

Guidelines for podiatrists working with podiatric assistants in podiatry practice



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Introduction

These guidelines have been developed by the Podiatry Board of Australia under Section 39 of the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law¹ (the National Law). The guidelines provide guidance to podiatrists in relation to a matter of professional practice not set down in the legislation and which can be used in proceedings under the National Law as evidence of what constitutes professional conduct or practice for podiatry under Section 41 of the National Law.

The relevant sections of the National Law are attached.

Who needs to use these guidelines?

The guidelines apply to all podiatrists except non-practising podiatrists.

These guidelines address how podiatrists may work with podiatric assistants in podiatry practice.

Summary of guideline

The guidelines specify the requirements for podiatrists delegating treatment of 'low risk' patients or clients to a podiatric assistant. They emphasise the importance of quality and safety of care and service. The Board recommends that podiatric assistants have completed a relevant qualification as described by the current Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council HLT Health Training Package.

Working with podiatric assistants

The precise nature of the duties of a podiatric assistant will vary depending on size and location of the practice and the training and experience of the podiatric assistant. The supervising podiatrist is always accountable directly for the scope of practice of the assistant, the care provided to the patient or client and for the conduct of the assistant.

The supervising podiatrist must ensure that:

1. The person who is to receive care has been assessed and determined to be 'low risk' by a registered podiatrist
2. A referring podiatrist has provided a clearly written referral for the assistant and/or a care plan that includes the delegation of tasks for the assistant, including the expected outcomes and targets
3. The person receiving care has provided informed consent for all procedures provided.

4. The podiatric assistant:
 - Has the knowledge and skills to effectively and safely carry out the delegated tasks
 - Documents all care provided
 - Understands the role of the supervising podiatrist
 - Has timely access to the supervising podiatrist
 - Maintains confidentiality of patient or client information.
5. The patient or client receiving care from a podiatry assistant is reassessed by the podiatrist every 12 months, or earlier if there is a change in foot health status identified by the assistant.

Each workplace should have appropriate evaluation and monitoring mechanisms in place to ensure the delivery of safe and quality services.

Podiatrists who intend to work with podiatric assistants and who have not undertaken supervision training should consider including some supervision-related training in their continuous professional development activities.

Qualifications for podiatry assistants

It is recommended that podiatric assistants hold a certificate of attainment of formal training delivered by a Registered Training Organisation e.g. a TAFE college. The content of the training is nationally approved qualifications in allied health assistance developed by the Community Services & Health Industry Skills Council. The tasks and duties that the podiatrist can delegate to the podiatric assistant are dependent on the range of competencies included in the qualification.

For podiatric assistants without formal training, the supervising podiatrist should be familiar with the competencies of these formal qualifications to ensure that the assistant is working within the framework endorsed by health industry stakeholders.

The Certificate IV in Allied Health Assistance that includes the podiatry skill set is the most desirable qualification for a podiatry assistant.

The recognised qualifications for a podiatry assistant include:

- Certificate III in Allied Health Assistance [HLT32407]
- Certificate IV in Allied Health Assistance [HLT42507]

For a description of these qualifications, see Attachment A.

¹ the National Law is contained in the schedule to the *Health Practitioner Regulation National Law (2009)*.

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The training packages that lead to the attainment of the qualification describe the scope of practice for the podiatry assistant via the competencies achieved. For more detailed information, open the link to these competency units at www.podiatryboard.gov.au in the section titled Codes and Guidelines.

Definitions

In these guidelines a **podiatric assistant** is a member of staff employed within a facility or practice who is not a registered podiatrist and who assists a podiatrist in the delivery of services to his or her patients or clients.

A **low risk** patient or client, in this context, is defined as a person who may have systemic disease however it is managed and stable and there are no systemic complications involving the foot or lower limb.

A **training package** is a **set of nationally endorsed standards and qualifications** for recognising and assessing people's skills in a specific industry, industry sector or enterprise. They are developed by the national Industry Skills Council (ISC).

Date of issue: 1 July 2010

Date of review: This guideline will be reviewed at least every three years

Last reviewed:



Attachment A

Description of qualifications

Certificate III in Allied Health Assistance [HLT32407]

This qualification covers workers who provide assistance to allied health professionals. Workers at this level operate under direct supervision and have competencies in;

- client movement
- basic medical terminology
- basic anatomy
- maintaining patient or client records
- first aid
- participation in occupational health and safety processes
- communication within a health setting
- assistance in an allied health program
- dealing with challenging behaviours
- complying with infection control procedures.

Duties may include safely preparing the client and the area for treatment in a hygienic manner, administrative tasks and communication with health staff and patients or clients. Allied health assistants qualified to a certificate III level will not conduct treatment programs or be involved in therapeutic treatments without direct supervision of a registered podiatrist.

Certificate IV in Allied Health Assistance [HLT42507]

This qualification covers workers who provide therapeutic and program related support to allied health professionals, under the guidance of an allied health professional, in this case, a registered podiatrist.

More specific podiatry electives [the four-unit 'podiatry skill set'] can contribute to this qualification.

- The podiatry skill set includes:
- HLTAH404A: Assist with basic foot hygiene
- HLTAH405A: Assist with podiatric procedures
- HLTAH406A: Assist with podiatry assessment and exercise
- HLTIN302A: Process re-usable instruments and equipment in health work.

In the workplace, the worker with a certificate IV in Allied Health Assistance that includes the podiatry skill set will have competencies of the certificate III level as well as additional competencies e.g. of implementing infection control procedures, contributing to organisational effectiveness and occupational health and safety. This will enable the podiatry assistant to provide therapeutic interventions and program related support e.g. carry out a stretching program prescribed by the podiatrist, change dressings or apply padding and strapping as prescribed by the podiatrist.

Supervision may be direct, indirect or remote and must occur according to organisational requirements.

Attachment B

Extract of relevant provisions from the *Health Practitioner Regulation National Law Act 2009*

Division 3 Registration standards and codes and guidelines

39 Codes and guidelines

A National Board may develop and approve codes and guidelines—

- (a) to provide guidance to the health practitioners it registers; and
- (b) about other matters relevant to the exercise of its functions.

Example. A National Board may develop guidelines about the advertising of regulated health services by health practitioners registered by the Board or other persons for the purposes of section 133.

40 Consultation about registration standards, codes and guidelines

- (1) If a National Board develops a registration standard or a code or guideline, it must ensure there is wide-ranging consultation about its content.
- (2) A contravention of subsection (1) does not invalidate a registration standard, code or guideline.
- (3) The following must be published on a National Board's website—
 - (a) a registration standard developed by the Board and approved by the Ministerial Council;
 - (b) a code or guideline approved by the National Board.
- (4) An approved registration standard or a code or guideline takes effect—
 - (a) on the day it is published on the National Board's website; or
 - (b) if a later day is stated in the registration standard, code or guideline, on that day.

41 Use of registration standards, codes or guidelines in disciplinary proceedings

An approved registration standard for a health profession, or a code or guideline approved by a National Board, is admissible in proceedings under this Law or a law of a co-regulatory jurisdiction against a health practitioner

registered by the Board as evidence of what constitutes appropriate professional conduct or practice for the health profession.