

Definition / Glossary

Midwifery Regulation Glossary of Terms

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Guide

Key words or Terms	ICM Definition
Accountability	The duty to take responsibility for decisions, actions, and professional behaviour. It means being answerable to women and families midwives are caring for, employers, regulators, and the public, practicing ethically, following standards, and being willing to justify decisions or accept consequences when those standards are not met.
Accreditation	The status of public recognition granted to an educational institution for a set period of time, confirming that it meets established standards and requirements to deliver a pre-service midwifery education programme.
Approval	The status of public recognition granted to a pre-service midwifery education programme for a set period of time, confirming that it meets the established standards and requirements.
Assessment	A systematic process for collecting qualitative and quantitative data to measure, evaluate or appraise a person's performance compared to specified outcomes or competencies.
Autonomous	<p>When referring to an individual: taking responsibility for one's decisions and actions. When referring to a profession: see self-governing.</p> <p>For example, the autonomous midwife provides care across the SRMNAH spectrum, making decisions in partnership with each woman in her care. Autonomous midwives are responsible and accountable for all decisions they make and the care they provide without delegation from, supervision of, or direction by any other health care provider.</p>



	For example, women's autonomy is the freedom of a woman to make choices about care and for those choices to be respected. It implies that individuals have competence to make informed decisions and that they were not coerced or forced during the decision-making process.
Autonomy	See: <i>autonomous</i>
Censure	A formal, public statement of disapproval issued by a regulatory authority when an individual or organisation has violated rules, standards, or laws, but the violation does not rise to the level of suspension, or more severe sanctions.
Code of Conduct	A document that sets out the specific, enforceable standards and rules that professional behaviour should align with. Behaviour that falls short of a code of conduct is considered unprofessional conduct and in severe cases, professional misconduct. (1) The Code of Conduct is written based on a Code of Ethics (see below).
Code of Ethics	<p>A document that sets out the principles and values that guide professional behaviour. It provides the moral and professional foundation on which a Code of Conduct is built. (1)</p> <p>Codes of ethics for midwives should be consistent with the ICM International Code of Ethics for Midwives.</p>
Competence	<p>Also see Competency</p> <p>The overall ability of an individual to perform a job or role effectively and to a defined level of proficiency. It reflects the application of knowledge, psychomotor and communication skills, judgment, attitudes, and professional behaviour to meet accepted professional standards.</p>
Competency	A specific, observable and measurable component of performance that contributes to an individual's overall competence in a job or role.



Condition of practice	<p>An order allows a health professional to remain in practice subject to restrictions which reflect the regulatory authority's finding as to the health professional's fitness to practise.</p> <p>It usually requires the health professional to undertake certain actions or restrict their practice in certain ways. In some cases, it may be appropriate to impose a single condition for a short period, e.g. to undertake specific training. Usually, a combination of conditions is imposed.</p>
Continuing competence	<p>Continuing competence for health professionals is the ongoing ability to demonstrate the knowledge, professional behaviours and skills necessary to practice safely, effectively, and ethically by maintaining and updating the knowledge, skills, and judgment required for their profession. It involves continuous learning, reflection, and improvement to ensure care remains current and aligned with professional standards.</p> <p>For midwives, this means demonstrating the ICM Essential Competencies for Midwifery Practice.</p>
Continuing education	<p>See continuing professional development.</p>
Continuing professional development (CPD)	<p>Ongoing education undertaken from first qualification throughout a health professional's career. This is the ongoing, structured process of learning and skill-building that enables professionals to maintain, enhance, and broaden their knowledge, competence, and professional performance throughout their careers. It ensures health professionals stay current with evolving practices, standards, and needs of the communities they serve.</p>
Equivalence	<p>The idea that two institutions, systems or jurisdictions are considered comparable in level, learning outcomes and rigour (in the case of education), or oversight, safety, quality, or protection (in the case of regulation).</p> <p>When institutions, systems or countries are considered equivalent, the educational credits or qualifications from</p>



