

Transport of People Who are Mentally Ill

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Functional Sub group Clinical/ Patient Services - Transport
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Summary Provision of escort etc when transporting mentally ill patients by Ambulance.

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Applies to Area Health Services/Chief Executive Governed Statutory Health Corporation, Board Governed Statutory Health Corporations, Affiliated Health Organisations - Non Declared, Community Health Centres, Divisions of General Practice, Environmental Health Officers of Local Councils, Government Medical Officers, NSW Ambulance Service, NSW Dept of Health, Private Hospitals and Day Procedure Centres, Private Nursing Homes, Public Health Units, Public Hospitals

Distributed to Public Health System, Community Health Centres, Divisions of General Practice, Environmental Health Officers of Local Councils, Government Medical Officers, Health Professional Associations and Related Organisations, NSW Ambulance Service, NSW Department of Health, Public Health Units, Public Hospitals, Private Hospitals and Day Procedure Centres, Private Nursing Homes

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Director-General

This Policy Directive may be varied, withdrawn or replaced at any time. Compliance with this directive is **mandatory** for NSW Health and is a condition of subsidy for public health organisations.

CIRCULAR

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TRANSPORT OF PEOPLE WHO ARE MENTALLY ILL

This Circular provides further information to staff in Area Health Services and should be read in conjunction with the Memorandum of Understanding between NSW Police and NSW Health. Circular 91/74 also relates to this issue.

As with other illnesses and injuries, people with mental illness may require ambulance transport. Ambulance transport is appropriate where the skills of Ambulance officers and the facilities and equipment of an Ambulance vehicle are required to meet the needs of the patient, and their condition prohibits the use of alternative means of transport. In keeping with the Ambulance Transport Guidelines, the use of an Ambulance will be appropriate in a range of mental health emergency situations. These may include, as determined by the on-duty psychiatrist or their delegate, people in an acutely disturbed mental state, people who have attempted suicide and people who have a high suicide risk.

A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) has been developed between NSW Police and NSW Health for dealing with mentally ill persons. The MOU outlines a variety of situations when Police vehicles, Ambulances and other health service transport may be used. Routine transport situations will be met by Area Health Service transport arrangements using Area vehicles. Police vehicles will only be used in situations where they have a statutory role or where there is a risk of a breach of the peace.

The Ambulance Service will always respond to an emergency (000) call in the community for transport to a hospital. For interhospital transports, where the Ambulance Operations Centre is first notified of a patient who appears not to meet Ambulance transport guidelines (as clarified in this circular) they are to contact the referring agent directly to seek clarification of the situation, and if the patient does not meet Ambulance Transport Guidelines (as clarified in this circular) to assist them to make alternative arrangements. It is the responsibility of the Area Health Services to provide or arrange for the transport of such patients, but common sense should prevail in making the most suitable arrangements.

Distributed in accordance with circular list(s):

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It is the responsibility of those requesting Ambulance transport for a patient, for example hospitals, mental health teams and general practitioners, to make arrangements for a suitable escort if this appears to be needed. If Ambulance officers on arrival have additional concerns or if the situation is deteriorating this should be discussed with the requesting agency and a suitable escort provided. The Police have undertaken to ensure the safety of all parties by providing an escort where the referring agency or ambulance officers believe the patient is violent or may become violent, or where there is a genuine threat of a breach of the peace.

Standard charges for interhospital transport of mentally ill patients will occur in accordance with usual interhospital charging arrangements.

The MOU proposes the development of local protocols. This is encouraged as prior knowledge and arrangements, which take into account local service issues, will enable planning at an appropriate level.

Where issues occur which are not able to be resolved at a local level, Area Health Services must have in place a clear process to involve appropriate senior staff, for example, Area Director of Mental Health Services, Area Director of Operations, Area CEO, to resolve the issue.

If any staff require further information relating to the transport of mentally ill patients they should contact their Sector or Area Director of Mental Health Services in the first instance.

Michael Reid
Director-General