Australian Chiropractic College

USE OF SHARPS

Policy and Procedures

DEFINITIONS

Terms in this document, for which definitions are not provided in the text or may not be self-evident or for which usage at ACC may differ to that in other higher education institutions are as follows:

AHPRA: Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency, which, through the CBA registers for professional practice, suitably qualified graduates of accredited Chiropractic programs.

Chiropractic Board of Australia (CBA): The statutory body responsible for regulating the chiropractic profession in Australia, including registration standards and public protection, and for appointing the CCEA as the accreditation authority for chiropractic education programs.

Chiropractic Centre: A Service Learning Environment provided by the College, either directly or through a relationship with a third-party authorised by the College, for the provision of chiropractic care by Student Interns under the supervision of Chiropractic Supervisors.

Chiropractic Supervisor: Chiropractors who are contracted or otherwise authorised to supervise and/or assess ACC students woth the College's SLEs and WIL environments. In particular within the College's Chiropractic Centres.

Council of Chiropractic Education Australasia (CCEA): The independent accreditation authority appointed by the Chiropractic Board of Australia to accredit and monitor chiropractic education programs, ensuring they meet nationally defined standards for quality, safety, governance, curriculum, resourcing, and graduate competence.

Cultural Safety: Commonly understood as 'an environment that is spiritually, socially and emotionally safe, as well as physically safe for people; where there is no assault challenge or denial of their identity, of who they are and what they need. It is about shared respect, shared meaning, shared knowledge, and experience of learning together' (Williams, 1999 pg. 213). Refer to the College's *Cultural Safety Policy* and *Cultural Safety Procedure.*

Dry Needling: Also known as Intramuscular Stimulation (IMS), is a process which involves the insertion of acupuncture needles into muscles in order to alleviate pain and stimulate healing.

Myofascial Trigger Point (MTrP): a 'hyperirritable locus within a taut band of skeletal muscle, located in the muscle tissue or its associated fascia' (Travell and Simons 1983). Essentially it is a tight area (knot) within a muscle that can cause spontaneous pain referral into a completely different area to where the muscle is.

Service-Learning Environments (SLEs): An ACC Chiropractic Centre or other Chiropractic Practicum/WIL Environment where students, under the guidance of Chiropractic or other authorised health professional supervisors develop their knowledge and skills in Chiropractic practice.

Sharps: A 'sharp' in health care is defined as anything that can penetrate the skin. They include needles and syringes, scalpel blades, stitch cutters, glass ampoules and vials, punch biopsy equipment, lancets, any other sharp surgical instrument for disposal, retractable sharps such as lancets for glucose testing, wire

cytology brushes, and razors. Sharps may be contaminated by biological substances (e.g. blood, microorganisms) as well as other hazardous substances (e.g. medicines, chemicals). (RACG, 2024)

WIL (Work Integrated Learning): "any arrangement where students undertake learning in a work context as part of their course requirements. WIL can be undertaken as part of coursework or research training." (Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency, 2022) WIL activities may include: professional workplace placements (also known as internships, Chiropractic placements, fieldwork, practicums) whether local, interstate or international, online or virtual WIL (e.g. telehealth) with real clients or industry input, industry-partnered projects in the classroom that involve industry, community or professional partners, a simulated work environment with industry input, consultation or assessment, or activities in other contexts involving industry or community partners.' May also be synonymous with 'Service Learning'.

PURPOSE

This Policy and the Procedures are part of the College's commitment to developing and maintaining practice safety in all of its endeavours.

