



Patient visitors and leave Mental health inpatient settings

This guidance has been developed to assist mental health services in responding appropriately and proportionately to the current stage of the COVID pandemic. They are aimed at assisting in balancing the need to protect patients, staff and the community from COVID-19 infection whilst providing therapeutic, least restrictive recovery-oriented care to patients and respecting their rights under the Mental Health Act 2014.

Current state of the pandemic

Evidence currently indicates low levels of community transmission of COVID-19 thanks to the current measures being taken.

Community and Government measures being taken to reduce COVID spread

The Government of Western Australia has declared a State of Emergency and a Public Health Emergency in response to COVID-19 coronavirus.

[Public Health Directions \(external link\)](#) have been issued to prevent the spread of COVID-19.

Directions under the Public Health Act 2016

Directions made under the *Public Health Act 2016* (Public Health Directions) must be complied with and the penalty is a fine. People must obey the public health directions even if they are not consistent with other legislation (for example, the *Mental Health Act 2014*) but this does not negate or over-ride the whole of the other Act. **The *Mental Health Act 2014* still applies.**

[COVID-19 coronavirus \(external link\)](#) provides the latest advice for people in WA.

Recommendations have been made by the Government to prevent the spread of COVID-19:

- [Physical distancing and hygiene \(external link\)](#)
- [COVID-19 testing \(external link\)](#)
- [COVIDSafe app \(external link\)](#)
- [SafeWA app \(external link\)](#)
- [Your wellbeing \(external link\)](#)
- [Patients, parents, visitors and carers \(external link\)](#)

Public Health Directions and Guidance issued in relation to visits to inpatient settings and leave

There are no current blanket requirements by the Commonwealth or State Government to stop all leave, ground access or visits at mental health hospitals.

Visits to aged care facilities and community care facilities

Aged Care Providers include Government and private agencies who provide care to older persons. Community Care Providers include organisations and staff who work to provide care outside of the hospital setting and in the community, including home care and non-clinical care.

[Guidelines for aged care and community care providers \(external link\)](#) have been developed.

WA Hospital visiting hours

Visiting hours at WA public hospitals may change in the future to limit the flow of people through hospitals, better protecting patients and staff.

Check the HealthyWA website for the [latest information on visiting public hospitals \(external link\)](#).

Guidance on visits to and leave from mental health inpatient settings

- Blanket policies to lockdown mental health facilities are not currently required or proportional
- The MHA 2014 remains functional and patient rights within the MHA 2014 apply:
 - Consider the principle of least restrictive practice;
 - Access to psychosocial therapy;
 - Discharge planning, community transitioning;
 - Right to communication; and
 - Right to visitors.

Visits

- All mental health facilities should seek to follow the state guidelines regarding hospital visiting, noting that it may need to be operationalised differently on different sites to ensure social distancing.
- Mental health services should ensure accessibility and availability of opportunities for audiovisual visits where face to face is not possible.
- Mental Health Advocates are not considered visitors for the purposes of the government hospital visiting guidelines and have a statutory right to access mental health units under the MHA 2014.

Leave

- All patients should be managed in the least restrictive way possible.
- All patients should be supported and encouraged to understand and follow the government rules about self-isolation if applicable and gatherings and advice about social distancing, reducing non-essential travel and hand hygiene.
- Certain cohorts, such as individuals who may have cognitive impairment, will require extra support during this period to assist them to understand and manage broader state emergency directions.
- Wherever possible leave and visiting arrangements should facilitate the involvement of family, carers and service providers in treatment, support and discharge planning.

Voluntary patients

- Have a right to access leave.
- If any open wards are temporarily locked for COVID-19 related reasons, there needs to be clear processes to allow patients to move in and out of the “open” ward environment without undue impediment.
- If voluntary patients repeatedly do not follow advice about social distancing and gatherings despite support, education and encouragement then their status as voluntary inpatients and management will need to be reviewed.

Involuntary patients

- The therapeutic needs and any associated restrictions for **involuntary patients** should be considered on **a case by case basis**, including leave, ground access, visitors, etc – any potential restrictions should be discussed and negotiated with the patient and family as usual, and should meet the criteria set out in the MHA 2014 and be proportionate to the current situation.
- Where restrictions are in place for an individual under the MHA 2014, work with the individual and family to find alternative strategies to reduce frustration and distress, as usual.

Review of this guidance

Should WA move into a more restrictive phase, or less restrictive phase, this will change the current practice. Thus, this situation and this advice may be subject to rapid review and change.

More information

For the latest clinical guidelines and clinician alerts, please refer to the Department of Health Website (https://ww2.health.wa.gov.au/en/Articles/A_E/Coronavirus)

For general information, including information for patients and carers, please:

- Refer to the HealthyWA website (https://healthywa.wa.gov.au/Articles/A_E/Coronavirus)
- Phone 13 COVID (132 68 43)
- Interstate Callers 1800 595 206; International Callers +61 9118 3110

Acknowledgements

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| Last Updated: | Last reviewed: | Changes: |
|---------------|----------------|---|
| 24 July 2020 | 21 Dec 2020 | Updates to website links to include latest information on COVID testing and SafeWA app Updated information on visiting WA public hospitals |

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