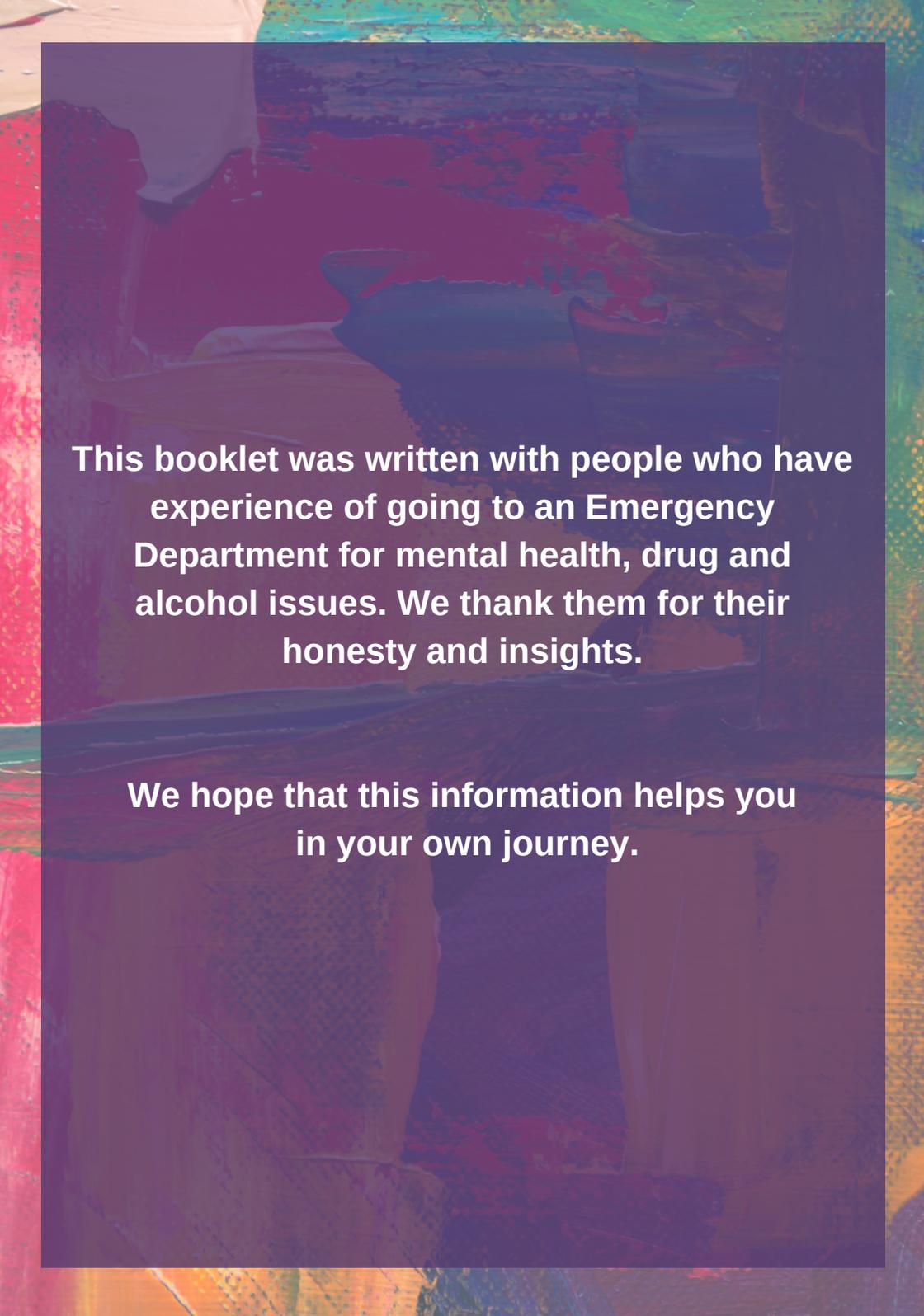


Your Emergency Department Journey

A guide for people visiting the ED for
mental health, drug or alcohol issues



Health
Murrumbidgee
Local Health District

The background is an abstract composition of layered, textured colors. It features a mix of deep blues, purples, and reds, with some areas appearing more like watercolor or ink washes. The overall effect is a rich, multi-dimensional palette that provides a backdrop for the white text.

This booklet was written with people who have experience of going to an Emergency Department for mental health, drug and alcohol issues. We thank them for their honesty and insights.

We hope that this information helps you in your own journey.



I think staff do a great job under difficult circumstances. I just felt frustrated that everything took so long. I knew I needed help. I just didn't know what sort I needed.

This one nurse asked me what was going on and I told her. She gave me the time I needed. I will never forget her. I felt like she really listened and she really cared.



