

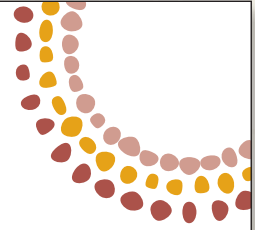


RAHC
REMOTE AREA HEALTH CORPS

Code of Conduct



Funded by the
Australian Government



Welcome to the Remote Area Health Corps

Remote Area Health Corps (RAHC) was established in 2008 to supplement the efforts of Aboriginal Medical Services (AMS) and the Northern Territory Government Department of Health in their health workforce activities. Specifically, RAHC aims to attract, recruit, place and support urban-based health professionals in short-term paid placements. The program seeks to mobilise urban-based health professionals and provide the required training and support to assist them to make the successful transition to remote practice.

While this Code of Conduct (the Code) is broadly consistent with those that most health professionals would adhere to in any workplace it also recognises the unique and challenging issues that a RAHC health professional may encounter in a remote setting. The Code aims to provide clear guidance on the standards that RAHC requires for everyone representing the organisation.

All RAHC health professionals (whether engaged as an employee or contractor) are expected to work in accordance with the principles, expectations and standards of this Code of Conduct.

In addition, registered health professionals are also bound by the conduct requirements of their relevant regulatory or professional body.

Please read this document carefully so that you fully understand its contents.

Use this time to consider your expectations and aspirations for your placement with RAHC. We believe that the principles, expectations and standards outlined in this Code provide a basis for you to achieve the most from your experience.

We then ask you to acknowledge your acceptance of the Code by signing the appropriate page and then send it back to us.

The Board and staff of RAHC believe that the opportunity to provide primary health care in remote Aboriginal communities and work with a supportive team is a great privilege and opportunity. We wish you all the best with your endeavours and stand ready to support you to ensure this opportunity delivers the best possible health outcomes for those we seek to serve and for you personally.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'P Roberts'.

Philip Roberts
General Manager

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Photographs used in this handbook were taken in the Northern Territory communities of Ampilatwatja, Ti Tree, Imanpa and Galiwin'ku. Permission was sought from these communities and from all individuals or guardians of individuals, before photography commenced. All photographs are copyright of the Remote Area Health Corps.

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Introduction

The purpose of this Code of Conduct (the Code) is to define the standards of behaviour and conduct expected from you when undertaking a placement with Remote Area Health Corps (RAHC). These standards apply to your personal and professional dealings with the broader community and its members, the health service, your colleagues, service management and the staff of RAHC.

You are representing RAHC to the community and health service so we request that you always act in RAHC's best interests. The nature of placements with RAHC in remote communities requires you to conduct yourself in a professional manner and maintain these standards both inside the workplace and outside the workplace in the broader community, where you will continue to be perceived as representing RAHC.

Adherence to the standards contained in this Code is fundamental to building a partnership of trust between the community, RAHC, the health services and the government.

RAHC expects that the delivery of all health services along with personal and professional interactions incorporate the following principles:

- safety
- professionalism
- respect
- honesty
- integrity.

Scope

The Code applies to all RAHC health professionals including employees, contractors, consultants and anyone who exercises power, represents and/or controls resources for, or on behalf of, RAHC, collectively referred to in this Code as 'Health Professionals'.

The Code provides a clear framework for the standards expected during your placement with RAHC and, where applicable, when your actions outside of a placement may impact upon RAHC and/or the broader community and health service.

As a health professional, you must observe the principles, standards, ethics and behaviour outlined in this Code of Conduct.

In addition, as a registered health professional you are also bound by the conduct requirements of your relevant regulatory or professional body as well as the standards and policies that apply at the health centre or program where you are working.

Non-compliance may result in disciplinary action, ranging from performance counselling to termination of employment, depending on the severity of the breach. Contractors may have their contracts with RAHC terminated.

Working environment

RAHC aims to support and be part of an environment that values safety, ethical and moral behaviour, ongoing improvement and employee participation in that process. We welcome your feedback and input on this Code and any insights you may obtain from particular situations or experiences.

In particular, RAHC health professionals may work in communities where there is, or has been, some instability or other challenging experiences.

Accordingly, RAHC does not want any health professional placing themselves in a situation which may instigate or exacerbate tension or violence or which may threaten the safety or security of any RAHC health professional or community member.

