Submission

Police Offences Amendment (Knives and Prohibited Weapons) Bill 2026 Consultation

Submitted by: Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF) Tasmania Branch
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1. Introduction

The Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF) Tasmania Branch welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the proposed reforms relating to knives and other prohibited weapons.

The ANMF is the largest professional and industrial organisation representing nurses, midwives and assistants in nursing in Tasmania. Our members work across public hospitals, private hospitals, aged care, community health services, mental health services, disability services and primary healthcare settings throughout the state.

The ANMF strongly supports the proposed legislative changes. Our support is informed by the increasing incidence of occupational violence and aggression experienced by nurses and midwives and the significant risks associated with knives and other weapons being brought into healthcare settings.

2. Escalating Violence and Aggression in Healthcare

Violence and aggression directed at nurses and midwives has become an increasingly serious workplace health and safety issue. Nurses and midwives regularly provide care to patients experiencing acute illness, mental health crises, cognitive impairment, substance intoxication, behavioural disturbances, or extreme distress. While the overwhelming majority of patients do not pose a threat, healthcare workers are frequently exposed to unpredictable and potentially dangerous situations.

ANMF members report that incidents involving verbal abuse, threats, intimidation, physical assault and weapon-related risks are occurring with concerning regularity. These incidents can have significant psychological and physical impacts on healthcare workers and contribute to workforce burnout, retention issues and concerns about personal safety at work.

Healthcare workers cannot simply remove themselves from these situations. Nurses and midwives have professional obligations to provide care to patients irrespective of their circumstances, often

requiring close physical proximity and direct interaction with individuals who may be distressed, agitated, volatile or violent.

3. The Reality of Knives in Clinical Settings

ANMF members regularly encounter knives and other sharp implements in healthcare environments. It is not uncommon for nurses and midwives to be involved in situations where knives are discovered amongst patients' belongings or confiscated during clinical presentations.

The discovery of a knife in a healthcare setting is extremely confronting for staff. However, an equally significant concern is the uncertainty surrounding weapons that may not have been identified or confiscated.

Many nurses and midwives provide care in environments where there is no physical barrier between themselves and patients. They undertake clinical assessments, administer medications, provide personal care, perform procedures and manage behavioural incidents at very close range. In these circumstances, the knowledge that a patient may potentially be carrying a concealed weapon creates an extreme degree of risk.

For healthcare workers, the consequences of a weapon being used can be immediate and catastrophic.

4. North West Regional Hospital Stabbing Incident

The risk posed by knives in healthcare settings was tragically highlighted by the stabbing of a medical officer at the North West Regional Hospital in Burnie in April 2023. During that incident, a patient lured the doctor outside the emergency department and stabbed him in the chest with a knife, causing life-threatening injuries that required emergency cardiac surgery. The doctor suffered significant physical and psychological trauma as a result of the attack.

This devastating incident remains a stark reminder that healthcare workers are not immune from serious violent assaults. It demonstrates that knives can and do enter healthcare settings and that the consequences for frontline staff can be profound and life-altering.
While this attack involved a medical practitioner, ANMF members recognise that a similar incident could occur to a nurse, midwife, assistant in nursing, paramedic, allied health professional or any other healthcare worker who provides direct patient care.

5. Workplace Health and Safety Considerations

Employers have a duty to provide, so far as reasonably practicable, a safe workplace for employees. Reducing the prevalence of knives and prohibited weapons within the community and strengthening legislative controls on their possession contributes directly to the safety of healthcare workers.

Nurses and midwives should not be expected to undertake their duties while facing an increased risk that a patient or visitor may be carrying a knife or other prohibited weapon.
Given the unique nature of healthcare work, where care delivery frequently requires close physical contact and cannot be undertaken from a position of safety or distance, legislative measures that

reduce access to and carriage of knives have an important role in preventing serious workplace injuries and deaths.

6. Conclusion

The ANMF Tasmania Branch strongly supports the proposed reforms relating to knives and other prohibited weapons.

Our members experience violence and aggression in the course of their work on a regular basis, and incidents involving weapons present an unacceptable risk to the health, safety and wellbeing of healthcare workers. The stabbing of a medical officer at the North West Regional Hospital serves as a powerful reminder of the very real consequences that can occur when knives are present within healthcare environments.

Nurses and midwives routinely find and confiscate knives in clinical settings and remain acutely aware that not all weapons are detected. The absence of physical barriers between healthcare workers and patients means the risk associated with concealed weapons is particularly acute.

For these reasons, the ANMF Tasmania Branch supports the proposed legislative changes and encourages the Government to take all reasonable steps to reduce the presence of knives and other prohibited weapons in the community, thereby improving the safety of healthcare workers and the broader public.

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Organisation Overview

The Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF) is both the largest nursing and midwifery union and the largest professional body for the nursing and midwifery teams in Tasmania. We operate as the State Branch of the federally registered Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation. The Tasmanian Branch represents around 8000 members and in total the ANMF across Australia represents over 300,000 nurses, midwives and care staff. ANMF members are employed in a wide range of workplaces (private and public, urban and remote) such as health and community services, aged care facilities, universities, the armed forces, statutory authorities, local government, offshore territories and more.

The core business of the ANMF is the industrial and professional representation of nurses, midwives and the broader nursing team, through the activities of a national office and branches in every state and territory. The role of the ANMF is to provide a high standard of leadership, industrial, educational and professional representation and service to members. This includes concentrating on topics such as education, policy and practice, industrial issues such as wages and professional matters and broader issues which affect health such as policy, funding and care delivery. ANMF also actively advocates for the community where decisions and policy is perceived to be detrimental to good, safe patient care.