- person with lived experience of going to an ED

In this booklet

We hope that the information in this booklet will help you understand more about how the Emergency Department works and your rights for good quality care.



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Your Rights and Responsibilities

While you are in the care of the ED, you have the right to:

- Feel safe
- Be respected
- Be involved in decisions about your care
- Have a support person with you or contacted for you
- Ask for more information
- Have things explained in a way you can understand

You help your care team give you the best possible support by:

- Answering questions as honestly as you can
- Being respectful of staff and other patients
- Asking for more information when you feel unsure



Ask for the 'Your Rights and Responsibilities' brochure for more information.

There are versions for both individuals and support people

It's your care.

You can ask:



- about the plan for your care and what will happen next



- what your options are and give your opinion on what you would like



- why a decision about your care has been made



- for updates and information
- for a drink or something to eat



- for a space to lie down if you need it
- for something to help if you smoke and are having cravings



- for pain relief if you need it



- for a support person to be called and to be part of the conversations



- to see an Aboriginal Health Liaison worker

When you arrive

When you arrive, the triage nurse will ask you how you are feeling and may do some quick tests to check your physical health

What to expect



The admissions staff will take details like your name, contact information and Medicare number. It's important that they have this information right so they can get in touch with you if needed.

If you have changed your GP recently, it's a good idea to let staff know so they can also make sure your medical contact information is correct.

After triage, you will be asked to wait. It is common for there to be a long wait in ED and this can be frustrating for everyone.

People are called into the ED by medical need, not by who arrived first. Sometimes people who are called first seem well, but we can't always tell by looking at someone what is going on for them.

It can be difficult and tiring to wait, but try to remember that staff care about you and you will be seen as soon as possible.

Sometimes the waiting room may seem quiet, or no one is called for a long time. You may wonder why you have to wait.

In fact, there may be things happening inside the ED that we cannot see which is causing a delay; an ambulance may have arrived with a very ill person, or there has been an emergency.

What to ask

- If you need to leave the waiting room for a short time to go to the toilet or smoke, you should let the staff know – and let them know when you get back!
- You can ask for a private space to wait if you feel you need it (each hospital is different but they may have a place you can wait, away from the main waiting room).
- You can stand outside while you wait if you need fresh air or to walk around – but make sure you let someone know where you are and how to find you.
- You can ask for a drink of water if you need one.
- If you feel unsure about what is happening, it is ok to ask one of the staff for an update.



Things to remember

- ✓ Tell a staff member if you start to feel worse
- ✓ The admissions staff and triage nurses do not control how long you have to wait, but are there to assist if you need any help or information

Inside the Emergency Department

When called, you will be taken to a room or bed inside the ED.

A nurse will greet you and help make you comfortable. This is your 'allocated nurse' and they are there to look after you.

The nurse will ask some questions and may do some tests to check your health.



What to expect

After this, you may have to wait for a Doctor to see you.

It is common for this to take some time.

If you need anything while you wait, you can press the call button or find a staff member and ask for your allocated nurse.

When the Doctor arrives they will ask questions and look at the information and test results that have been collected. The Doctor might ask for more tests to be done, such as blood or urine tests.

You might be given medication. You can ask what this is for and any questions you may have. You can also ask for medication if you feel you need it.

The Doctor might ask the 'MHECS' (sounds like 'MEX') team to talk with you about how you are feeling and make a plan to help.

MHECS stands for **M**ental **H**ealth **E**mergency **C**onsultation **S**ervice.

Other staff that work in the ED (like a social worker) may be called to help organise any extra support you might need when you leave the ED.

What to ask

- You can bring someone with you but many hospitals only allow one or two support people inside the ED at a time. Others can wait in the waiting room.
- You can ask who your allocated nurse is and how to contact them if you need anything. Let them know if you are in pain or start to feel worse.
- Once inside the ED, you cannot leave to smoke but you can ask for something to help with cravings while you are there.

Spaces in the ED

Many EDs have different types of spaces for looking after patients.

You might be taken at first to a room with a chair and a computer where the nurse and Doctors will chat to you and ask you questions about how you are feeling.

You might also be brought to a 'Quiet Room' or 'Safe Assessment Room' while you wait for a Doctor or a MHECS assessment. This space is designed to be somewhere you can rest, with soft light and furnishings. It has a door that can be closed to keep out the noise of the ED but you can ask for it to be left open if you prefer.

If you are in a space which isn't comfortable for you, talk to staff about what other options are available.



Having a Mental Health Assessment

What to expect

During your visit to the ED, you might be connected with MHECS, to talk about how you are feeling and your options for care.

The MHECS team are there to talk with you about how you are feeling, your thoughts and why you came to ED. They will ask how you would like to be supported and will listen to your opinions.

If you are in the ED in Wagga hospital, someone from the MHECS team will come and talk to you in person.