RAHC aims to deal with any adverse situations as soon as possible and at low a level as possible. We seek to work with all parties to achieve appropriate outcomes.

The Code assumes that all local laws are relevant and apply to your place of work and your own conduct. A health professional should seek to understand the community standards and local laws that apply for their placement especially around the possession and consumption of alcohol.

Please contact a RAHC team member if you are uncertain how to act or have any concerns.

Ethical behaviours

Ethics are the principles by which our actions are judged to be good, bad, right or wrong. It is not only a matter of obeying the law, or adhering to rules, regulations or policies. Ethics go beyond this to include how we make decisions as to what is the right thing to do.

All RAHC health professionals must respect the context, values and beliefs of the environment and culture in which they work and must behave in a manner that is considered ethical and law abiding. In particular, RAHC seeks to create a harmonious relationship with the local community and the health service so your decisions and actions must take that broader relationship into consideration.

The decisions about the right thing to do apply to your personal conduct and include consideration of work habits, communication and dress. They also extend to the nature of your relationships with your colleagues and peers, management, broader community and its members and your ability to perform your role effectively in that setting.

In deciding whether a particular action is ethical you may consider:

- is the action you are going to undertake consistent with your own personal standards of right or wrong?
- is your action going to be considered by others as being ethical and morally correct?
- will your action place you and/or others in a compromising position or endanger the safety of others?
- is the action consistent with your professional group's standards of ethical practice?
- how easily could you justify your actions if you were called upon to do so?
- are you prepared for your actions to be made public and placed under review?

If the RAHC General Manager or their delegated representative considers your actions to be unethical or inappropriate you may face disciplinary action up to and including removal from the community where you are working and termination of the placement. This process would allow for natural justice and disputing parties would be requested to provide their perspective on the matter involved.

Frequently asked questions

Why does RAHC have a Code of Conduct?

A Code of Conduct sets standards and provides information to assist in the understanding of the ethical values and standards of behaviour that apply in daily professional activities.

These standards are fundamental to building a partnership of trust between RAHC, the community and a range of stakeholders including health services, Government and other individuals and organisations.

These standards must be adhered to by all RAHC health professionals.

Who does the Code apply to?

This Code applies to all RAHC health professionals including employees, contractors, consultants and anyone who exercises power, represents and/or controls resources for, or on behalf of, RAHC.

What happens if the Code is not followed?

If the Code is not followed, performance feedback will take place with the outcomes ranging from counselling to termination of a placement, depending on the severity of the breach.

What do I do if I'm not sure?

If you're not sure please discuss any aspect of the Code that you are not sure of with a RAHC team member. Where there are uncertainties related to health care delivery, you should discuss these with your manager (i.e. the health centre or program manager) in the first instance.

What do I do if I see someone else not following the Code?

If you believe someone you work with is not following the Code, please discuss the situation with either the person themselves, your manager or supervisor at the health centre or a RAHC team member. You should be able to discuss these issues in confidence without fear or risk of retribution.

It is preferable to resolve an issue at the lowest practical level possible. However, RAHC is ready to provide support and advocacy when required.



The Code of Conduct

1. Anti-discrimination and equal opportunity

RAHC is committed to providing a working environment where all participants are treated fairly and with respect.

Discrimination, vilification, sexual harassment, bullying and victimisation based on race, colour, religion, gender, age, sexuality, marital status, disability and/or other factors unrelated to legitimate business considerations are unlawful and unacceptable and may be considered a breach of this Code.

You are entitled to your personal preferences in private or political matters. No pressure will be placed on anyone to influence those preferences or associated activities and no approval or disapproval should be shown by anyone in their RAHC role of anybody's private or political preferences or activities.

2. Violent or aggressive behaviour

RAHC will not tolerate actual or threatened violent or aggressive behaviour including abusive language in the workplace. If you believe your personal safety is at imminent risk, you have the right to withdraw from the area.

You are required to report all incidents of violent or aggressive behaviour to the health centre or program manager who will investigate any incidents with a view to preventing or minimising the risk of aggression and violence in the future. A member of the RAHC team should be kept advised of any such reports.