In the interests of safety to all concerned, the Procedure address the protocols and procedural steps in managing needle stick injuries, infection control and appropriate disposal. Clear protocols for safe handling, use and disposal of sharps are necessary to prevent injury that could lead to infection. (RACG, 2024)

The *Use of Sharps Policy and Procedures* are aligned with the requirements inherent in HESF (2021), specifically:

- 3. Teaching (3.1 Course Design: 3.1.3)
- 5. Institutional Quality Assurance (5.4 Delivery with Other parties: 5.4.1, 5.4.2)
- 6. Governance and Accountability (6.2 Corporate Monitoring and Accountability: 6.2.1 (a); 6.3 Academic Governance: 6.3.1 (a),(c),(d)
- 7. Representation, Information and Information Management (7.2 Information or Current and Prospective Students:7.2.2 (c),(d)

Furthermore, it aligns with the CCEA's *Accreditation Standards for Chiropractic Programs and Competency Standards for Chiropractors* (2025), specifically:

- Standard 1Public Safety (criteria 1.1, 1.3, 1.4, 1.5, 1.7)
- Standard 2 Government and quality improvement (2.4 d., 2.6 a.)
- Standard 3 Program of Study (3.2, 3.8, 3.10)
- Standard 5 Student Assessment (5.6)
- Universal Competency 1 Practising Professionally (1.1, 1.4,1.5)
- Practice Competency 4 Clinical assessment (4.2, 4.3)
- Practice Competency 5 Planning Care (5.1)
- Practice Competency 6 Implementing, Monitoring and Evaluating Care (6.1, 6.2).

The ACC requires that all staff (employed or contracted) and students, including those engaged in SLEs and/or WIL comply with this Policy and Procedure.

Any breach of the ACC's requirements for compliance may result in penalties, sanctions or other disciplinary action, in accordance with ACC Code of Conduct and other relevant ACC Policies and Procedures, also listed under *Related Documents* below.

SCOPE

This Policy applies to all staff, contractors, and enrolled students, and covers all learning and teaching activities and settings, whether on- or off-campus. This includes scheduled classes, 'Outreach' Chiropractic Centres, and approved extra-curricular activities.

POLICY

As outlined in the ACC *Dry Needling Policy,* neither the theory nor the performance of Dry Needling will be included or performed within the curriculum, and will not be practiced in ACC SLEs by either Chiropractic Supervisors or students.

The use of sharps, as a component of diagnostic and clinical assessment, may be included in the curriculum. Where the use of sharps are included in the curriculum the use of sharps will be clearly detailed in the relevant Unit Profile.

It is acknowledged that while undertaking WIL, students may observe a Chiropractor or other healthcare professional utilising interventions like dry needling in the practitioner's practice. Students are limited to observation only in such circumstances and must not handle, use, assist with, or dispose of sharps or related equipment during WIL or other College-related activities, except where the use of sharps is explicitly authorised within an approved unit of study and conducted under the supervision of an appropriately qualified practitioner in accordance with this Policy and its associated Procedures.

Where Sharps are utilised in the curriculum, the management of safety risks and incidents associated with sharps is governed by this Policy and the associated Procedures.

PROCEDURE

1. Purpose and Application of the Procedure

1.1 Purpose

This Procedure operationalises the Use of Sharps Policy by setting out the processes and requirements for the safe management of sharps-related risks, including prevention, incident response, infection control, and reporting obligations, within Australian Chiropractic College (ACC) learning and teaching environments.

The Procedure supports the College's commitment to public safety, student and staff wellbeing, and compliance with relevant regulatory, accreditation, and quality assurance requirements.

1.2 Application

This Procedure applies to all ACC staff and students in the following circumstances:

a. Where the use of sharps is explicitly authorised within an approved unit of study, as detailed in the relevant Unit Profile and conducted under appropriate supervision; and
b. Where ACC staff or students are present in learning or work-integrated learning environments in which sharps are used by other practitioners, including circumstances where students are observing such practices.

This Procedure applies across all ACC learning environments, including on-campus settings, ACC Chiropractic Centres, approved SLEs, and WIL placements.

1.3 Scope Boundary

Nothing in this Procedure confers permission for students to use, handle, assist with, or dispose of sharps outside of circumstances explicitly authorised under the Policy and an approved unit of study.

