

## Using Social Media

**Summary** This Policy Directive sets out mandatory requirements and provides practical guidance to assist NSW Health staff in understanding and meeting their professional and ethical obligations when using social media.

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**Distributed to** Ministry of Health, Public Health System, NSW Ambulance Service

**Audience** All NSW Health staff

## Using Social Media

### Policy Statement

NSW Health supports the responsible and respectful use of social media. While social media helps staff connect, share information and advocate, it also carries risks if used inappropriately. Public trust in NSW Health depends on staff acting professionally online and protecting the safety and wellbeing of patients, families and communities.

All staff must follow the *NSW Health Code of Conduct* when using social media in an official or personal capacity. As the Code of Conduct and this Policy Directive incorporate NSW Health's CORE values, staff must uphold these values and avoid activity that could damage public trust or confidence.

This Policy Directive applies to all NSW Health staff, including employees, contractors, visiting practitioners, volunteers, students, researchers and trainers. It confirms existing obligations and sets minimum standards for official and personal use of social media, including child safe requirements in digital settings.

### Summary of Policy Requirements

#### Staff responsibility

Restricted applications (such as TikTok and DeepSeek) must not be used on government issued devices, or on personal devices used for government business, in line with cyber security directives.

Staff should be aware that social media activity is generally public and permanent, and that actions such as liking or sharing content may be interpreted as an endorsement.

All staff are expected to exercise sound judgment and maintain professional standards when engaging online. All staff are accountable for their own social media use.

#### Official use of social media

Official NSW Health social media accounts must only be established with formal approval from the Chief Executive, Secretary, or their delegate. Only authorised staff may post or engage on these accounts.

All official activity must be polite, respectful and uphold the NSW Health's CORE values. Official content must be impartial and comply with privacy, consent and child safe requirements, as well as relevant NSW Health policies.

### Personal use of social media

Staff have a right to use social media in a personal capacity; however, they must not imply they are speaking on behalf of NSW Health unless authorised. Personal use of social media must not affect public trust in NSW Health.

Staff must not post, support, share or like content that is offensive, obscene, derogatory, defamatory, threatening or hateful, or that is reasonably likely to cause serious harm.

Staff must not post photos, videos or information about other staff, patients or members of the public without consent.

### Child safety

Staff must take particular care when using digital platforms in any context involving children or young people. Consent must be obtained from a parent or legal guardian before sharing any image, video or identifying information.

Staff must not use private messaging to communicate with a child where an open or authorised channel is available. Staff must not engage in online friendships with patients or clients outside of the healthcare relationship and must comply with the *NSW Health Code of Conduct*. Any inappropriate or unlawful contact with a child online will be reported to the relevant authorities.

### Accountability and breaches

Staff are encouraged to raise concerns or complaints through internal channels. A range of formal mechanisms are available to support staff in raising issues, including through their manager, senior manager or human resources (or equivalent team, as applicable to the NSW Health agency).

Workplace issues will be managed through existing grievance, misconduct and unacceptable behaviour policies. Staff may also seek support through their union or professional association. Managers are responsible for ensuring that staff are aware of these requirements.

Breaches of this Policy Directive will be assessed on a case-by-case basis, considering the staff member's role and seniority, the nature of the content or activity, whether the staff member was identifiable as a NSW Health employee, and the potential impact on public trust. Outcomes for breaches will vary depending on the seriousness of the matter and may include disciplinary action.

## Revision History

Version	Approved By	Amendment Notes
PD2025_043 November-2025	Secretary, NSW Health	New Policy Directive.

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## 1. Background

NSW Health supports the responsible, respectful use of social media, and the right of all individuals to express their views, support causes or engage in public discussions, including advocating in relation to their roles and health services.

Staff must be mindful of their responsibilities as public servants when engaging on social media both in their personal capacity and as employees of NSW Health.

What we say and share on social media can influence the public's trust in our health services. Maintaining that trust is essential as people of all backgrounds, identities, abilities, cultures and beliefs must feel welcome, respected and safe.

### 1.1. About this document

This Policy Directive aims to:

- Clarify the existing obligations for NSW Health staff under the relevant Codes of Conduct.
- Remind staff that participation on social media is subject to the standards of behaviour set out in the Codes of Conduct.
- Confirm that it does not change the Codes of Conduct or any other existing policies and associated requirements.
- Support the obligation of NSW Health to protect children and young people in digital and social media environments, in line with the NSW Government [Guide to the Child Safe Standards](#) administered by the Office of the Children's Guardian.

