

Teacher Health and Wellbeing

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Consultation Draft

1. Overview

Every child in Northern Territory schools has the right to be safe from harm, and to receive a quality education. Children rely on teachers to provide a safe and nurturing learning environment and most teachers have strengths and skills that help them to achieve this. However sometimes teachers have particular circumstances that can make this more difficult than usual. This can include if a teacher has a health issue that affects their ability to work safely and appropriately with children.

Many teachers have health issues that do not affect their ability to practise their profession, and the existence of a health issue alone does not automatically mean that those teachers are unable to teach children. In some circumstances however, a health issue can impede a teacher's ability and suitability to work safely with children, or teach to the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (the Standards). This is where we, the Teacher Registration Board of the Northern Territory, need to know about these health issues, and once we know about them, we can work with teachers to influence positive health and wellbeing outcomes and wherever possible, keep teachers in the profession.

Teachers have a responsibility to ensure they monitor their own health status, speak up when they identify or experience health issues, and seek help for themselves or other teachers when needed. Together, we can make sure that all Territory children have teachers that keep them safe at school and assist them to learn to their full potential.

2. Purpose

This policy conveys our commitment to promoting positive health and wellbeing outcomes among the Northern Territory teaching profession. We also outline our expectations of teachers in monitoring their health, and notifying us when a health issue becomes a health impairment. This policy also:

- Places child safety and quality teaching at the centre of all of our health impairment considerations.
- Supports us to achieve our functions of ensuring that only people who are competent, and fit and proper are registered or authorised to teach.
- Clearly sets out the obligations of teachers to report health impairments, so that all teachers are aware of what we expect and how they can expect to be treated.
- Assists us in ensuring that the professional and community expectations of teacher conduct and capability are maintained.

3. Scope

This policy applies to all registered teachers and authorised persons in the Northern Territory.

4. Definitions

Word / Term	Definition
Authorised person	a person who has been granted an authority to teach by the Board.
Children	for the purpose of this policy, means a child or young person who attends school in the Northern Territory.
Eligibility for registration	the criteria that a person must meet pertaining to the qualifications, competence, fitness and propriety of the person, to be able to be registered or authorised as a teacher in the Northern Territory

Word / Term	Definition
Health impairment	for the purpose of this policy, is where a health issue affects, or potentially affects, the ability for a teacher to remain eligible for registration or authorisation.
Health issue	for the purpose of this policy, means a physical or mental impairment, disability, condition or disorder, including substance abuse and dependence.
Health practitioner	a qualified provider responsible for delivering health and medical services including physical and mental health, primary health and specialist medical treatment services.
School	for the purpose of this policy, are places of learning where teachers are employed to teach, or lead a course of instruction for, children.
Teacher	means a person who holds interim, provisional or full registration in the Northern Territory or an authorised person.

5. Policy

5.1 Principles

- Children in the Northern Territory benefit from having teachers who are healthy, well, and thriving in their profession.
- We respect the rights of children to an education.
- We do not discriminate against those with health impairments; our primary concern is ensuring all teachers who are registered or authorised to teach are able to work safely and appropriately with children, and can teach to the Standards.
- We operate from a supportive framework for teachers affected by health impairments, with our main goal being to assist teachers to manage and overcome circumstances of health impairment to ensure that, where possible, they are able to safely remain in the profession.
- Where a health impairment affects a teacher's ability to remain registered or authorised to teach, we will make a decision about the teacher's registration or authorisation fairly, efficiently and without prejudice.
- We recognise, consider and respect the privacy, dignity and rights of teachers when investigating health impairments.
- We consider and accommodate the individual attributes, needs and circumstances of each teacher through our processes. This includes the specific physical, mental and intellectual needs of the teacher.

5.2 Legislative basis

The requirement for teachers to notify the Board of health impairments are contained within the requirements for teachers to provide their personal details to the Board in accordance with section 28, section 33(2)(a), section 41(3)(a)(i) and 46(2) of the *Teacher Registration (Northern Territory) Act 2004* (the Act).