Where students are present in environments in which sharps are used by other practitioners but are not authorised to engage in their use, students are limited to observation only, and this Procedure applies solely for the purposes of risk awareness, incident response, and reporting.

2. Roles and Responsibilities

2.1 Students

Students are responsible for:

- Complying with the Use of Sharps Policy and this Procedure at all times;
- Engaging in the use of sharps only where explicitly authorised within an approved unit of study, and only under appropriate supervision;
- Limiting their involvement to observation only in environments where sharps are used by other practitioners and where use is not authorised;
- Promptly reporting any sharps-related incident, exposure, or near miss in accordance with this Procedure;
- Following reasonable directions given by supervising staff or practitioners in relation to sharps safety and incident management.

2.2 Supervising Practitioners and ACC Staff

Supervising practitioners and ACC staff are responsible for:

- Ensuring that students' involvement with sharps is restricted to activities authorised under the Policy and relevant Unit Profiles;
- Providing appropriate supervision where the use of sharps is authorised within the curriculum;
- Ensuring that students who are observing the use of sharps are not required or permitted to participate in such activities;
- Initiating and overseeing appropriate incident response and reporting where a sharps-related incident occurs in their presence;
- Supporting a safe learning environment consistent with public safety and infection control requirements.

2.3 Program Coordinator – Chiropractic Practice

The Program Coordinator – Chiropractic Practice is responsible for:

- Oversight of the implementation of this Procedure across ACC learning environments;
- Receiving and managing reports of sharps-related incidents involving ACC students or staff;
- Ensuring appropriate follow-up, support, and escalation of incidents in accordance with ACC policies;
- Monitoring compliance with the Use of Sharps Policy and this Procedure as part of the College's quality assurance processes;
- Reporting relevant issues, risks, or trends to appropriate College committees in accordance with governance requirements.

2.4 Australian Chiropractic College

The Australian Chiropractic College is responsible for:

- Providing appropriate induction and information to staff, students, and supervising practitioners regarding sharps-related risks and obligations;

- Ensuring that systems, resources, and governance arrangements support compliance with the Use of Sharps Policy and this Procedure;
- Monitoring and reviewing the effectiveness of sharps-related risk management as part of institutional quality assurance and review processes.

3. Prevention and Risk Minimisation

3.1 General Principles

The prevention of sharps-related injury and infection is a core safety obligation of the College. Where sharps are present within learning environments in which ACC students are engaged, reasonable and proportionate measures must be taken to minimise the risk of injury, exposure, or infection to students, staff, patients, and others.

Risk minimisation measures apply both in circumstances where the use of sharps is authorised within the curriculum and where students are present in environments in which sharps are used by other practitioners.

3.2 Authorised Use of Sharps

Where the use of sharps is authorised within an approved unit of study:

- The scope and context of sharps use must be clearly specified in the relevant Unit Profile;
- Students must engage in such activities only under appropriate supervision;
- Risk controls must be in place to support safe practice consistent with the Use of Sharps Policy and this Procedure.

3.3 Observation-Only Contexts (External Practices)

Students may observe the use of sharps while undertaking learning activities in external practices, including Work Integrated Learning placements, where ACC staff are not present.

In such contexts:

- Students are restricted to observation only;
- Students must not handle, use, assist with, or dispose of sharps or related equipment;
- Students are expected to maintain situational awareness of sharps-related risks and comply with any reasonable safety directions of the host practitioner, consistent with this Policy and Procedure.

3.4 Infection Control and Personal Safety

Where sharps are present within learning environments, general infection control and personal safety principles apply, including:

- Awareness of sharps-related hazards and exposure risks;
- Adherence to standard precautions appropriate to the setting;
- Understanding of reporting and escalation requirements in the event of an incident.

Detailed operational requirements for infection control and incident response are set out in subsequent sections of this Procedure.

