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Voluntary admission

The doctor in a hospital must make every reasonable effort to contact the parents or guardian when a person under the age of 16 years is admitted to a mental health inpatient unit as a voluntary patient. Doctors cannot admit a person under the age of 14 to a mental health inpatient service as a 'voluntary patient' without their parent's or guardian's consent. If a person 14 or 15 years old is admitted as a voluntary patient, they must be discharged if the parent or guardian objects. However, the child can agree to continue as a voluntary patient.

Care pathways

Mental health services may have a 'care pathway' (a written plan) that they follow during the assessment and treatment of certain conditions, for example, eating disorders. Family members and carers can ask if there is a written 'care pathway' available. An explanation or a copy of the 'care pathway' may help you, as the carer, to understand the care and treatment you can expect at that mental health service.

Your rights

It is important that the treating team have recorded, in the medical record of the young person, your contact and relationship details. These details should be recorded regardless of whether the service is inpatient or community service, or public or private. It is a good idea to check with the treating team if you are recorded as the designated carer or principal care provider for the person. A person under the age of 18 cannot exclude their parents from being given notice and information as if they were a designated carer.



Further Information

- **NSW Mental Health Line:**
1800 011 511 – A 24/7 phone service
www.health.nsw.gov.au/mentalhealth/Pages/mental-health-line.aspx
- **NSW Health information on Child and Adolescent Health Services:**
www.health.nsw.gov.au/mentalhealth/services/children/Pages/programs-children-teens.aspx
- **Head to Health:**
www.headtohealth.gov.au/support-for-parents-and-guardians
- **Black Dog Institute:**
www.blackdoginstitute.org.au
- **Specialist programs for perinatal infants, children, teens, young people and their families:**
<https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/mentalhealth/Pages/services-camhs.aspx>
- **Mental health services and support contact list for young people:**
<https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/mentalhealth/services/Pages/support-contact-list.aspx>
- **13Yarn:**
call 13 92 76 to speak with an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Island Crisis Supporter 24/7
www.13yarn.org.au

Child and adolescent inpatient mental health services

Information for carers

This brochure provides information for family members and carers of young people experiencing serious mental health issues which may result in the young person being taken to a child and adolescent mental health service in a hospital.

Information on assisting young people with emerging mental health issues can be found by following the links within this brochure such as NSW Health Information on Child and Adolescent Health Services, Head to Health or the Black Dog Institute.



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Inpatient care

There is no single approach to providing mental health care for children and adolescents experiencing serious mental health issues. Not all children and adolescents with serious mental health issues will benefit from inpatient care.

Inpatient care provides a more controlled environment than most community-based options. It can be beneficial for consumers who require 'acute containment'; that is, constant monitoring and support to prevent harm to themselves or others.

Inpatient care may be the most suitable option for young people experiencing thoughts of suicide or self-harm if it is not safe for them to be cared for in a different environment.

Some young people may be admitted for supervision of medication changes or for further assessment. Inpatient admission should only be considered when it is necessary to prevent more harm or trauma to the consumer and their family.

Alternatives to inpatient care may lead to equivalent or better outcomes for most young people. Inpatient care can be a traumatic experience for children and adolescents and for their families and carers¹.



Principles of care

You may read elsewhere that child and adolescent mental health services are *trauma informed, person centred and collaborative, least restrictive and disruptive*². For family members and carers these terms may not be very meaningful. The following may help you in discussions with mental health services:

- Overall, treatment services should aim to reduce, as much as possible, further trauma to the child or adolescent.
- Services should be based on the needs of the child or adolescent, and this may require some flexibility from the service.
- Collaboration means that the consumer and the carers discuss with the treating team the options for care and treatment. In some cases, the treating team and the consumer may agree on care and treatment independent of the parent or carer.
- 'Restrictive and disruptive' means that services should minimise restrictions on a person's movement and interrupt their preferred daily routine as little as possible.
- Keep in mind that family members and carers of teenagers may have different views to health professionals about risk taking and disruptive behaviour so some compromise may need to be negotiated.

You, as the parent and carer, can ask for a conversation with the treating team to make sure they know your wishes or when you feel these principles are not being followed.



Mental Health Act

Involuntary admission to hospital

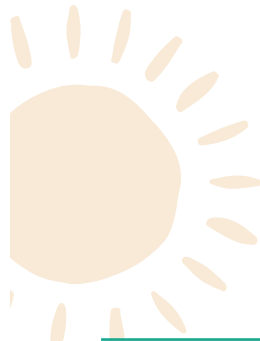
The *Mental Health Act 2007 NSW* allows for the admission to hospital of a child or adolescent against their will, and at times, against the will of their parents or guardians. Involuntary admission of people under the age of 16 does not happen very often. It can occur when the doctors are of the view that there is a risk of harm to someone because of the mental illness of the child or adolescent.

In the rare event that a child or adolescent is admitted involuntarily, every effort is made to allow inpatient care on a voluntary basis, preferably with the consent of their parents or guardian.

Occasionally a court may order a mental health assessment for a young person, but this does not mandate admission and will be limited to the child or adolescent being taken to a hospital for assessment.

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) inpatient units are specialist units for young people, but they are not available in all Local Health Districts. Some private hospitals have services for the voluntary admission of young people. They are like public hospital services, but these services are limited and not available in all districts.

See the link within this brochure on NSW Health information on Child and Adolescent Health Services for more information on these services.



¹ NSW Health, 2022, Guide to Understanding Inpatient Mental Health Admissions for Children and Adolescents

² NSW Health, 2022, Guide to Understanding Inpatient Mental Health Admissions for Children and Adolescents

