Overview
This policy and practice guideline is issued under sections 309A and 493A of the Mental Health Act 2000 (‘the MH Act’). It relates to the securing of adult acute mental health inpatient units as required by the Director of Mental Health pursuant to an order made under section 493AE(2)(e) of the MH Act (Action director may take for a significant matter and related risk).

This policy and practice guideline sets out requirements in relation to securing adult acute mental health inpatient units effective on and from 15 December 2013.

Purpose
The purpose of making this policy and practice guideline is to prevent involuntary patients from absenting themselves from adult acute mental health inpatient units without permission and causing a serious risk to their own life, health or safety or a serious risk to public safety.

This policy and practice guideline should be applied with that purpose in mind.

Policy and practice guideline
Further to the memorandum issued by the Deputy Director-General, Health Service and Clinical Innovation, on 6 December 2013, and to the order made on 13 December 2013, this policy and practice guideline requires that, subject to the matters set out below, the main entry and exit doors to all acute mental health inpatient units be locked on and from 15 December 2013.

However, voluntary patients, visitors, persons who are not involuntary patients or involuntary patients who have a valid basis for departing from the unit (including a leave entitlement) should be allowed to move freely in and out of the units (and through any exit or entry doors which are otherwise locked), subject to all appropriate steps being taken to ensure that persons who do not fall into one of these categories do not depart from the unit.

The appropriate steps that need to be taken to enable such movement in and out of the units will depend on each facility.

For example, a staff member might need to be located at or near the door at all times between 7am and 11pm to check each person’s identification (preferably photographic identification) against a list of involuntary patients to ensure that the person is not an involuntary patient. Consideration should be given to compliance
with the requirements of Part 7 (Confidentiality) of the *Hospital and Health Boards Act 2011* (Qld) in selecting the appropriate person to perform such a role.

Consideration should also be given to ensuring that persons who have a valid basis for departing from the unit if the door is unattended at any time are able to make arrangements to depart when they wish to do so or are otherwise made aware of the circumstances in which they will be able to depart the unit.

The safety of patients, staff and visitors to the unit is also of critical importance. To that end, this policy and practice guideline should not be carried out if this has the consequence that any legislative requirement is not complied with by the facility.

For example, each facility must ensure that it complies with the *Fire and Rescue Service Act 1990* (Qld) and the *Building Fire Safety Regulation 2008* (Qld). All mental health services should consult with their local Occupational Health and Safety Units to ensure that appropriate fire safety arrangements and evacuation procedures are in place.

The facility should take all necessary steps to carry out any required works or arrange for the attendance of additional staff to enable the facility to comply with all legislative requirements (to be identified by each facility) and this policy and practice guideline, by no later than March 2014 if possible.

For example and depending on the facility, a staff member may need to be located at or near the door at all times during the day and night to ensure compliance with legislative requirements relating to evacuation for fire.

Further, appropriate steps will need to be identified and taken to ensure that an involuntary patient is not left alone in an area within the facility with the effect that they are kept in seclusion within the meaning of section 162J of the MH Act applies unless allowed under Chapter 4A Part 2 of the Act.

**Key contacts**

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Key resources

Mental Health Act 2000


Hospital and Health Boards Act 2011 (Qld) Confidentiality guidelines (update pending)