4. Incident Response – Sharps Injury or Exposure

4.1 Scope of Application

This section applies where a sharps-related injury, exposure, or near miss occurs involving an ACC student or staff member, or occurs in the presence of an ACC student during College-related activities, including external learning and Work Integrated Learning environments.

4.2 Immediate Response

Where a sharps-related injury or exposure occurs, immediate first aid must be undertaken as soon as practicable in accordance with standard first aid principles applicable to the nature of the exposure. Where the incident occurs in an external practice, students are expected to follow the immediate safety directions of the host practitioner and any applicable workplace health and safety procedures in place at the site.

4.3 Notification and Escalation

- Where a sharps-related incident occurs **within an ACC-controlled environment**, the ACC Chiropractic Supervisor present is responsible for initiating local incident management processes and ensuring notification to the Program Coordinator – Chiropractic Practice.
- Where a sharps-related incident occurs **within an external practice**, the student must notify the host practitioner in accordance with the practice's local workplace health and safety and incident management policies, and must also report the incident to the Program Coordinator – Chiropractic Practice as soon as practicable.

4.4 Medical Follow-Up

- Where an ACC student or staff member sustains a sharps-related injury or exposure, they are expected to seek appropriate medical assessment and follow-up as soon as practicable, regardless of the setting in which the incident occurred.
- **In ACC-controlled environments**, responsibility for coordinating client medical follow-up rests with the ACC Chiropractic Supervisor, in accordance with ACC policies and professional obligations.
- **In external practices**, responsibility for client medical follow-up rests with the treating practitioner and is to be managed in accordance with the practitioner's professional obligations and the practice's local policies and procedures.

4.5 Support and Counselling

Following a sharps-related incident, appropriate support, including counselling, will be made available to ACC students or staff as required.

Coordination of support will be managed by the Program Coordinator – Chiropractic Practice or their delegate, in accordance with relevant ACC policies.

5. Reporting, Documentation and Review

5.1 Documentation of Sharps-Related Incidents

- **In ACC-controlled environments**, the ACC Chiropractic Supervisor present is responsible for ensuring that an ACC Injury Report / Investigation Form is completed and submitted in accordance with ACC requirements.

- In external practices, students must comply with the host practice's local incident reporting and documentation requirements.
  In addition, the student is responsible for ensuring that an ACC Injury Report / Investigation Form is completed and submitted to the Program Coordinator – Chiropractic Practice as soon as practicable.

Completion of documentation required by an external practice does not replace the requirement for reporting under ACC processes.

5.2 Post-Incident Review

- For incidents occurring within ACC-controlled environments, the Program Coordinator – Chiropractic Practice will review the incident in consultation with the ACC Chiropractic Supervisor to identify any required follow-up actions, risk controls, or quality improvement measures.
- For incidents occurring within external practices, the Program Coordinator – Chiropractic Practice will review the incident based on information provided through ACC reporting processes.
  This review is limited to ACC's duty of care, student safety, and quality assurance obligations and does not extend to the review or enforcement of the external practice's internal policies or procedures.

All sharps-related incidents involving ACC students or staff must be escalated to the Chief Executive Officer.

Further reporting to academic and corporate governance bodies, including the Academic Board and Board of Directors, will occur in accordance with the College's governance, risk management, and reporting frameworks, as set out in the Implementation and Monitoring section of this document. Where appropriate, de-identified incident information may be considered as part of ACC quality assurance and risk management activities.

6. Handling, Use and Disposal of Sharps (Authorised Contexts Only)

6.1 Scope and Applicability

This section applies only where the use of sharps is explicitly authorised within an approved unit of study and conducted in accordance with the Use of Sharps Policy and the relevant Unit Profile.

Nothing in this section authorises or permits students to handle, use, assist with, or dispose of sharps in observation-only contexts, including external practices or WIL placements where such use is not authorised.