The definition of personal details in the Act includes “*details of any physical or mental impairment, disability, condition or disorder, including substance abuse or dependence, that the person has and that may affect the person's eligibility for registration or authorisation*”.

The recording of personal details by the Board is in accordance with section 26(2)(a) of the Act.

In order to decide whether a person is eligible, or remains eligible, for teacher registration, the Board enacts its power in section 50(3)(b) of the Act, and the Board’s decision-making Framework.

5.3 Requirements of teachers

Teachers are professionally and ethically obligated to ensure they are physically and mentally capable of protecting the safety of children they teach.

We expect teachers to monitor their health and wellbeing on an ongoing basis.

In accordance with our Act, teachers must report certain health issues to us, at the time of applying for registration, renewing registration or when a change occurs to a teacher’s health status.

Not all health issues need to be notified to us. We are only interested in **serious, significant** health issues that affect a teacher’s competence to teach and/or their fitness and propriety. In other words, their eligibility for registration.

If a teacher identifies that they have a health issue that affects their eligibility for registration, we consider this to be a health impairment.

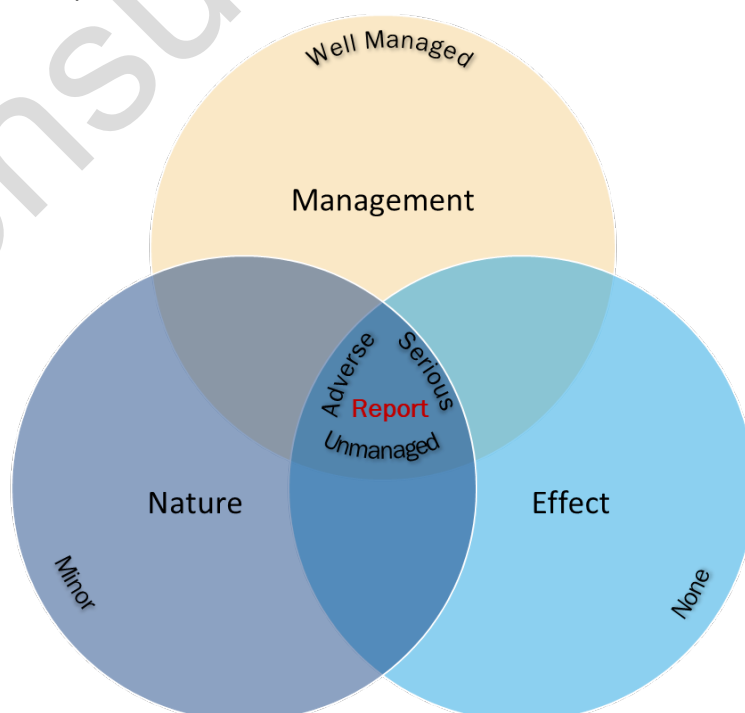
A health issue becomes a health impairment if it affects a teacher’s ability and suitability to work safely and appropriately with children and/or to perform the role of a teacher.

In particular, health impairments affect a teacher’s ability to:

- exercise judgement;
- maintain behavioural and motor control;
- demonstrate coordination, concentration and/or alertness;
- protect children from harm; and/or
- teach to the Standards.

A health impairment is reportable to us where its **nature** is **serious**, its **effect** on a teacher’s behaviour or judgement is **adverse**, and it is **unmanaged**. Refer to Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: How to identify a health impairment



Teachers are **not** required to notify the Board of short term, minor illnesses or other conditions that are able to be remedied, managed, controlled or recovered from in such a way that renders the condition to have no effect on the person's eligibility for registration. This includes those that are:

- managed by an aid, implement or support such as prescription glasses or hearing aids;
- temporary, short-term or occasional health issues with mild, short-term effects;
- treated to the extent that the effects of the health issue are not adverse, such as through medication or rehabilitation; or
- remedied through time, intervention or correction such as sick leave, surgery or devices such as casts, splints or braces.