If a RAHC health professional engages in actual or threatened violent or aggressive behaviour they may be disciplined and their placement terminated.

3. Personal conduct

Your personal conduct should be fully consistent with this Code.

You must respect the context, values and beliefs of the environment and culture in which you work and must behave in a manner that is considered ethical and law abiding.

Since you are representing RAHC to the community and health service you must act in RAHC's best interests. The nature of placements with RAHC in remote communities requires you to conduct yourself in a professional manner and maintain these standards both inside the workplace and outside the workplace in the broader community, where you will continue to be perceived as representing RAHC.

Registered health professionals are also bound by the conduct requirements of their relevant regulatory or professional body as well as the standards and policies that apply at the health centre or program where you are working.

You are required to deal fairly and honestly with your colleagues, management, stakeholders and the broader community and its members and treat them with dignity and respect.

You are required to conduct yourself professionally and courteously at all times.

Any conduct or behaviour that is inappropriate, intimidating, discriminatory or offensive is unacceptable and may be considered a breach of this Code.

You will be working in a remote setting in a small team. You should exercise discretion and judgment in all matters and seek to contribute to the effective function of the team.

In particular, you should refrain from making gratuitous remarks and airing personal opinions about the personal and professional conduct of colleagues, community members, community governance structures and other professional or community-based networks or structures.

Where you have concerns about the actions of others that you believe affect the conduct of your work or the proper operations of the workplace in terms of proper care delivery, you should raise these in a professional manner with the relevant health centre or program manager. If you are uncertain how to act then you should consult with a RAHC team member.

Health services, health centre or program managers or other stakeholders are entitled to raise concerns about individual actions that are unnecessarily disruptive or unprofessional in the respective workplace or community setting. These concerns will be dealt with in a transparent and fair way, with all parties consulted and counselled about a course of action that will likely lead to the best outcome for the community and its members, health service and RAHC health professional.

All complaints or grievances will be managed first through the relevant procedures and systems of the health service or program. Where this is not possible, you may use the RAHC incident and/or complaint reporting procedures.

4. Personal and professional boundaries

You are responsible for ensuring you maintain appropriate personal and professional boundaries between yourself and others.

Personal and professional boundaries are based on trust, respect and the appropriate use of power.

These boundaries relate to matters such as inappropriate sexual behaviour, close and exclusive emotional relationships, public displays of affection, and relationships that involve preferential treatment or an improper use of position of authority and may be in breach of this Code.

A breach of personal and professional boundaries may include, but is not limited to:

- excessive self-disclosure of intimate or personal life
- unwelcome interest or questioning about a non-work related matter
- verbal and/or physical invasion of privacy including personal space
- intentional comments that cause a party to feel uncomfortable or uneasy
- excessively friendly, informal or intimate behaviour
- harassment, discrimination or bullying.

5. Workplace environment

RAHC is committed, in partnership with health services and programs, to provide a safe, healthy and productive workplace environment.

Alcohol and other drugs

The abuse of prescription or over the counter drugs and/or alcohol or the use and/or possession of illicit drugs is not acceptable.

The possession or consumption of alcohol that violates local laws is unacceptable and may result in termination of your placement.

Health professionals on duty or on call should not be under the influence of, or suffering the effects of, drug or alcohol consumption.

The consumption of alcohol, where it affects your ability to perform your role or affects other workers' ability to perform their roles, invites adverse work and community relations, compromises workplace safety or where it violates the law, is unacceptable.

Where the use of prescription drugs affects your ability to perform in your role, you must discuss this with the health centre or program manager and/or RAHC management as appropriate. The relevant manager may, at their discretion, request that you step-down from your regular duties until such time as you are not under the negative influence of such substances.

You may discuss the details of your condition confidentially with the RAHC Clinical Manager prior to revealing your circumstances to RAHC or other management, provided this does not unreasonably delay your advice to relevant managers.

RAHC can provide confidential support to you if you require assistance in dealing with any substance abuse. Please contact the RAHC Clinical Manager or a RAHC team member if you require assistance in this area.

Smoking

You must observe health centre and local policy in relation to smoking.

Smoking in a health centre or any accommodation provided is prohibited.

Smoking in any vehicle owned, leased or operated by RAHC is not permitted.