	one can be accepted in the other, and vice-versa. For example, midwifery qualifications in Austria are also recognised in Germany, and vice-versa.
Fitness to practise	<p>The ability to meet the professional standards of a midwife in a certain jurisdiction.</p> <p>Fitness to practise is evidence that a midwife has the knowledge, skills, professional behaviours, character, and health status necessary to meet the standards or competencies required for entry to the midwifery profession and for continuation of the practise of midwifery.</p>
Guideline(s)	<p>A systematically developed and evidence-based plan or explanation on how to undertake a task or decision to implement a standard.</p> <p>It provides direction but is not mandatory or legally binding, serving as a benchmark for quality, safety and accountability in a profession. This is different to a standard, which is expected to be met.</p>
Health professional	An individual who is educated in a health discipline, licensed and/or regulated in a jurisdiction to practice that profession; e.g., midwives, nurses, medical doctors.
Independent	Being able to make clinical judgments and decisions using own professional knowledge, skills, and standards, free from undue influence or control by employers, colleagues, or others, while remaining accountable for the care provided.
In-service midwifery education	See <i>continuing professional development</i> .
Legislation	A set of laws formally created and enacted by a governing body, such as a parliament or congress. It establishes legal rules, duties, and rights that individuals and organisations must follow and provides the framework for regulation, enforcement, and public protection.



Licensure	<p>A process by which an organisation (e.g., regulatory authority, government agency, professional association) grants time-limited formal legal authorisation to an individual to engage in a profession after verifying competence according to a predetermined and standardised criteria.</p> <p>The formal, legal authorisation granted by a regulatory authority (government agency or professional association) that allows an individual to practice a specific profession. It confirms they have met required education, competency, health and character standards.</p> <p>Licensure is time-bound, and licensed professionals must meet certain criteria (e.g. continuing education) to renew their license.</p>
Midwife	<p>A midwife is a person who has successfully completed a midwifery education programme that is based on the ICM Essential Competencies for Midwifery Practice and the ICM Global Standards for Midwifery Education and is recognised in the country where it is located; who has acquired the requisite qualifications to be registered and/or legally licensed to practice midwifery and use the title 'midwife'; and who demonstrates competency in the scope of midwifery practice.</p> <p>See ICM International Definition and Scope of Practice of a Midwife.</p>
Midwifery education institution	<p>An institute of higher education or organisation that provides pre-service midwifery education programmes. This may include universities, colleges, and schools, depending on the country context. They are accredited by relevant authorities in the jurisdiction they are in, which approves them to deliver programmes which meet ICM Global Standards for Education, and to issue certificates for those programmes.</p>



Midwifery partnership	<p>According to the ICM Philosophy and Model of Midwifery Care, a midwifery partnership is one of trust, reciprocity, and equity between a midwife and a woman.</p> <p>Each midwife strives to ensure that they do not impose their professional and personal power onto women; rather, through the provision of respectful, personalised, continuous and non-authoritarian care a midwife seeks to establish relationships in which each woman is the primary decisionmaker. (2)</p>
Midwifery Philosophy	<p>A statement of beliefs about the nature of midwifery practice and midwifery education. See ICM Philosophy and Midwifery Model of Care.</p>
Natural justice	<p>The right to procedural fairness and a fair decision, especially in disciplinary or regulatory matters. (3) It includes the right to a fair hearing, the right to be informed of allegations, and the opportunity to respond before decisions affecting one's professional practice are made.</p>
Practice Standard	<p>The required desirable and achievable level of achievement (performance) for entry to the Register, compared to which actual practice is compared.</p> <p>Midwives must continue to meet practice standards by demonstrating continuing competence.</p>
Pre-service midwifery education	<p>The process of preparing individuals to become competent midwives, therefore meeting the ICM Essential Competencies for Midwifery Practice.</p> <p>The midwifery programme, which meets the ICM Global Standards for Midwifery Education, is a combination of midwifery theory and practice, organised to meet learning outcomes that lead to the award of a qualification as a professional midwife.</p>



