

# Nursing Practice and People with Developmental/Intellectual Disabilities

## POSITION STATEMENT

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This position paper has been developed by the Professional Association of Nurses in Developmental Disability Areas (PANDDA, Australia) Inc. and contains five statements about Nursing in relation to people with developmental disabilities. These statements are intended to convey that people with developmental disabilities have the same rights as any person to community services, that Nursing is a community service, and that people with developmental disabilities and their families benefit from a Nursing service which is cognisant of their history, which is consistent with contemporary service philosophy, and which is ethically and legally accountable.

### STATEMENT 1

**People with developmental disabilities are as entitled to Nursing services as any community member.**

Nursing, a familiar part of the fabric of society, offers both generic and specialist services to the community. People with developmental disabilities and their families are members of the community and, as such, have the same rights as any member of the community to Nursing services. The term, “developmental disabilities” describes difficulties with functioning as a result of a variety of conditions. People with developmental disabilities have the same health requirements as ‘any member of the community, as well as special health needs as a consequence of developmental disabilities. Their families, too, have special health needs related to the diagnosis and sequelae of the conditions which gave rise to developmental disabilities. Nursing can address both the generic and special health requirements of people with developmental disabilities and their families.

### STATEMENT 2

**Nursing’s history with people with developmental disabilities provides a context for services.**

Nursing has long been involved with people with developmental ‘disabilities’ and their families. Over time, nurse nurses have played a major role in direct care and the development and management of specialised services, and were instrumental in the earliest provision of community living projects. With the introduction of other professional groups to the field, nurses collaborated with these disciplines in a multidisciplinary team to, provide comprehensive services for people with developmental disabilities and their families. Nursing has shared with people with

developmental disabilities and [their families the historical struggle for a better life as well as contemporary philosophy, legislation and services. This experience and history has provided Nursing with a unique perspective on the lives of people with developmental disabilities and their families.

### STATEMENT 3

#### **Contemporary Nursing philosophy is consistent with the current philosophy of developmental disability services.**

Contemporary Nursing philosophy reflects the changing direction of health care towards support of self-caring individuals in the community. The current philosophy of developmental disability services is also concerned with the support of self-caring individuals in the community. Because both philosophies are consistent, nurses who come into contact with people with developmental disabilities and their families can provide a service which is keeping with the goals of developmental disability services. Specialist developmental disability nurses have never had a conflict with the prevailing philosophy of developmental disability services. Contemporary Developmental Disability Nursing is a complex interpersonal-process involving a holistic approach with emphasis on clients' rights, particularly the rights to self-determination and independent decision making within the context of their life situation. Developmental disability nurses recognise the need for flexibility, adaptability, sensitivity and responsiveness, as they shape their practice to the dynamically changing needs of people with developmental disabilities, their families and the community.

### STATEMENT 4

#### **Nursing, as a profession, is accountable to its discipline for its practice.**

The practice of professional nurses in Australia is governed by the Nurses' Act 1994 and its regulations and is accountable to the Nurses' Registration Board, which sets the standard for education and practice, in each state and territory. The Australian Nursing Council Inc. has also published guidelines for nursing practice in relation to competencies, ethics and professional conduct. Nursing, including specialist nursing, has developed standard of practice for the discipline. Nursing is cognisant of general legislation which affects its practice, for example, legislation in relation to contract, consent, confidentiality, human rights and equal opportunity, duty of care, children, property: medication. occupational health and safety and death. For such issues as abortion, euthanasia, and quality of life also require Nursing to have a knowledge of ethical and legal implications. Specialist nursing pays particular

heed to legislation affecting the specialist area of practice, for example, the Disability Services Act 1986 and the Disability Discrimination Act 1992. Nursing's self-regulatory system upholds the standards and procedures of the profession through annual registration and disciplinary action when required.

### STATEMENT 5

#### **Continuing education regarding developmental disabilities is essential to the Nursing profession.**

With the changes to nurse education over the last decade, all nurses graduate as generic nurses and may elect to specialise later. Alongside this change services for people with developmental disabilities have become more generic. These changes require rethinking of the education of nurses. Because all nurses now come into contact with people with developmental disabilities. Nurses Registration Boards ensure that there is some introduction to the area in undergraduate nursing courses. There is an expectation from the profession that specialising nurses will undertake further study usually at the Master's level. A major expectation for professional development is continuing education and peer supervision. Short courses, conference attendance and presentation, research publication and clinical supervision are the hallmarks of professional Nursing.

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