Smoking breaks are not provided during working hours. You may smoke during unpaid meal or tea breaks and before or after shifts or as agreed with your manager.

6. Working hours

Hours of operation vary between health services and programs. You are required to report to work as rostered or as directed by the health centre or program manager or delegate, for the hours as outlined in your employment agreement.

You are required at all times to adhere to the duty hours and on-call commitments specified by the health centre or program.

You are required to be punctual and diligent in all your work duties.

You should report to work as required and when an absence is unavoidable, promptly notify the appropriate person of the reason.

Duty hours

You are required to be present at the health centre for the specified rostered hours. The rostered hours will vary depending upon the role a health professional is engaged to perform. A roster should be provided upon arrival at the health centre.

While on placement you report to the health centre or program manager. It is at the manager's discretion to approve an absence at a specified rostered time.

On call

Health professionals on call must be contactable at all times as per local policies.

If you are on call and receive a call-out you must be present at the health centre within the time frames specified by the health centre manager unless doing so presents an unreasonable risk of personal injury.

Clinical or other incidents

If you are involved in an incident of any kind you should follow the actions and reporting procedures set out by the health centre or program under which you are working.

If the health centre or program manager is unable to provide appropriate guidance, the employee should refer to alternate sources such as the Northern Territory Department of Health (NT DoH) Atlas or contact a RAHC team member for assistance.

A RAHC team member must also be notified at the earliest possible time, and in situations involving possible insurance claims, within 48 hours of the incident.

All reports forwarded to RAHC will be managed in accordance to the RAHC Privacy Policy.

Leaving RAHC

When you finish a RAHC placement you must return any RAHC or health centre or program property and equipment and items containing business information and all forms of identification relevant to the work place. This includes intellectual property that may have been created while working with RAHC.

7. Confidentiality

Obligations of confidentiality as set out hereafter apply to you whilst working for RAHC and extend beyond the date of termination of your employment or contract with RAHC.

You agree that you will not, either during or after your employment or contract with RAHC, use or disclose confidential information or otherwise seek to exploit or elicit confidential information without the prior written consent of RAHC.

You agree to prevent the use or disclosure of confidential information unless the information lawfully comes into the public domain through no fault of your own, or you are required to disclose the information by RAHC or by law. In this later case you agree to give notice in writing to RAHC before making any such disclosure.

Confidential information includes all oral, written, or conceptual information, of RAHC or its clients such as records, documents, accounts, plans, formulae, designs, creative concepts specifications, correspondence, letters and papers of every description as well as clinical information that in any way can identify the individual or community where you work. It also includes electronically recorded data, all copies or extracts relating to the affairs, transactions or business of RAHC or any of its clients or which may come into your possession during your work with RAHC.

You will respect the privacy of colleagues, clients and community members and refrain from unnecessary and gratuitous dialogue on the behaviours or circumstances of others. This applies to the place of work, the local community and/or other organisations and networks.

You will not disclose to any external parties inappropriate information regarding the decisions or practices of the health centre or other setting in which you work. If you are uncertain about any actions or comments you should consult a RAHC team member.

You should disclose to RAHC any academic or research studies you are undertaking, or plan to undertake, that involve any data gathered during, or as a result of, your placement. Specific proposals should be discussed with, and cleared by, RAHC, the relevant health centre manager and community leaders, as well as a nationally-recognised research ethics review panel.

You acknowledge that, due to the nature of the duties and responsibilities of your work with RAHC, you will be in possession of knowledge and documents, which will be strictly confidential and agree to preserve the private and confidential nature of such information with vigilance and diligence.

You will immediately notify RAHC of any use or disclosure by you of confidential information under the terms of this Code or use by others that you may become aware of.

You will keep RAHC fully informed in relation to all actions, claims and demands of whatsoever nature arising out of a breach of your obligations of confidence.

8. Disclosure of Information

You may receive information or provide information to RAHC that is necessary for the organisation's interests as long as it does not breach any laws, regulations or RAHC policies. Further disclosure of that information external to RAHC should only be made with the specific authorisation of RAHC and/or the information source. Also refer to section on Confidentiality.

External disclosure of information should only be made with specific authorisation.