6.2 General Handling Principles

Where students are authorised to use sharps within the curriculum:

- Sharps must be managed in a manner that minimises the risk of injury, exposure, or infection;
- Handling must occur only within approved learning environments and under appropriate supervision;
- Sharps must not be modified, manipulated, or reused in a manner inconsistent with approved practice.

6.3 Prohibited Practices

The following practices are prohibited in all ACC learning environments:

- Recapping of used needles;
- Bending, breaking, or otherwise manipulating sharps after use;
- Removal of needles from syringes by hand;
- Handling of sharps without appropriate supervision where supervision is required;
- Any handling of sharps outside the scope explicitly authorised in an approved unit of study.

6.4 Disposal of Sharps

Where sharps are used within authorised contexts:

- Sharps must be disposed of immediately following use in approved sharps disposal containers;
- Responsibility for disposal rests with the person in control of the sharp at the time of use;
- Sharps disposal must be undertaken in a manner consistent with relevant health, safety, and environmental requirements.

6.5 Infectious and Contaminated Waste

Where sharps-related activities generate infectious or contaminated waste:

- Such waste must be segregated from general waste;
- Disposal must occur in accordance with approved waste management arrangements applicable to the learning environment.

7. Environmental Infection Control

7.1 General Requirements

Where sharps are present within ACC learning environments, appropriate environmental infection control measures must be in place to minimise the risk of contamination, exposure, or infection.
Environmental controls apply in both:

- ACC-controlled environments where the use of sharps is authorised within the curriculum; and
- ACC learning environments in which students are present but restricted to observation only.

7.2 Clinical and Teaching Spaces

In ACC-controlled environments where sharps are used:

- Treatment surfaces, equipment, and clinical spaces must be maintained in a clean and hygienic condition appropriate to their use;
- Linen and other reusable materials must be managed in a manner that minimises infection risk between uses;
- Any visible contamination must be addressed promptly in accordance with approved infection control practices.

7.3 Blood and Body Fluid Spills

Where blood or body fluid spills occur in ACC-controlled environments:

- Appropriate containment and cleaning measures must be undertaken to minimise exposure risk;
- Personal protective measures appropriate to the nature of the spill must be used;
- Disposal of contaminated materials must occur in accordance with approved waste management requirements.

Detailed operational steps for spill management are set out in relevant clinical and infection control guidance applicable to the setting.

7.4 Waste Segregation

Where sharps or sharps-related activities generate waste:

- Infectious or contaminated waste must be segregated from general waste;
- Waste must be managed in accordance with applicable health, safety, and environmental requirements relevant to the learning environment.

8. Training, Induction and Awareness

8.1 Staff Training and Induction

ACC staff involved in learning and teaching activities where sharps may be present must be informed of the Use of Sharps Policy and this Procedure as part of their induction and ongoing professional development.

This includes awareness of:

- Scope limitations on student involvement with sharps;
- Responsibilities in relation to supervision, safety, and incident response;
- Reporting and escalation requirements under ACC governance arrangements.

8.2 Student Induction and Awareness

Students must be informed of the Use of Sharps Policy and this Procedure as part of their orientation and preparation for learning and teaching activities, including Work Integrated Learning placements.

Student awareness must include:

- Circumstances in which the use of sharps is authorised within the curriculum;
- Observation-only requirements in external practices;
- Sharps-related risks and expectations for personal safety;
- Incident reporting and escalation requirements.

8.3 Supervising Practitioner Awareness

ACC Chiropractic Supervisors and other supervising practitioners involved in ACC learning environments must be informed of:

- Student scope limitations in relation to sharps;
- Expectations regarding supervision where sharps use is authorised;
- Reporting obligations for sharps-related incidents occurring in ACC-controlled environments.

Where students are placed in external practices, **students must make the host practitioner aware of their scope and observation-only requirements under ACC arrangements as soon as they become aware that sharps are being used within the practice**.
Where an external practitioner does not respect the student's observation-only status, or requests or pressures the student to engage in the handling, use, assistance with, or disposal of sharps, the student must immediately disengage from the activity or environment where it is safe to do so, and report the incident to the Program Coordinator – Chiropractic Practice as soon as practicable.