Professional association	<p>An association of practitioners of a given profession, aiming to advocate for the profession, support and promote their members' career development, education, and industry-related activities.</p> <p>See the ICM Definition of a Midwives' Association for more information.</p>
Protection of the public	<p>The responsibility of health professionals and regulatory authorities to ensure that health care is safe, ethical, and of high quality. It involves preventing harm, enforcing professional standards, and taking action against unsafe, incompetent, or unethical practice and practitioners.</p>
Provisional	<p>Temporary; existing only until permanently or properly replaced.</p>
Register of midwives	<p>An official, authoritative list maintained by a regulatory body or other competent authority that records all individuals legally licensed or certified to practice as midwives in a jurisdiction. Being on the register confirms that a midwife meets required education, competency, and professional standards, ensuring public safety and accountability.</p> <p>The register is available to the public.</p>
Regulation	<p>A system of rules, standards and oversight arising from legislation and established by a regulatory authority in a given jurisdiction to ensure health professionals are qualified, competent and ethical.</p> <p>It identifies who can hold the title "midwife" and protects the public by controlling entry to the profession, monitoring practice, and taking action when standards are not met.</p> <p>The functions of regulators are described in the ICM Global Standards for Midwifery Regulation.</p>



Regulatory Authority (also called regulatory body, or regulator)	<p>An official body legally authorised to oversee a health profession. It sets standards for education, licensure, practice, and ethics, monitors compliance, and takes action to protect the public by ensuring health professionals are competent, qualified, and accountable.</p> <p>For midwives, the regulatory authority may be a midwifery council, nursing and midwifery council or board that regulates allied health professionals.</p>
Regulatory authority governance	<p>The system of management, structures, policies, decision-making processes and administration used by a regulatory authority to oversee a health profession. It ensures accountability, transparency, fairness, and effective regulation so that standards, licensing, and public protection responsibilities are carried out fairly and consistently.</p>
Relicensing (also called recertification)	<p>The process by which a health professional renews their legal authorisation (license) to practice. It typically requires demonstrating ongoing competence, completing continuing professional development, and meeting current regulatory, ethical, and professional standards to ensure safe and effective care.</p>
Scope of Practice	<p>The range of activities, procedures, and responsibilities that a health professional is trained, competent, and authorised to perform. It is defined by the regulator, ensuring safe and effective care within their area of expertise.</p> <p>The extent of the Scope of Practice of a Midwife is defined by the ICM Essential Competencies for Midwifery Practice.</p>
Self-governing	<p>The system in which a profession regulates its own members through established standards, codes of conduct, and disciplinary processes. It allows health professionals to set education, practice, and ethical requirements for their own profession while maintaining accountability to the public through oversight by a regulatory framework.</p> <p>In any jurisdiction where a midwifery profession is given a legal and social mandate to regulate itself, it is a self-governing profession through the mechanism of self-regulation.</p>



Stakeholder	<p>Any person, organisation or group that has an interested in, or can be affected by the practice, decisions and outcomes of a midwife, midwifery service, regulatory authority, pre-service midwifery education programme, midwives' association or ICM.</p> <p>Stakeholders can include women, patients, families, colleagues, employers, regulators, professional associations, community representatives, and others.</p>
Standard	<p>An established benchmark, norm, uniform reference point or set of criteria that defines the expected knowledge, skills, behaviours, and quality of care for health professionals.</p> <p>Standards guide safe, effective, and ethical practice and are used by regulatory authorities, employers, and professionals to ensure consistent and accountable health care.</p> <p>Note that a standard should be met, as opposed to guideline which is advised.</p>
Striking off (disqualification, cancellation, loss of license)	<p>The permanent revocation of a health professional's legal authorisation to practice through removing the professional from the Register in the jurisdiction, prohibiting them from practising the profession ever again.</p> <p>It occurs when a health professional fails to meet regulatory, ethical, or competency standards, preventing them from providing care and protecting the public from unsafe or unqualified practice.</p>
Suspension (suspense, suspended)	<p>When a regulatory authority has temporarily withdrawn a health professional's legal permission to practice for a set period of time.</p> <p>Suspension usually occurs due to concerns about competence, conduct, or safety, and the professional cannot provide care until the suspension is lifted or resolved.</p>



References

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