If you are unsure about whether it is appropriate to disclose information, seek the advice and permission of the health centre or program manager. There may be different policies for dealing with different groups, such as the public, government officials, consultants and the media. Responsibility for ensuring that any disclosure is appropriate remains with the relevant health centre or program manager at the community level or, in the case this is not applicable, with the RAHC General Manager.

9. Property and equipment

Health centre or program property and equipment, including goods, money or intellectual property must only be used for the purpose of enabling you to perform your duties.

While on placement you may have access to property and equipment in the form of, but not limited to, phones, computers, email, internet and voicemail that are provided to enhance your ability to perform your services/duties. This equipment is not be used for personal gain or any other purpose including, but not limited to:

- copying of computer software programs, regardless of whether or not the programs are protected by copyright
- falsification or improper use of corporate cards, expense accounts, petty cash funds or other similar accounts.

Any health professional found to be utilising equipment for personal use or for purposes that are considered unreasonable or illegal will face disciplinary action up to and including removal from the community where you are working and termination of the placement.

Property and equipment belonging to the health centre, program or RAHC is not to be removed from the premises without written authorisation. If removal is necessary, then approval must be obtained from the health centre or program manager (or where appropriate RAHC management).

If you are in control of any RAHC, health centre or program property and equipment, particularly cash or other valuables, you are personally accountable for them. If an item is lost, stolen or misplaced while under your control, it must be reported to the relevant manager as soon as possible.

We ask all health professionals to take particular care with items such as mobile or satellite phones and laptops which, for example, should not be left in a visible position within an unoccupied vehicle.

You may be held liable for the replacement cost of lost equipment items should they be lost through careless or irresponsible actions.

RAHC health professionals are responsible for leaving the accommodation they occupy in a reasonable condition and as clean as practicably possible.

10. Systems, Internet, Email and Social Media

Health centre or program property and equipment, including computer and communication equipment and systems must only be used for the purpose of enabling you to perform your duties.

If you are found to be utilising equipment or systems (including social media) for excessive personal use, for purposes which are considered unreasonable, unacceptable or illegal you may face disciplinary action and possible termination of your placement.

Systems

When using the systems in a health centre or other official premises you should:

- ensure appropriate physical and technical measures and safeguards are taken when using workstations to ensure the confidentiality, integrity and availability of sensitive information and that access to any sensitive information is restricted to authorised users
- in particular, laptops and other mobile devices, due to their mobility, should be treated with particular care to help safeguard against equipment loss, data loss or unauthorised access to the system or network
- manage user accounts and passwords provided to access IT systems with due care and ensure usage complies with the requirements of the relevant health service or program
- comply with requirements around physical building security as this is one of the most vulnerable points for most organisations when it comes to data or equipment theft.

Internet use

When using the internet in a health centre or other work premises you should:

- not download, view or distribute material which could be considered offensive or illegal, such as pornographic or racist material
- take care not to infringe copyright when downloading material, or forwarding it to others
- not attempt to gain unauthorised access to information – otherwise known as hacking
- not use, or allow someone else to use, any computer system or software to defraud or obtain money or service of value by false pretenses, promises or representations
- not order goods or services for personal use, or enter into any other personal contract, via the internet unless authorised to do so - RAHC will not accept liability for any such contract formed
- not destroy, alter or prevent access to, or otherwise interfere with information on a computer, unless authorised to do so
- not download large files which will slow the system unless permitted to do so for work purposes.

Email use

All health professionals have a responsibility to ensure the same courtesy and consideration applies to writing and sending emails as would apply to writing a memo or letter. When writing emails from a community and/or health centre or other official computer, you should not:

- send obscene, offensive or damaging material
- send threatening material, or material intended to frighten or harass
- send defamatory material
- send emails to friends, family or colleagues that have culturally offensive comments, or opinions regarding the community, centre or program management where you are working
- infringe copyright
- send unsolicited advertising or similar activities and/or send 'chain' emails.

Social media

Social media encompasses a broad range of online activities which includes social networking sites such as Facebook, video and photo sharing websites, online forums, blogs, discussion groups, chat rooms, wikis, instant messaging, professional networks, websites and applications developed for the sharing of user-generated content – be it written, graphic or audio-based – for the exchange of comments by individuals.

