

fact sheet

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Midwifery: an overview

A career in midwifery offers many opportunities to work in partnership with women. Midwives work in hospitals, the community and the woman's home to provide care throughout pregnancy, labour, birth and the first weeks of new motherhood.

During their careers, midwives develop specific skills in assessing the progress of women throughout the childbearing cycle and promoting health. When a complication arises, they are in the forefront of referring the mother and/or baby to other health care professionals for a particular service.

Midwives have an important role to play in the provision of primary health care and, as well, they have the knowledge and ability to manage highly complex clinical situations. At all times, midwives focus on the needs of the woman, supporting and educating her to make informed choices about her own health and that of her baby.

Becoming a midwife

There are several ways to become a midwife and all involve undertaking studies at university.

- Bachelor of Midwifery is a three year degree that's called a direct entry course because it enables you to study midwifery without the need to hold a registered nursing qualification. This is a relatively new course that is currently being offered by the University of Technology, Sydney.
- Bachelor of Nursing (or other qualification leading to registration as a nurse) followed by a Graduate Diploma in Midwifery. This midwifery course has been available at a number of universities for many years and is conducted in a way that combines part-time work with full-time study. This is a very popular course for registered nurses to study because it significantly broadens their career opportunities in the health care industry.

- Bachelor of Nursing/Bachelor of Midwifery is a combined degree that enables you to study both nursing and midwifery and be able to hold registration as both a nurse and midwife on completion. This programme is currently offered by a limited number of universities.

The University Admissions Centre website contains information on the courses and universities that offer them. Visit www.uac.edu.au

General information about becoming a midwife can be viewed on the NSW Health website:

www.nursing.nsw.gov.au

The Australian College of Midwives website contains interesting information and updates on topics of current interest and importance to midwives and midwifery practice. The College is a national, not for profit organisation that serves as the peak professional body for midwives in this country. Visit www.midwives.org.au

Working as a midwife in South Eastern Sydney Illawarra Health

Midwifery is practiced in many different settings in this Area Health Service with midwives employed in semi-rural and regional settings as well as metropolitan tertiary and specialist referral centres.

Wherever midwives are located they strive to provide the highest quality and most innovative maternity care. However, the ways in which this care is organised and delivered varies considerably according to the preferred model of care used in each setting.

While most midwives continue to choose to practise in hospitals, an increasing number is now providing maternal care in the community and in the woman's home.

Midwives are able to select from full time, part-time and casual employment opportunities and a variety of shift patterns is available in each of the hospitals. Ongoing professional development is provided through facility-based and Area-wide educational programs and attendance at conferences, seminars and workshops is encouraged and supported wherever possible.

Facilities employing midwives include:

- Milton Ulladulla Hospital (Milton)
- Royal Hospital for Women (Randwick)
- Shellharbour Hospital (Shellharbour)
- Shoalhaven District Memorial Hospital (Nowra)
- St George Hospital (Kogarah)
- Sutherland Hospital (Caringbah)
- Wollongong Hospital (Wollongong)

A leader in the development of midwifery care

South Eastern Sydney Illawarra Health has both a national and international reputation for supporting the development and evaluation of collaborative midwifery models of care and a commitment to providing research and educational opportunities for its midwives.

Such a commitment includes the employment of innovative managers and Clinical Midwifery Consultants and the appointment of a Professor of Midwifery Practice Development and Research for the Area Health Service. In addition, the Clinical Chair in Women's Health Nursing has been in place for over a decade. All of these individuals occupy leadership roles at various levels within the organisation and contribute to the profession through research and enquiry.

The reputation of South Eastern Sydney Illawarra Health extends to the high level of support given to midwifery students, newly graduated midwives and midwives returning to practice in the workplace by ensuring that they gain experience in "midwifery continuity of care". This approach helps enhance their competence so that they can practice confidently in any maternity care setting.