.org/topics/gender-equality-and-womens-empowerment>.

² Gender interacts with but is different from sex. The two terms are distinct and should not be used interchangeably. Sex refers to a set of biological characteristics while gender is a social construct. Gender norms, roles and relationships vary from society to society and evolve over time. They are often upheld and reproduced in the legislation, values, education system, employment, religion, media and other institutions of the society in which they exist. When individuals or groups do not 'fit' established gender norms they often face stigma, discriminatory practices or social exclusion – all of which affect health. Gender is also hierarchical and often reflects unequal relations of power, producing inequalities that intersect with other social and economic inequalities <https://www.who.int/gender-equity-rights/en/>; <https://www.un.org/en/global-issues/gender-equality>.

³ <https://www.who.int/health-topics/gender>

The Commonwealth Nurses and Midwives Federation (CNMF) strongly encourages:

1. all nurses and midwives, particularly those in leadership positions or positions of influence, to actively support the United Nations Sustainable Development Goal 5: *Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls*⁴ and take affirmative gender equity action to contribute to the achievement of this goal;
2. all nurses and midwives to advocate for, and act as role models, for gender equality.

The CNMF endorses planned action by nurses and midwives within society, particularly within health systems to:

- (a) promote positive attitudes toward gender equality;
- (b) implement strategies to achieve gender equality in nursing, midwifery and health generally;⁵
- (c) review and amend nursing, midwifery and health legislation and regulation to achieve gender equality;
- (d) review and amend nursing, midwifery and health policies and programs to achieve gender equality;⁶
- (e) promote the incorporation of gender equity strategies into recruitment, retention, remuneration, and professional development policies for nurses and midwives;
- (f) promote the incorporation of gender equity strategies into leadership, education, and career progression opportunities for nurses and midwives.

⁴ <https://sdgs.un.org/goals/goal5>

⁵ World Health Organisation 2022 *Gender Mainstreaming for Health Managers: A practical approach manual* <https://www.who.int/news/item/06-07-2022-who-updates-widely-used-gender-mainstreaming-manual>.

⁶ United Nations Office of the High Commissioner Human Rights 2011 *Gender Equality Policy* https://www2.ohchr.org/english/issues/women/docs/genderequalitypolicy_september2011.pdf.