This Policy Directive applies to all NSW Health staff who are required to abide by the [NSW Health Code of Conduct](#) which includes:

- Staff who are employed in NSW Health whether on a permanent, temporary or casual basis.
- Contractors, including visiting practitioners, agency staff and volunteers.
- Students, researchers or those undertaking or delivering training in NSW Health.

This Policy Directive is to be used in conjunction with the Public Service Commission's [Use of Social Media in a Private Capacity: Guidance for NSW Government Sector Employees](#) and other relevant policies and guidelines listed in [Section 7](#) Related documents.

### 1.2. Key definitions

<b>Codes of Conduct</b>	Refers to the NSW Health Policy Directive <i>NSW Health Code of Conduct</i> ( <a href="#">PD2015_049</a> ) and the Public Service Commission's <a href="#">Code of Ethics and Conduct for NSW Government Sector Employees</a> .
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<b>NSW Health</b>	Refers to public health organisations, the NSW Ministry of Health, the Ambulance Service of NSW, and all other organisations under the control and direction of the Minister for Health or the Secretary of NSW Health.
<b>Consent</b>	<p>Permission for something to happen or agreement to do something.</p> <p>In the context of children and young people under the age of 18, consent must be obtained from a parent or legal guardian before sharing any image, video, or identifying information.</p> <p>Consent requirements for young people should be considered in line with the definition below “Children/Young people” and, where necessary, confirmed with the Legal and Regulatory Services branch in the Ministry of Health.</p>
<b>Children/Young people</b>	<p>Refers to any person under the age of 18, consistent with the NSW Government <i>Guide to the Child Safe Standards</i>.</p> <p>A young person is defined as someone aged 16 years or above but under the age of 18 years.<sup>1</sup></p>
<b>Trauma-informed</b>	<p>In a social media context means:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Realising the impact trauma can have on families, carers, organisations, communities and individuals, and understanding that all clients and staff may have their own experiences of trauma.</li> <li>• Recognising the signs of trauma, and that relationships can be the basis for healing.</li> <li>• Responding appropriately and effectively by applying the principles of trauma-informed care.</li> <li>• Seeking to prevent re-traumatisation of clients and staff.</li> </ul> <p>All social media content and interactions must consider the potential to exacerbate or cause trauma and seek to minimise this potential.<sup>2</sup></p>
<b>Post/posting</b>	Includes activities such as creating, publishing, broadcasting, blogging, tagging, uploading, commenting, sharing, re-posting and liking (or reacting to) content on social media platforms.

<sup>1</sup> *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998* (NSW), [section 3](#).

<sup>2</sup> Adapted from SAMHSA, [Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach](#), 2016.

**Social Media Platform**

For the purposes of this Policy Directive, social media platforms refer to websites, platforms and applications that enable users to connect, communicate and participate in content or information sharing, including through encrypted sites. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Social networking sites – for example, Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn.
- Internal communication tools – for example, Office 365, Microsoft Teams, Viva/Yammer, Slido.
- Video and photo sharing sites – for example, YouTube, Tik Tok, Snapchat, Flickr.
- Forums for discussion – for example, Whirlpool, Yahoo! Groups, Google Groups, Reddit, Discord.
- Blogs/comments and podcasts – including corporate, personal and those hosted by traditional media outlets.
- Micro-blogs – for example, X (formerly Twitter) and BlueSky.
- Online encyclopaedias – for example, Wikipedia.
- Instant messaging software/applications – for example, MSN, WhatsApp, iMessage, WeChat, Microsoft Teams.
- Virtual spaces or worlds – for example, the Metaverse and online gaming.

This list is not exhaustive. Past (where content remains accessible and relevant), existing and future social media platforms similar to the above-listed should be considered part of this definition and associated policy requirements.

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## 2. NSW Health CORE values

When using social media, staff are expected to act in a manner consistent with the organisation's CORE values.

The NSW Health CORE values build on the public sector core values of integrity, trust, service and accountability.

The NSW Health CORE values are:

- Collaboration
- Openness
- Respect
- Empowerment

NSW Health strives to reflect these CORE values in our workplaces and in our conduct by demonstrating the following characteristics:

- **Collaboration:** We work together, recognising the contributions of all staff, to create supportive workplaces that produce the best health outcomes.
- **Openness:** We seek to understand new perspectives to learn, grow and continuously improve. We communicate transparently to build a safe and inclusive workplace that values diverse experiences.
- **Respect:** We value one another and recognise that everyone has talents, ideas and skills to contribute. We are considerate and listen to understand.
- **Empowerment:** We are trusted and enabled to take ownership of our work and goals, make decisions and contribute our unique talents and ideas to advance NSW Health.

