

## Position Statement

# The midwife is the first choice of health professional for childbearing women

### Background

Skilled health personnel, as referenced by SDG indicator 3.1.21, are competent maternal and newborn health (MNH) professionals, who have been educated, trained and regulated to national and international standards. Competent healthcare professionals, including midwives, nurses, obstetricians, paediatricians and anaesthetists, who provide care during childbirth are often referred to as “skilled birth attendants” or SBAs<sup>2</sup>.

Analyses in the 2021 State of the World’s Midwifery (SoWMy) report indicate that fully educated, licensed, and integrated midwives, supported by interdisciplinary teams and an enabling environment, can deliver about 90% of essential sexual, reproductive, maternal, infant and adolescent health (SRMNAH) interventions across the life course, yet they account for just 8% of the SRMNAH workforce.<sup>3</sup>

Furthermore, universal coverage of midwife-delivered interventions would avert 67% of maternal deaths, 64% of neonatal deaths, and 65% of stillbirths, allowing 4.3 million lives to be saved annually by 2035 <sup>4</sup>.

ICM believes that the midwife is the most appropriate health care professional to provide care to women and gender diverse people during pregnancy, childbirth, and the postnatal period. Everyone should have access to midwives and midwife-led care from the onset of pregnancy without the need to consult other healthcare professionals first.

In the context of widespread discussion about the global consensus on skilled attendance at childbirth and the recognition of the central role of the midwife, ICM has recognised a need to identify the midwife specifically as the most appropriate health care professional delivering skilled care during pregnancy, childbirth and the postnatal period.

## Position

The ICM recognises midwives as the professional of choice for childbearing women and gender diverse people globally. This universal standard is based on initial and ongoing competency-based midwifery education. ICM promotes the Midwifery Model of Care<sup>5</sup> based on respect for human dignity, compassion, and the promotion of human rights for all persons.

There is a global shortage of 900,00 midwives, and ICM recognises the vital role that other competent MNH health professionals play in saving the lives of both mothers and babies, especially in low- and middle-income countries. Midwives will work in partnership with all levels of health workers to make childbearing safe, while at the same time aspiring to achieve universal care by midwives for all.

In all collaborative work, ICM will promote and endorse midwives and midwifery skills as defined by the Definition of the Midwife and the ICM Essential Competencies for Basic Midwifery Practice, as vital to the health and wellbeing of women and newborns. This belief will underpin all ICM collaborative efforts. Where ICM's position is compromised in global negotiations, in order to move forward, it will proceed to issue a parallel statement endorsing the value of midwifery care in achieving the above.

## Recommendations

Member associations are encouraged to promote and endorse midwives and midwifery skills, as defined by ICM core documents and position statements, as vital to the health and wellbeing of women and gender diverse people, and newborns.

Member associations are encouraged to use this position statement, as needed, as a guide for expanding education programmes and regulatory frameworks, which will lead to an increased number of competent midwives in their country practising the full scope of midwifery, in order better to serve childbearing women and their families.

## Related ICM Documents

- o ICM. 2019. ICM Essential Competencies of Midwifery Practice
- o ICM. 2021. Global Standards for Midwifery Education
- o ICM. 2021. Guidance for meeting the ICM Global Standards for Midwifery Education (2021): Practical/Clinical Experience
- o ICM. 2011. International Definition of the Midwife
- o ICM. 2011. Global Standards for Midwifery Regulation

## Other Relevant Documents

- o UN. 2015. Every Woman Every Child. Global strategy for Women's and Children's Health.
- o UNFPA. 2021. The State of the World's Midwifery Report

- o Definition of skilled health personnel providing care during childbirth: the 2018 joint statement by WHO, UNFPA, UNICEF, ICM, ICN, FIGO and IPA <https://apps.who.int/iris/bitstream/handle/10665/272818/WHO-RHR-18.14-eng.pdf>

**Adopted at Glasgow International Council meeting, 2008**

Reviewed and adopted at Prague Council Meeting 2014.

Revised and adopted at Bali Council meeting, 2023

*Due for next review, 2026*