



FACT SHEET

Mental Health Acute Assessment Team Proof of Concept

Some mental health patients are being transported directly to mental health facilities rather than taken to hospital Emergency Departments (EDs) under a joint NSW Ambulance/Western Sydney Local Health District/Ministry of Health initiative in December 2013.

Many patients with acute and non-acute mental health problems access care by phoning Triple Zero (000). While NSW Ambulance paramedics have access to a mental health training program, this is designed to inform the emergency management of the patient's presenting behaviour.

It does not equip paramedics to make a mental health diagnosis or plan ongoing care and treatment, which can only be done by a qualified mental health professional following a comprehensive mental health assessment. The majority of these patients are therefore taken to an ED for further diagnosis.

The Mental Health Acute Assessment Team (MHAAT) teams a specialist paramedic with a mental health nurse for dispatch to specific mental health related Triple Zero (000) callers. This skill-mixed team provides increased assessment and referral capabilities in the out-of-hospital setting, giving mental health patients access to the most appropriate care in the quickest time possible and minimising transport to EDs.

All three agencies involved in this initiative have acknowledged the potential benefits to both patient care and EDs with the transportation of appropriate patients directly to mental health facilities; and support utilising patient pathways that involve assessment and treatment at the scene and transfer of care from NSW Ambulance with referral to community-based services where appropriate.





FACT SHEET – MENTAL HEALTH ACUTE ASSESSMENT TEAM

Potential patients

It's conservatively estimated that 15 per cent of people who phone Triple Zero (000) require mental health care; approximately 100,000 people per year. Many of these patients require a combination of physical, psychosocial and psychiatric treatment – the last often requiring admission to a mental health facility in a general hospital such as Westmead Hospital or a specific mental health facility such as Cumberland Hospital. For some, treatment of physical injuries in a general hospital environment is required initially, followed by care at a mental health facility.

For others, direct admission to a mental health facility is appropriate, with minor treatment for physical conditions occurring concurrently.

The following Triple Zero (000) callers may benefit from a joint paramedic/mental health assessment and treatment approach:

- those with a self-identified mental health condition
- people calling on behalf of a patient, indicating that the patient is experiencing a mental illness.

NSW Ambulance paramedics may also recommend that certain patients require mental health input/advice and request the MHAAT via the control centre. These could include:

- those with an underlying mental health condition which was initially presented as a physical condition but, on assessment, doesn't require physical care
- patients with physical care needs, but where a mental health issue is a complicating factor in assessment or treatment.

Medical Priority Dispatch System (MPDS) determinants assumed to be associated with mental health related problems will be automatically considered.

Patient exclusions

Patients with the following criteria may be excluded:

- patients currently scheduled under the Mental Health Act by a NSW Police Force officer or a NSW Ambulance paramedic
- patients aged 17 years or younger
- patients aged 65 or more (if AT SIS 55)
- patients who don't meet 'between the flags' criteria
- patients sedated under NSW Ambulance Patient Management Protocol A7.

Qualitative feedback from clinical and managerial staff from all agencies involved in the initiative has been positive, that mental health patients are being managed more efficiently and appropriately, with flow-on benefits to both NSW Ambulance and EDs in terms of demand management and interagency collaboration.