## 3. Official use of social media

NSW Health has official accounts on social media websites, platforms and applications that are authorised to represent the agency or health organisation. NSW Health maintains an official presence on platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, X (formerly Twitter), YouTube and LinkedIn. Authorised use of official NSW Health social media channels must be in accordance with the NSW Government [Social media guidelines](#).

Staff must have approval from their Chief Executive, Secretary (as applicable) or delegate (in accordance with local delegations) before creating an official NSW Health social media account. Only authorised staff may post or engage on these official accounts. All communication must comply with the NSW Health Policy Directive *NSW Health Public Communication Procedures* ([PD2017\\_012](#)) and the relevant Codes of Conduct.

The official use of social media includes:

- Any comment, post or video which has been authorised by the Chief Executive, Secretary (as applicable) or their delegate to be published as the position of NSW Health.

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- A staff member authorised to comment, post, share, message or engage on the official NSW Health social media accounts.

### **3.1. Key principles for official use of social media**

When authorised staff post and interact online on behalf of NSW Health, they must:

- Be polite, respectful and uphold the CORE values of NSW Health.
- Be trauma-informed.
- Represent NSW Health in a professional manner.
- Only publish information which is consistent with relevant policies and is authorised for disclosure as official information.
- Remain apolitical and impartial.
- Not express personal opinions from official NSW Health social media accounts.
- Not cross-promote personal accounts when posting on the official NSW Health social media accounts.
- Not interact with or provide comments to journalists, politicians or lobby groups in a way that could be perceived as representing NSW Health, unless authorised to do so.
- Ensure appropriate consent is obtained before posting any images, videos or stories, and that the content complies with privacy, media clearance and child safe requirements.
- Not use NSW Health official social media to perpetrate violence, such as sexual harassment, intimidation, coercion, stalking, grooming, child abuse and exploitation.

### **3.2. Using social media during caretaker periods for state elections**

During election years, special rules apply to NSW Government communications, including the use of social media platforms. NSW Health organisations are to refer to the caretaker conventions issued by the Premier's Department when there is an official caretaker period.

## **4. Personal use of social media**

Staff have the right to post or interact on social media in a personal capacity. Personal use refers to when a staff member uses their own personal account or device and posts content that is personal or does not need to be authorised by NSW Health.

### *Advocacy, expression and raising concerns*

NSW Health respects and supports the right of staff to advocate for improved working conditions and better health services. Staff are also entitled to express their personal views, including on matters affecting their work and the health system, provided this is done respectfully and in a way that does not breach their obligations under the [NSW Health Code of Conduct](#) or this Policy Directive (see [Section 6](#) Managing breaches of this policy).

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At the same time, staff are encouraged to raise concerns or complaints through internal channels, which are generally the most effective avenues for resolution or change. A range of formal and informal mechanisms are available to support staff in raising issues, including through their manager or a more senior staff member, in line with relevant NSW Health policies.

### ***Professional conduct and public trust***

Social media provides opportunities for individuals to interact, share achievements, promote expertise, network with other professionals, stay informed about developments in areas of expertise, and enhance job seeking opportunities. In some circumstances, individuals may be identifiable as NSW Health employees and their online activity may be connected to their work. In line with NSW Health's CORE values, respectful and professional online interactions are expected at all times.

NSW Government sector employees have a responsibility to maintain community trust and confidence in public institutions. Staff are expected to uphold confidence in their own ability, and that of NSW Health, to act impartially, apolitically and professionally in their official capacity.

Personal online conduct, particularly when they are identifiable as NSW Health employees, can influence public perceptions of their impartiality and professionalism. This expectation does not limit lawful union or professional association activity, as outlined in [Section 6](#).

### ***Digital conduct and accountability***

When using social media platforms staff should be mindful of the following:

- That the [NSW Health Code of Conduct](#) can extend to conduct outside the workplace, including on social media.
- If staff like, share or comment on a post, they may be perceived as endorsing the content or author. Staff should consider the context and whether their interaction gives rise to a perceived or actual conflict of interest in relation to their role.
- Personal use of social media could still identify them directly or indirectly as a staff member of NSW Health. Even if an account is anonymous (that is, without a name or photograph) staff should assume that they may be identifiable.
- Applying appropriate security on personal social media accounts can help limit exposure of a staff member's activity. However, while social media allows for altering names, content and privacy settings, any social media activity can be discovered. As such, all social media activity should be considered public and permanent.
- Social media activity can reach a wider audience than just a poster's network by being reshared and reproduced in other media without their knowledge or consent.
- If staff are wearing their NSW Health uniform or using the NSW Government or a NSW Health logo they are more easily identified as a NSW Health employee. This can create the impression they are speaking on behalf of their organisation.

