



The role of community visitors in Authorised Mental Health Services

The Office of the Public Guardian advocates for and protects the rights and interest of adults residing in Authorised Mental Health Services (AMHS). This is achieved through the Community Visiting and Advocacy function.

What is a community visitor?

Community visitors are independent advocates who oversee the care and treatment provided in Authorised Mental Health Services. Their role is to ensure services meet appropriate standards, uphold individuals' rights and are delivered in the least restrictive way possible. Key areas of focus include:

1. Care and treatment

Community visitors ensure that care and treatment:

- Promote and maintain individuals' health and wellbeing.
- Aim to improve mental health conditions.
- Are regularly reviewed to ensure progress and appropriateness.

2. Decision-making

Community visitors promote the presumption that individuals have the capacity to make decisions about their lives, treatment and care. They ensure that Authorised Mental Health Services:

- Seek and consider individuals' views and wishes.
- Encourage individuals to participate in decisions about their treatment and care.

3. Least restrictive practices

Under the *Mental Health Act 2016*, treatment must be delivered in the least restrictive way. Community visitors ensure that Authorised Mental Health Services:

- Minimise restrictions on individuals' rights and liberties while prioritising safety and welfare.
- Reduce or eliminate the use of seclusion and restraint (chemical, mechanical or physical).
- Properly document decisions and methods when restrictions are applied.

Community visitors also ensure individuals, carers and support persons are informed of their rights and responsibilities and are supported in exercising them.

Powers of community visitors

Under the *Public Guardian Act 2014*, community visitors have statutory powers to perform their duties effectively, including:

- Entering facilities without prior notice.
- Requesting and inspecting relevant documents, including patient records.
- Speaking privately with patients or staff.
- Requiring staff to answer questions or provide assistance.

Service providers and staff are legally obligated to provide requested documents and information. Those who comply are protected from liability under the *Public Guardian Act 2014*.



What happens during a visit?

1. Preparation

Community visitors review previous visit reports and identify outstanding issues. They may request a list of patients to focus on individuals with specific needs, such as those with dual diagnoses, children or individuals under guardianship or child protection orders.

2. Arrival and initial enquiries

Upon arrival, community visitors identify themselves to senior staff, follow security procedures and gather information about significant incidents since their last visit, such as complaints, restrictive practices or patient concerns.

3. Engagement and advocacy

Community visitors prioritise interactions with patients who have raised concerns, experienced restrictive practices or requested to meet with them. They advocate for individuals by addressing issues with staff and nurse unit managers and seeking timely resolutions.

4. Document review

Community visitors may request and review relevant documents, such as patient files, to support their advocacy. They ensure that all information is handled in compliance with the *Public Ethics Act 1994*, the *Public Service Act 2008*, and the *Information Privacy Act 2009*.

After the visit

Following each visit, community visitors provide a report to the Authorised Mental Health Services management team. This report summarises the visit and outlines any issues raised by patients or identified by the community visitor.

Obligations of staff to community visitors

All staff must adhere to the code of conduct for the Queensland Public Service, which emphasises respect, professional courtesy and lawful use of authority. Community visitors are also bound by ethical and legal obligations to manage public resources responsibly and protect individual's privacy.

For more information visit our website www.publicguardian.qld.gov.au.



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Acknowledgement of Country

The Office of the Public Guardian acknowledges and pays our respects to the Traditional Custodians over the lands, seas and waterways throughout the state of Queensland in which we work and live and pay our respects to their Elders, past, present and emerging.

Translation

If you need translation services, contact the Translating and Interpreting Service on 131 450.