IMPLEMENTATION and MONITORING

All ACC staff are informed of the Use of Sharps Policy and Procedures as part of their induction to the College, under the oversight of the Academic Dean.

All ACC students are informed of the Use of Sharps Policy and Procedures as part of their orientation to Work Integrated Learning and Service-Learning Environments, coordinated by the Program Coordinator – Chiropractic Practice.

Chiropractic Supervisors engaged in ACC clinical and service-learning environments are informed of the Use of Sharps Policy and Procedures through induction and information sessions conducted by the Program Coordinator – Chiropractic Practice.

The implementation of this Procedure is the responsibility of the Program Coordinator – Chiropractic Practice, under delegated authority from the Chief Executive Officer.

The Program Coordinator – Chiropractic Practice reports quality assurance, compliance, or other issues arising in relation to the Use of Sharps Policy and Procedures to the Academic Dean. The Academic Dean, through the Quality Assurance Cycle and end-of-semester reporting, provides reports and recommendations to the Academic Board.

Any breaches of the Use of Sharps Policy and Procedures are notified to the Chief Executive Officer, Academic Dean, and President. The Chief Executive Officer ensures that risks associated with compliance or non-compliance are escalated, as appropriate, to the Academic Board and the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee, for consideration and recommendation to the Board of Directors.

POLICY REVIEW

The ACC's *Use of Sharps Policy and Procedures* is normally reviewed every three years.

It is a policy of the ACC that any Policy or Procedure may be reviewed earlier as indicated by internal or external factors (including but not limited to such factors as changes in the guidelines of regulatory authorities, accreditation/registration requirements of the profession, or relevant legislation at state or federal level) as determined the Board of Directors and/or Academic Board.

RELATED LEGISLATION, REGULATORY REQUIREMENTS and REFERENCES

- *Accreditation Standards for Chiropractic Programs and Competency Standards for Chiropractors.* (2025). Council on Chiropractic Education Australasia. https://www.ccea.com.au/standards
- Royal Australian College of General Practitioners. (2024, June 17). *Overview – Sharps*. Royal Australian College of General Practitioners. https://www.racgp.org.au/running-a-practice/practice-standards/racgp-infection-prevention-and-control-guidelines/7-sharps/overview
- VU, 2015. Dry Needling Policy and Procedure, Osteopathy.

RELATED DOCUMENTS

- Staff Induction and Professional Development
- Marketing, Advertising and Communication Policy and Procedures
- Code of Conduct Policy

- Staff Performance and Disciplinary Policy and Procedures
- Student Grievance and Appeals Policy and Procedures
- Staff Grievance and Appeals Policy and Procedures
- Critical Incident Policy and Procedures
- Clinical Policies and Procedures including: Caring for Children, Informed Consent, Cultural Safety Policy and Procedure.

VERSION CONTROL

Document: A033 Use of Sharps Policy and Procedures		
Responsible Officers: Program Coordinator – Chiropractic Practice		
Initially Endorsed by: Academic Board		**Date:** 19 July **2023**
Reviewed and Approved by: Academic Board		**Date:** 6 May 2026
HESF	1.4 Learning Outcomes and Assessment	1.4.2b 1.4.2c
Version: V2	**Replaces Version(s)**: N/A	**Next Review:** January 2029
Nature of change	**May 2026:** Comprehensive review and restructure of the Use of Sharps Policy and Procedures to strengthen governance, clarify scope limitations relating to student involvement with sharps, and align with updated CCEA Accreditation Standards and Competency Standards (2025). Revisions include expanded procedural guidance for authorised sharps use, observation-only contexts, incident response, reporting and escalation pathways, infection control, environmental safety, and risk management, together with updated terminology, delegated responsibilities, and implementation and monitoring arrangements.	