



4 MEDICATION SAFETY

This standard aims to ensure that clinicians safely prescribe, dispense and administer appropriate medicines, and monitor medicine use. It also aims to ensure that consumers are informed about medicines, and understand their own medicine needs and risks.

The standard in the second edition is largely the same as the standard in the first edition, with one addition for health service organisations to assess patients' ongoing medication management and review their medication.

Why the standard is important

Medicines are the most common treatment used in health care. Although appropriate use of medicines can improve health, medicines can also be associated with harm.¹ Harm may occur because the wrong medicine is prescribed, supplied or used, or because the right medicine is dosed or used incorrectly.

It is estimated that 2–3% of hospital admissions are related to medicines.² This means that at least 230,000 people were admitted to hospital because of a medicine incident in 2011–12. Some groups have even higher rates of hospital admission related to medicines – for example, for those aged 65 years and over, up to 30% of admissions are related to medicines.¹

The cost of such incidents to patients and the healthcare system is significant. A study published in 2009 estimated that medicine-related hospital admissions in Australia cost \$660 million.³ Estimates for 2011–12 place this figure closer to \$1.2 billion.¹

Up to 50% of medicine-related hospital admissions are potentially avoidable.³ Making processes systematic and standardised can improve medication safety. This standard sets out these processes, and the elements that are needed in governance and communication strategies to ensure medication safety.

If the standard is in place ...

- There are **systems, practices and processes** that support and promote safety when health service organisations procure, supply, store, compound, prescribe, dispense, administer and monitor the effects of medicines
- **Clinicians** are supported in safe medicine use
- Patients' **medication history**, including information relating to medicine allergies and adverse drug reactions, is recorded at the start of each episode of care, and is available to clinicians
- **Information** is provided to patients about their medicine needs and risks; and patients understand their treatment options and can make informed choices about their medicines
- A medicines list is provided to patients and receiving clinicians when **handing over care** (between healthcare personnel or areas).

Changes from the first edition

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

The Medication Safety Standard in the second edition is largely the same as the standard in the first edition. It continues its focus on the safe and quality use of medicines, and engaging and informing patients so that they can be partners in their own care. The main change is that health service organisations are now required to identify patients at risk of experiencing medicine-related problems, and undertake a medication review for these patients.

Key steps you can take to prepare for the second edition

- Review and strengthen the governance of medication management
- Collaborate with the workforce to address gaps in communication about medicines
- Continue to embed structured medication reconciliation processes and practices into patient care
- Consider how patients who are most at risk of a medication-related problem are prioritised for medication review
- Ensure that shared decision making processes are in place so that patients can make informed choices about their medicines.

Further information

A full copy of the Medication Safety 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 **Advice Centre** provides support on implementing the NSQHS Standards for health service organisations, surveyors and accrediting agencies.

EMAIL accreditation@safetyandquality.gov.au

PHONE 1800 304 056

References

- 1 Roughhead EE, Semple S, Rosenfeld E. Literature review: medication safety in Australia. Sydney: Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care; 2013.
- 2 Roughhead EE, Lexchin J. Adverse drug events: counting is not enough, action is needed. *Med J Aust* 2006;184(7):315-16.
- 3 Roughhead EE, Semple S, Rosenfeld E. Medication safety in acute care in Australia: where are we now? Part 1: a review of the extent and causes of medication problems 2002-2008. *Aust New Zealand Health Policy* 2009;6:18.

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.