- Creating content at the workplace or during work hours may raise questions about whether the staff member is appropriately using their paid work time and resources, unless occurring during approved breaks or periods of legitimate downtime.
- Creating content at the workplace or during work hours increases the risk of breaching the privacy of patients and other staff, for example if confidential patient information is visible in the background or if consent has not been obtained.
- Attempts to de-identify patients or staff for the purposes of social media content may not be effective, as individuals may still recognise themselves or be identifiable to others.
- Health practitioners must be aware of their obligations under the *Health Practitioner Regulation National Law (NSW)* and the code of conduct for their health professional board and privacy legislation. Guidance is available via [Social media: How to meet your obligations under the National Law](#), published by the Australian Health Practitioners Regulation Agency (Ahpra).

### **Restricted applications**

Applications such as TikTok and DeepSeek may not be used on government issued devices or on personal devices that are used for government business. This includes, for example, personal smart devices and laptops used to access work emails or Microsoft Teams accounts, or official systems. Staff should refer to the NSW Department of Customer Service Circular [DCS-2025-01 Cyber Security NSW Directive – Restricted Applications List](#), as amended from time to time, for details of any applications that may not be used.

## **4.1. Key principles for personal use of social media**

When using social media in a personal capacity, staff must **not** do the following:

- Indicate or give the impression that they are authorised to speak on behalf of NSW Health, unless authorised to do, or that their personal views reflect the official position of NSW Health.
- Engage in activity that may adversely affect their standing as a NSW Health employee or damage public trust in NSW Health or other government institutions. Union delegates and members are entitled to use social media for lawful trade union or professional association activity provided they have complied with the [NSW Health Code of Conduct](#) and have not implied they speak on behalf of NSW Health (see [Section 6](#) Managing breaches of this Policy Directive).
- Post anything about other staff, patients or members of the public that could be reasonably interpreted as, or contribute to, bullying, harassment or discrimination against them on the basis of their sex, race, marital status or other protected attributes.
- Post, support, share or like content that is offensive, obscene, derogatory, defamatory, threatening or hateful, or that is reasonably likely to cause serious harm to others or to the reputation of NSW Health.
- Post photos, videos or information about other staff or patients without their consent.

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- Impersonate or falsely represent any other person or organisation.
  - Post pornographic, sexually explicit or defamatory content that may be unlawful.
  - Post content that promotes or encourages behaviour that may constitute a criminal offence or otherwise violate the law including breaches of privacy, is in contempt of court, breaches intellectual property rights or is otherwise unlawful.
  - Use a NSW Health or NSW Government logo or emblem inappropriately or out of context.
  - Engage in conduct that undermines child safety (see Section 4.2 Child Safety in digital and social media environments).
  - Share information that is not publicly available and that, if disclosed, could cause harm to individuals, organisations or government. This includes content labelled OFFICIAL: Sensitive, or classified as PROTECTED or higher, in accordance with the [NSW Government Information Classification, Labelling and Handling Guidelines](#).

## **4.2. Child Safety in digital and social media environments**

NSW Health is committed to maintaining child safe environments, including in digital and online settings. Staff must take particular care when using social media or communication technology in any context that may involve children or young people.

Staff must not:

- Use a computer, mobile phone, camera or other device in a way that is inconsistent with the NSW Government [Guide to Child Safe Standards](#), [NSW Health Code of Conduct](#) or NSW Health policy directives.
- Use private messaging (including gaming platforms) to communicate with a child where an open or authorised channel is available and appropriate.
- Engage in online friendships with patients or clients, outside of the healthcare relationship (as outlined in the [NSW Health Code of Conduct](#) Section 4.6 Maintain professional relationships with patients or clients).

Any inappropriate or unlawful contact with a child online will be reported to the relevant authorities, including NSW Police, the Office of the Children's Guardian, the Department of Communities and Justice or the Australian Communications and Media Authority.

## **5. Accountabilities**

All staff are accountable for the content they publish in a personal capacity on any social media platform.

If staff have concerns about their own social media use or that of colleagues, they are encouraged to raise these concerns with their manager, or with a more senior manager or with their local human resources team (or equivalent team, as applicable to the NSW Health agency).

Concerns about workplace issues should be raised through the appropriate internal channels, which are generally the most effective avenues for resolution or change. Staff are encouraged to use these internal workplace channels where appropriate; this does not limit their right to seek external support, including through their union or professional association.