RAHC does not seek to discourage nor unduly limit any health professional's personal expression or online activities however we do ask health professionals to always consider how their contributions on social media will be perceived by others, and how it reflects on themselves, RAHC and the health services and programs where they have worked. For example, your view may be assumed to be the view of a health service or RAHC, even if the intention was to express a personal opinion. Also, posts may stay in the public domain for a long time and could ultimately end up on the front page of a newspaper or as evidence in court.

Where comments or a profile can identify you as a RAHC health professional you must:

- be mindful that your behaviour is bound by RAHC's Code of Conduct and as a registered health professional the applicable code for your registering organisation
- only disclose and discuss publicly available information
- ensure that all content published is accurate and not misleading
- expressly state on all postings (identifying you as a RAHC health professional) the stated views are your own and are not those of RAHC
- be polite and respectful to all people you interact with
- adhere to the Terms of Use of the relevant social media platform/ website, as well as copyright, privacy, defamation, contempt of court, discrimination, harassment and other applicable laws.

You must not:

- post material that is offensive, obscene, defamatory, threatening, harassing, bullying, discriminatory, hateful, racist, sexist, infringes copyright, constitutes a contempt of court, breaches a Court suppression order or is otherwise unlawful
- be so strong in your criticism of the health centre or program management and administration or RAHC that it could disrupt the workplace
- make a personal attack about anyone connected with your placement
- make unreasonable criticism of RAHC's clients and other stakeholders
- imply that you are authorised to speak as a representative of RAHC, nor give the impression that the views you express are those of RAHC
- use or disclose any confidential information obtained in your capacity as a RAHC health professional
- make any comment or post any material that might otherwise cause damage to RAHC's reputation or bring it into disrepute or the reputation of any customer, client or stakeholder of RAHC.

11. Conflict of interest

A conflict of interest exists where loyalties are divided. You have a potential conflict of interest if, in the course of your work, any decision you make provides any improper gain or benefit to yourself or a third party.

It is difficult to formulate an all-embracing set of guidelines regarding potential conflicts of interest. Specific questions regarding situations not clearly covered must be determined on a case by case basis. The principles to consider are:

- your capacity to influence dealings that RAHC or the health centre or program may have with a third party
- the improper personal benefit that may flow to you or a relative, friend or other third party through the exercise of that influence
- whether the activity is fraudulent, corrupt or is otherwise an irregular transaction.

Where you believe you may have a conflict of interest or a potential conflict of interest you must notify the health centre or program manager of that potential conflict and may be required to remove yourself from the workplace activity. The RAHC General Manager should also be notified.

In specific circumstances RAHC may ask for a written declaration of any actual or potential conflict of interest from you, as it may relate to a specific activity you are working on. This written declaration will be kept on your RAHC file until we are notified by you that the association with the potential conflict no longer exists.

Any situation potentially involving direct or indirect conflict of interest should be avoided unless consent is provided in writing by the health centre or program manager or RAHC General Manager or a nominated delegate.

Outside business activities

You should take care to ensure that active participation in any outside work or business does not affect the performance of your duties during work hours or create a potential or actual conflict of interest.

12. Fraud, corruption and irregular transactions

You must not engage in any fraudulent activity. Fraudulent activity may include, but is not limited to:

- misuse of organisation credit cards or fuel cards
- intentional submission of incorrect timesheet, overtime or invoices
- intentional incorrect submission of expense claims.

As part of its obligations under law, RAHC will fully co-operate with any investigation by law enforcement or regulatory authorities.

13. Health, Safety and Environment (HSE)

As far as reasonably practical, it is your responsibility to:

- ensure your personal safety and the safety of others at all times
- comply with appropriate HSE policies and procedures
- communicate effectively in the interests of HSE
- carry out emergency procedures when required
- report any irregularities or dangerous occurrences in the prescribed manner
- wear safety clothing and personal protective equipment as supplied
- co-operate with your management team in meeting HSE requirements.

You must not interfere with or misuse anything provided for your health and safety, and protection of the environment.

14. Review and revision

RAHC reserves the right to modify, replace or terminate this Code.

15. Further resources and information

If you require further information or reading, you can review the following:

- AHPRA Code of Conduct
- NT Worksafe
- RAHC Cultural Orientation Handbook.



Respect should be an inherent part of
your interaction with everybody within
the community.



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