



Procedures for Involving Police When Mental Health Consumers Are Missing or Absent Without Leave

This procedure supports the application of [MP 0012/16 Mental Health Consumers Who Are Missing or Absent Without Leave Policy](#) (the policy) and is applicable to all Health Service Providers that provide public mental health services, including through emergency departments.

1. Language and definitions in reporting to the WA Police Force

Health staff must work collaboratively with the WA Police Force when responding to absent without leave (AWOL) or missing person incidents.

The WA Police Force uses the following definitions:

WA Police Force Category	WA Police Force Key Elements	Reporting
Missing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • whereabouts are unknown • police and the reporting person have formed a reasonable belief supported by the available evidence that there is a genuine and serious concern for the person’s welfare and safety and/or • there is suspicion of criminality surrounding their disappearance (i.e. abduction/homicide) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emergency situations – call 000 (triple zero) and ask for police • Non-emergency – call police on 131 444
Absent	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • whereabouts are unknown • there are no genuine and serious concerns for the person’s safety and welfare and no suspicion of criminality surrounding their absence • they are simply not at a place where they are expected or required to be 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No need to report to police
Lost	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a person who is unaccounted for • has found themselves in circumstances or an environment that has disorientated, incapacitated 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emergency situations – call 000 (triple zero) and ask for police • Non-emergency – call

	<p>or rendered them stranded and in distress</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a last known location and searchable area has been identified 	<p>police on 131 444</p>
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A mental health consumer who is missing in accordance with the above WA Police Force definition must be reported to the WA Police.

The WA Police Force does not classify a person at risk of harming others as 'missing'. Health staff must still consider such a mental health consumer to be missing for the purposes of compliance with the policy, including in relation to reporting as a notifiable or clinical incident, and in relation to notifying police as per the below requirements.

Although not classified as missing according to the above WA Police Force definition, a consumer whose whereabouts are unknown and who is at risk of harming others must be reported to the WA Police Force.

When communicating with police in relation to an AWOL or missing person incident, staff members must:

- clearly communicate any risk of harm to the mental health consumer and/or others
- recognise the terminology used by WA Police Force and ensure mutual understanding of the situation
- keep police apprised of any changes in risk.

2. Requirements for Health Service Provider procedures and protocols

HSP local procedures and protocols for involving the WA Police Force in AWOL or missing person incidents must recognise the WA Police Force definitions above, and include, at a minimum, the following:

- notifying police immediately via dialling 000 (triple zero) in emergency situations, regardless of legal status under the *Mental Health Act 2014*
- notifying police via dialling 131 444 in non-emergency situations, where there remains:
 - a genuine and serious concern for the mental health consumer's welfare and/or
 - a risk of harm to others or property, such as arson
- in non-emergency situations, notifying police via dialling 131 444 where a person in charge of a hospital or other place or a medical practitioner makes an Apprehension and Return Order
- assessing the risk of harm to the mental health consumer or others
- clear communication with the WA Police Force during AWOL or missing person incidents, including information sharing and risk factors for consideration.

Note that if a person is not AWOL, there is no genuine and serious concern for their safety and welfare, and there is no risk to others or property, police will not respond, as the person meets the WA Police Force definition of absent.

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