If you are in another ED, you will talk to someone from MHECS by video call. They can see you and you can see them so you can talk as you would if they were in the room with you.

MHECS support people all across the Murrumbidgee health district so sometimes there is a wait until they are available.

The MHECS team will talk to you about your options for care. This may include being admitted to the hospital or being discharged home with a plan for your local Mental Health, Drug and Alcohol service to contact you.

They will also talk to a psychiatrist to help make a decision about what support may be helpful for you.



What to ask

- You can ask what your options are for your care and give your opinion on what you would like.
- You can talk to MHECS about keeping safe and ways to cope with difficult feelings.
- You can ask them questions.
- You can ask for things to be explained in a way you can understand.
- You can ask for information about other services that are available to help you.
- A support person can be part of these conversations if you want.

Things to remember

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- ✓ MHECS staff are there to listen and support you with how you are feeling.
 - ✓ MHECS will help make a plan for your care by talking with you and talking to a psychiatrist; this may include being admitted to hospital or being discharged home with a plan to connect with your local community mental health service.

Going home

What to expect

After you have seen a Doctor and/or someone from MHECS, you may be able to go home. This is called being 'discharged.'

A plan will be made with you for support in your local community.

Your local Mental Health, Drug and Alcohol service will get information about your visit to ED and they will call you to make an appointment.

You might be asked to make an appointment with your GP to talk to them about your visit to the ED.

They can arrange some other supports to help you feel better, like a review of your medication or appointment with a counsellor or other specialist.

You may also be referred to other services that can help with things you may need support with.



You will be told what to do if you feel unwell or unsafe after you leave the ED.

You will be given a 'discharge plan' before you leave. This is a list of the appointments that have been made for you, contacts for services and other useful information. It is important to make sure your contact number and GP details are correct.

What to ask

- You can ask for the reasons why a decision about your care has been made.
- You can ask about the plan for your care once you go home and what you should do if you feel unwell or unsafe.
- You can ask for a copy of your discharge plan, or to have referrals and important information written down for you.
- You can ask for a support person to be part of the conversations if you want.



Things to remember

- ✓ Let staff know if you don't feel safe to go home or if you don't have a safe place to go to when you leave ED.
- ✓ Make sure staff have the right contact information for you and your GP.

Being admitted to hospital

What to expect

If you need more support right away, staff might arrange for you to be admitted to hospital.

You will probably be admitted to the 'Mental Health Inpatient Unit' but this could be different depending where you are.



It takes time to organise an admission to hospital. This means you may have to wait in the ED for a bit longer while plans are made.

There are many reasons why this could take some time. You may hear staff talk about bed space, paperwork or other processes.

These are a normal part of the way a hospital works and staff will do their best to move you into hospital as soon as possible.

If you are outside Wagga, it may take extra time to arrange transport to hospital for you.

If you are not sure what is happening, you can ask staff.

By now, you might be feeling tired or hungry. Ask your nurse if you need a place to lie down or want something to eat or drink.

If you are still in a consult room (with seating rather than a bed), you might be able to move to a bed space to rest while you wait.

What to ask

- If you feel upset or confused about what is happening, let staff know. They may be able to have someone come and talk to you.
- You have the right to ask why decisions have been made but ED staff may not have all the information and may not be able to answer all your questions.
- You will be able to talk to staff in the hospital inpatient unit about your time in ED and why you have been brought into the hospital.
- If you would like someone (like a friend or family member) to be told where you are and that you are going into hospital, ask a staff member if they can contact someone for you.

Things to remember



If you smoke, you can ask for something to help with cravings if you need it. Smoking is not allowed in the hospital and unfortunately you are not able to leave the ED to smoke while you wait for admission.

Advice from others with shared experience

The process will take some time and you will have to tell staff your problem a number of times
- Kelly

It's a stressful time but try to remain calm and remember staff are there to help even though it may not seem that way.
- Natasha

If you have doubts, ask. Everyone is on your side, let them help.
- Richard

If I tell staff about my feelings of anxiety, I find they are understanding and more supportive.
- Barbara

Be prepared to communicate your story multiple times without overriding emotion if possible, or have the aid of your carers with you, to convey your story to your treating team. The clearer the story, the easier the journey may become. Own your story, they are here to help you.
- Hamish

Be prepared for a lengthy wait. Try to keep calm and understand that the staff are there to help you. Please do not get upset with them.

- Anon

Don't be afraid to ask staff for information about your care.

- Anon

Hospital staff are here to help you. Please ask if you need help.

- Leonie

It's ok to get help if you need it but be honest to the nurses and doctors because the more you explain what is going on with you/them the more they can help you.

- Ray

If you can, take a support person with you.

- Helen

It's important to allow your information to be shared within your team to ensure care co-ordination.

- Natasha

My notes and questions

