



Position Statement

Reducing Environmental and Lifestyle Related Health Hazards

ICN Position:

Nurses and national nurses associations should play a strategic role in helping reduce environmental and lifestyle related health hazards.

National nurses associations (NNAs) can contribute to reducing health hazards for individuals and communities by:

- Promoting a positive life style, including exercise, stress management, accident prevention, weight maintenance and nutrition education that is sensitive to socio-economic status, gender and cultural beliefs.
- Developing and widely disseminating a NNA position concerning major national environmental and lifestyle-related health hazards.
- Working with governments and communities to introduce measures to create and preserve healthy living and working environments, including water fluoridation, control of food additives, measures to reduce substance abuse, and services to combat health hazards.
- Supporting government efforts to prevent and control specific health hazards including international co-operation to address shared problems (e.g. inadequate nutrition, drug trafficking, pollution control, sexually transmitted infections, counterfeit medicines, etc.).
- Initiating and participating in:
 - bodies that develop, co-ordinate and supervise hazard prevention and control programmes;
 - national/local disaster planning, and international programmes in case of disasters in other countries;
 - research into: the magnitude, consequences and required interventions of critical environmental and occupational health hazards; wellness and the practices and techniques which enable people to reduce health hazards and maintain their health; early warning of health hazards; improving living and working conditions; monitoring the environmental levels of pollutants; and, measuring the impact of nursing intervention on environmental hazards.
- Ensuring that nurses have sufficient information and education, empowerment and resources to effectively carry out their role in hazard related health promotion and counselling.
- Collaborating with health facility managers to ensure safe disposal of medical waste and avoid harm to the environment.

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The International Council of Nurses (ICN) affirms the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children and the Plan of Action¹ which address the need to create and preserve healthy environments for children.

Background

Lifestyle and environmentally related health problems are a growing cause of morbidity, mortality, increased health care costs and decline in productivity and quality of life. Of particular concern are:

- Lifestyle related hazards such as tobacco, alcohol and drug abuse, add to personal and societal costs in the form of cancer, violence, road accidents, etc. As well, cardiovascular diseases and mental health problems are global concerns, as is the dramatic increase in sexually transmitted diseases.
- Food additives and chemicals used in food production are growing nutritional concerns.
- In many industrialised countries, people suffer from obesity and eating disorders such as anorexia and bulimia and, throughout the world, many people are consistently undernourished.

Environmental factors, such as stress, are major causes of ill health. Pollution (water, air and soil) is increasing the prevalence of acute and chronic diseases.

Whether arising from personal choice or from the environment, these hazards require attention. Nurses are increasingly advocating policies and programmes aimed at creating healthy homes, schools, workplaces, communities, etc. Work environments which lessen stress and allow people to make their full contribution need to be supported, created and studied.

Nurses are important advocates for accident and disease prevention both at home and in the workplace. Most accidents are preventable, but much more education is required.

¹ United Nations, *World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children and Plan of Action for Implementations of the World Declaration on the Survival, Protection and Development of Children in the 1990's*, United Nations, New York, 1991.

Adopted in 1999
Reviewed and revised in 2007

Previously: *Health Hazards*

Related ICN Positions:

- [Nurses and the natural environment](#)
- [Occupational safety and health for nurses](#)
- [Nurses' role in the prevention and early detection of cancer](#)
- [Reducing Travel-Related Communicable Disease Transmission](#)
- [Acquired immunodeficiency syndrome \(AIDS\)](#)

The International Council of Nurses is a federation of more than 130 national nurses associations representing the millions of nurses worldwide. Operated by nurses and leading nursing internationally, ICN works to ensure quality nursing care for all and sound health policies globally.