Channels for raising concerns are outlined in NSW Health Policy Directives:

- *Resolving Workplace Grievances* ([PD2016\\_046](#))
- *Managing Misconduct, Serious Performance and Child Related Concerns* ([PD2025\\_021](#))
- *Prevention and Management of Unacceptable Workplace Behaviours* ([PD2025\\_022](#)), and
- *Public Interest Disclosures* ([PD2023\\_026](#)), which provides guidance on reporting serious wrongdoing under the *Public Interest Disclosures Act 2022* (NSW), such as corrupt conduct, maladministration, or the misuse of public resources.

Managers are responsible for ensuring that the staff under their supervision are aware of and understand the requirements of this Policy Directive.

## **6. Managing breaches of this policy**

When assessing a complaint about a staff member's use of social media, the following factors should be considered. Whether or not the social media content meets the threshold of misconduct will depend on a combination of factors being met, noting that every situation is different. These factors may include:

- Whether the activity is relevant to the person's role and/or place of work and/or employer.
- The expectations associated with their role.
- The staff member's level of seniority.
- The nature of the content or activity, including why it may be considered inappropriate or harmful.
- Whether the activity casts doubt on the staff members ability to do their role.
- Whether the activity could reasonably impact public trust in NSW Health's commitment to provide safe and equitable care to all people.
- Whether the staff member was in uniform or otherwise identifiable or known as a NSW Health employee.
- Whether the content included any NSW Health identifying logo.
- Whether the content could be reasonably interpreted as representing the views of NSW Health or the employing organisation.
- The nature and purpose of the platform being used.
- Any other relevant factors that may arise specific to the circumstances.

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- Whether the activity involves lawful trade union or professional association activity, which is permitted under this Policy Directive. Union delegates and members are entitled to use social media for this purpose but must not imply they speak on behalf of NSW Health and must act in line with the [NSW Health Code of Conduct](#).

There are a range of potential consequences for breaches of this Policy Directive depending on the nature and seriousness of the matter.

Managers are responsible for addressing alleged breaches of this Policy Directive promptly and in a fair and reasonable manner. For guidance on managing potential breaches see NSW Health Policy Directives:

- *Resolving Workplace Grievances* ([PD2016\\_046](#))
- *Managing Misconduct, Serious Performance and Child Related Concerns* ([PD2025\\_021](#))
- *Prevention and Management of Unacceptable Workplace Behaviours* ([PD2025\\_022](#)).

## 7. Related documents

This table lists the key NSW Health and NSW Government documents that support this Policy Directive. Staff should also refer to any local guidance material.

Title	Author
<i>NSW Health Code of Conduct</i> ( <a href="#">PD2015_049</a> )	NSW Health
<i>NSW Health Public Communication Procedures</i> ( <a href="#">PD2017_012</a> )	NSW Health
<i>Managing Misconduct, Serious Performance and Child Related Concerns</i> ( <a href="#">PD2025_021</a> )	NSW Health
<i>Prevention and Management of Unacceptable Workplace Behaviours</i> ( <a href="#">PD2025_022</a> )	NSW Health
<a href="#">Code of Ethics and Conduct for NSW Government Sector Employees</a>	Public Service Commission
<i>Cyber Security NSW Directive – Restricted Application List</i> ( <a href="#">DCS-2025-01</a> )	NSW Department of Customer Service
<a href="#">NSW Government Social Media Guidelines</a>	NSW Government
<a href="#">Use of Social Media in a Private Capacity: Guidance for NSW Government Sector Employees</a>	Public Service Commission
<a href="#">Social Media: How to meet your obligations under the National Law</a>	Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency
<i>Communications - Use &amp; Management of Misuse of NSW Health Communications Systems</i> ( <a href="#">PD2009_076</a> )	NSW Health
<a href="#">NSW Government Information Classification, Labelling and Handling Guidelines</a>	NSW Government
<a href="#">NSW Health Social Media Staff Guidelines</a>	NSW Health
<a href="#">NSW Health Staff Social Media Use – frequently asked questions</a>	NSW Health
<i>Public Interest Disclosures</i> ( <a href="#">PD2023_026</a> )	NSW Health
<i>Resolving Workplace Grievances</i> ( <a href="#">PD2016_046</a> )	NSW Health
<a href="#">Guide to Child Safe Standards</a>	Office of the Children’s Guardian
<a href="#">Integrated Trauma-Informed Care Framework: My story, my health, my future</a>	NSW Health

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[Concept of Trauma and Guidance for a Trauma-Informed Approach](#)

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)

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