Teachers must continuously monitor their own physical and mental health, including substance use, and notify the Board if they develop a health impairment.

Any changes to a teacher's physical or mental condition must be notified to the Board within 90 days of the change occurring, in accordance with the requirement to notify the Board of changes to personal details.

This notification must be made regardless of whether the health impairment has caused or contributed to an actual incident, accident or other adverse event in a school environment.

5.4 Considerations of the Board

Once we receive notice from a teacher that they have a health impairment, we conduct an initial assessment of that notification to determine what we do next.

In determining whether a person remains eligible to teach in the presence of a health impairment, we consider the same things as for any matter where a person's eligibility for registration is in question.

The only distinctions between our decisions regarding matters where a health impairment is identified as a risk factor for a person, are that we may:

- Require the teacher to undergo a medical assessment;
- Engage an appropriate health practitioner to engage with the teacher, assess the teacher or provide us with advice;
- Require the teacher to engage with an appropriate health practitioner to assist them to reach or maintain eligibility for registration.

As with all of our decisions, we may request and consider, any information that we deem to be relevant to help us to make a decision. This may include self-reported information, employer information, and historical and contemporary health information.

Some of these assessment processes, such as medical assessments, require the consent of the teacher. Some of the assessment processes, such as requesting information from an employer, do not require the consent of the teacher. We will work with teachers to ensure consent is obtained where required, and that teachers understand their rights and responsibilities.

We will adhere to all relevant legislation regarding teacher registration, information privacy, anti-discrimination and health management.

5.5 Protective Factors

We realise that prevention is the best way to ensure our teaching profession is healthy and thriving. Protective factors are those that work to reduce any risks associated with health impairments. We can implement some protective factors, to assist teachers in improving their health, understanding their

obligations and responsibilities, but we also need teachers to play their part in looking after themselves and others. We have included some ideas here for how we can all contribute to positive health and wellbeing outcomes for teachers.

WHAT WE CAN DO

- Partner with specialised health and wellbeing services to help guide us in the development and implementation of health and wellbeing promotional material and information for teachers.
- Offer professional learning opportunities to assist teachers in understanding their obligations and responsibilities.
- Encourage teachers to ask for our help and to proactively speak with us about their health concerns.
- Work to de-stigmatise health impairments and adopt a supportive approach to helping teachers achieve a state of good health and wellness.
- Create and maintain accessible communication pathways so that teachers can easily seek our help and talk to us when they have issues.
- Practice what we preach, and look out for our colleagues and others in the teaching profession.

WHAT YOU CAN DO FOR YOURSELF

- Children need their teachers to be supported. Realise that it's ok to ask for help when you need it – from us, from your employer, from a health professional or from your colleagues and friends.
- Monitor your health and wellbeing on an ongoing basis. Find regular supportive health professionals that will work with you on health promotion activities and help you when you need it.
- Discover what helps to reduce your stress and makes you feel well, and spend dedicated time to doing these things.
- Take time out when you need to.
- Join professional networks and associations – they can provide fantastic support for you in your journey as a teacher.
- Reflect regularly on your practice and engage in professional learning.
- Join community clubs or associations, start a hobby or find special interest groups to broaden your activity levels and social interaction outside of your workplace.

WHAT YOU CAN DO FOR OTHERS

- Create or join professional networks and participate actively in these. Build supportive relationships with your colleagues.
- If you are concerned about another teacher's health or wellbeing, don't ignore it. Talk to them or another trusted person about your concerns.
- Participate in work health and safety committees, forums and discussions in your workplace. Raise health and safety issues with your employer.
- Join advocacy groups relevant to the teaching profession. Assist other teachers to access these if they need to.
- Mentor and guide other teachers, particularly those who are new to the profession or new to the Northern Territory.
- Celebrate the achievements, milestones and goals of your colleagues.
- Promote healthy activities in your workplace and/or school community.
- Check in with your colleagues on a regular basis, make sure they are ok and that they know you are there for them.

6. Review

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