



1 CLINICAL GOVERNANCE

This standard aims to ensure that there are systems in place within health service organisations to maintain and improve the reliability, safety and quality of health care.

This standard, together with the Partnering with Consumers Standard, set the overarching requirements for the effective implementation of all other standards.

The revised standard recognises the importance of governance, leadership, culture, patient safety systems, clinical performance and the patient care environment in delivering high quality care.

Why the standard is important

Although most health care in Australia delivers good clinical outcomes, patients do not always receive the care that is recommended, and adverse events continue to occur.¹ Adverse events can be associated with pain, delays in care, short-term and permanent disabilities, and death. They can also be associated with increased healthcare costs because of longer hospital stays, additional treatments and readmissions.²

In recent years, health service organisations have used the National Safety and Quality Health Service (NSQHS) Standards as a framework to put in place safety and quality systems that have improved patient safety.

Clinical governance is the set of relationships and responsibilities established by a health service organisation between its governing body, executive, clinicians, patients and consumers, to deliver safe and quality health care. It ensures that the community and health service organisations can be confident that systems are in place to deliver safe and high-quality health care and continuously improve services.

Clinical governance is an integrated component of corporate governance of health service organisations. It ensures that everyone - from frontline clinicians to managers and members of governing bodies, such as boards - is accountable to patients and the community for assuring the delivery of health services that are safe, effective, high quality and continuously improving.

If the standard is in place ...

- **Leaders** at all levels in the organisation set up and use clinical governance and safety and quality systems to improve the safety and quality of health care
- The **safety and quality systems** work effectively with management systems
- The **workforce** has the right qualifications, skills and supervision to provide safe, high-quality health care to patients
- The **environment** promotes safe and high-quality health care for patients.

Changes from the first edition

The second edition of the NSQHS Standards streamlines actions and addresses gaps identified in the first edition.

The Clinical Governance Standard builds on the existing Governance for Safety and Quality in Health Service Organisations Standard from the first edition. It continues its focus on risk, monitoring, quality improvement, training and performance management.

The main changes are that the new standard explicitly recognises the importance of leadership and culture in establishing clinical governance systems to maintain and improve the safety and quality of care, and describes the role of the governing body and clinical leaders. It incorporates new elements, such as e-health, and emergency and disaster management. It also recognises that organisations need to measure and act on differences in clinical practice, and to provide an environment that promotes safe and high-quality care.

Key steps you can take to prepare for the second edition

- Review and strengthen your current clinical governance arrangements
- Consider the high-risk times in your service context; it may be helpful to review existing structures and processes to determine whether they meet the organisation's needs
- Address gaps by collaborating with consumers and leaders throughout the organisation to develop or adapt structures and processes.

Further information

A full copy of the Clinical Governance Standard, including the criteria and actions required for health service organisations to meet it, is contained in the NSQHS Standards (second edition). The NSQHS Standards (second edition) is available on the website of the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care at www.safetyandquality.gov.au.

The National Model Clinical Governance Framework provides more information about clinical governance and is available on the Commission's website.

The **Advice Centre** provides support on implementing the NSQHS Standards for health service organisations, surveyors and accrediting agencies.

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References

- 1 Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care. Windows into safety and quality in health care 2010. Sydney: ACSQHC; 2010.
- 2 Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care. Vital signs 2015: the state of safety and quality in Australian health care. Sydney: ACSQHC; 2015.
- 3 Mannion R, Freeman T, Millar R, Davies H. Effective board governance of safe care: a (theoretically underpinned) cross-sectioned examination of the breadth and depth of relationships through national quantitative surveys and in-depth qualitative case studies. Health Serv Deliv Res 2016;4(4).

National Safety and Quality Health Service (NSQHS) Standards

The National Safety and Quality Health Service (NSQHS) Standards were developed by the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care with the Australian Government, state and territory partners, consumers and the private sector. The primary aim of the NSQHS Standards is to protect the public from harm and improve the quality of health care. They describe the level of care that should be provided by health service organisations and the systems that are needed to deliver such care.

The second edition of the NSQHS Standards were released in November 2017. Organisations will be assessed against the new standards from January 2019.