

Learnings Summary: October – December 2024

This document provides a summary of learnings arising from the Mental Health and Alcohol and Other Drugs [Serious Incident Review](#) (SIR) Sub-Committee meetings held October - December 2024.

Services should review this summary to determine which learnings are relevant locally, and whether further local action is required.

We value your feedback. If you have any questions or comments about this report, please email CEC-PatientSafety@health.nsw.gov.au

Physical health care

- Management of physical comorbidities should be a priority within mental health and drug and alcohol services.
- The care of consumers with complex mental and physical health needs in standalone mental health facilities remains a concern when there are delays in accessing necessary medical care. Clear pathways for escalating care and more integrated approaches to medical and mental health services are essential.

Relevant NSW Health Policy Directive, Guideline and resources:

NSW Health Guideline *Physical Health Care for People Living with Mental Health Issues* ([GL2021_006](#))

NSW Health Policy Directive *Recognition and management of patients who are deteriorating* ([PD2025_014](#))

Clinical Excellence Commission [Between the Flags](#) website

MHAOD SIR Sub-Committee [Lessons and Learnings – September 2024 Clinical Emergency Response Education](#)

Care planning

- Delayed treatment in first episode psychosis can increase the risk of aggression and violence.
- Ensure consistent, accurate, and supported risk assessment and care planning for children and adolescents to address gaps in patient safety and care quality across facilities.
- Meaningful family and carer engagement is needed when conducting a risk assessment. It provides contextual information when developing effective safety plans to improve response to deterioration.
- Do not assume carer roles are safe or supportive. Rigorous screening for risks, as in any close relationship, is essential. See NSW Health Policy Directive *Domestic Violence Routine Screening* ([PD2023_009](#)).
- All units must follow facility guidelines, to ensure early detection of deterioration and an appropriate, measured response.

Discharge planning and transfer of care

• Ensure consumer discharge is supported by clear communication, appropriate referrals and adequate follow-up to prevent gaps in care. • Correct documentation and review of unescorted leave decisions, especially when a consumer's status changes from voluntary to involuntary, are crucial. In addition, risk assessments and escalation protocols should be arranged for periods of leave. • Handover procedures that include clear responsibilities are critical to ensuring continuity of care for people with opioid dependence, particularly during vulnerable periods like post-release from incarceration. • Reliable and ongoing search policy and robust leave assessment processes are required to ensure safety across all inpatient units, regardless of familiarity with the consumer. • Good practice in the transfer of care requires active communication, shared information, and ensuring connections are properly established. • Avoid using consumer-blaming language.	Relevant NSW Health policy and resources: NSW Health <i>Discharge Planning and Transfer of Care for Consumers of NSW Health Mental Health Services</i> policy (PD2019_045) Safety Notice (SN:035/23) Updated – <i>Provision of written leave information for consumers on leave from mental health inpatient units.</i>
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Capacity assessment

• A capacity assessment is distinct from a mental health assessment. It must be conducted thoroughly, with system-wide education and family engagement to ensure appropriate care and decision-making for people with serious mental illness. • The Mental Health Review Tribunal provides a Consent For Surgery Flowchart and Medical Consent Regimes Table which deal with consent issues and medical/surgical matters (documents also available via the following link: https://mhrt.nsw.gov.au/documents/). The NSW Health Consent to Medical and Healthcare Treatment Manual provides operational guidance and procedures to support compliance with NSW law on obtaining consent to medical and healthcare treatment from people accessing care or their substitute consent providers.

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