

Mental Health Act 2016
Chief Psychiatrist Policy

Temporary absence

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General

The Chief Psychiatrist may approve particular patients who are detained in an inpatient unit of an authorised mental health service (AMHS) to be temporarily absent under prescribed circumstances.

A temporary absence may be approved to enable access to health care, to attend a court or judicial hearing, to seek accommodation as part of discharge planning or for compassionate grounds.

Scope

This Policy is mandatory for all Authorised Mental Health Services (AMHSs). An authorised doctor, authorised mental health practitioner, AMHS administrator, or other person performing a function or exercising a power under the [Mental Health Act 2016](#) (the Act) must comply with this Policy.

Clinicians should work collaboratively with and in partnership with patients to ensure their unique age-related, cultural and spiritual, gender-related, religious and communication needs are recognised, respected and followed to the greatest extent practicable. Clinicians should consider the timely involvement of appropriate local supports and provide treatment and care with a recovery-oriented focus.

This policy **must** be implemented in a way that is consistent with the objects and principles of the [Act](#).

This policy must be read in conjunction with the relevant provisions of the [Act](#).

Policy

1 Authorisation of temporary absences

1.1 Patients who may require a temporary absence approval

Particular patients who are detained in an inpatient unit of an AMHS may require approval to be temporarily absent for a specific purpose. Particular patients are:

- patients subject to a Forensic Order (inpatient category) (FO) who do not have the required limited community treatment authorised or ordered, or
- classified patients, or

- patients subject to a Judicial Order¹.

1.2 Reasons a temporary absence may be required

The Chief Psychiatrist may approve a temporary absence for the following reasons:

- for the patient to see a doctor, dentist, or other health care provider, or
- for the patient to be able to go to court, tribunal or other judicial body if needed, or
- for the patient to look for accommodation as part of discharge planning, or
- on compassionate grounds, for example if the client has a funeral to attend, and
- for any other purpose the Chief Psychiatrist is satisfied justifies the need for the temporary absence.

A temporary absence is **not** required for a FO or classified patient, when being transported on grounds within an AMHS to attend an appointment (e.g. between two units in the AMHS to attend a medical appointment, such as a medical imaging scan or blood test).

1.3 Approval of temporary absence

Only the Chief Psychiatrist can approve a particular patient's temporary absence from an AMHS.

An authorised doctor **must** request written approval from the Chief Psychiatrist by completing the [Chief Psychiatrist Approval – Temporary Absences and Limited Community Treatment for Particular Patients form](#).

This form is to be completed electronically in CIMHA or, if this is not practicable, completed in hard copy and uploaded to CIMHA.

The request must include:

- the reasons the temporary absence is being sought, and
- the proposed start and end dates and times, and
- details of the proposed absence (e.g. the nature and location of health care to be provided), and

¹ A judicial order is a court examination order; or an examination order; or another order requiring or permitting the detention of a person in an AMHS, made by a court under any of the following section: 124(1)(b), 183(c)(ii), 193(2), 544(4), 551(4)(b).

- any conditions for the proposed absence (e.g. that the person is to be escorted or accompanied throughout the absence), and
- a current risk assessment of the patient.

The Chief Psychiatrist will determine the request as soon as practicable and provide the outcome to the relevant AMHS administrator and the authorised doctor on the [Chief Psychiatrist Approval – Temporary Absences and Limited Community Treatment for Particular Patients form](#).

The temporary absence **must** be recorded as a clinical note on the patient's file in CIMHA.

2 Return after temporary absence

A temporary absence ends at the end of the approved period stated in the [Chief Psychiatrist Approval – Temporary Absences and Limited Community Treatment for Particular Patients form](#) or when the patient returns to the AMHS.

If the patient does not return within the approved period, an authorised person can transport the patient back to the service. The [Chief Psychiatrist Policy – Transfers and Transport](#) and [Chief Psychiatrist Policy – Managing Involuntary Patient Absences](#) outlines the powers of an authorised person for transporting a patient who has not returned as required from a temporary absence.

Issued under section 305 of the Mental Health Act 2016

Dr John Reilly
Chief Psychiatrist, Queensland Health
15 April 2020

Definitions and abbreviations

Term	Definition
AMHS	Authorised mental health service – a health service, or part of a health service, declared by the Chief Psychiatrist to be an authorised mental health service. AMHSs include both public and private sector health services. While treatment and care is provided to both voluntary and involuntary patients, additional regulation applies under the Act for persons subject to involuntary treatment and care.
CIMHA	Consumer Integrated Mental Health Application – the statewide mental health database which is the designated patient record for the purposes of the Act.
Judicial Order	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A court examination order or, • An examination order, or • Another order requiring or permitting the detention of a person in an AMHS, made by a court under any of the following: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ S 124(1)(b) ○ S 183(c)(ii) ○ S 193(2) ○ S 544(4) ○ S 551(4)(b)
The Act	<i>Mental Health Act 2016</i>
Authorised person	<p>Includes a health practitioner, an ambulance officer, a police officer, the Administrator of an AMHS, and a health service employee appointed by the Administrator.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Administrator may appoint a specific health service employee, or a class of health service employees (for example all consumer consultants employed in the AMHS) as authorised persons.
Temporary absence	Means a brief period during which a patient is authorised to be absence from an AMHS for a specific purpose.

Referenced documents and sources

[Chief Psychiatrist Approval – Temporary Absences and Limited Community Treatment for Particular Patients form](#)

[Chief Psychiatrist Guidelines – Involuntary Patient Absences](#)

[Chief Psychiatrist Practice Guidelines – Transfers and Transport](#)

Referenced documents and sources

Mental Health Act 2016

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Attachment 1: Key contacts

Key contacts

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AMHS Administrator

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