

Frequently Asked Questions Regarding the Secure Mental Health Unit (SMHU) Model of Care

Preamble

The SMHU is being planned to be a purpose built, secure mental health facility located on Mugga Lane, Symonston. The SMHU will be an integral part of ACT Health services provided by the ACT Health Directorate. As part of Canberra Hospital and Health Services (CH&HS), the SMHU will be managed by the Justice Health Services program as part of the Mental Health, Justice Health and Alcohol & Drug Services (MHJHADS) Division.

A secure mental health service does not currently exist locally. A SMHU is not simply about increasing the capacity of what ACT Health already has but it is also about providing a new service to the ACT community.

The SMHU Model of Care Draft v2.1 went out for public consultation at the end of 2013. The following frequently asked questions are drawn from the feedback received during consultation.

Purpose and Scope of the SMHU

What is the purpose of the SMHU?

The SMHU will be a 25 bed unit that will provide a safe clinical and therapeutic environment for people with a mental illness who may be characterised as complex, often difficult to treat and are of serious risk to others. People treated in the SMHU will be unable to be safely or adequately treated in a less restrictive setting. This also includes people with a mental illness who cannot be adequately assessed and treated in a correctional setting.

What will be the difference between acute care provided at SMHU and acute care provided at the Adult Mental Health Unit (AMHU)?

The acute care provision will be similar to what is provided at the AMHU; however the assessed risk of the individual will be such that care and treatment will need to be provided in a secure environment.

What will be the difference between the rehabilitation at the SMHU and mental health rehabilitation at the new University of Canberra Public Hospital (UCPH)?

The rehabilitation needs of those admitted to the SMHU will be more complex in part due to their assessed security needs.

What treatment will be offered?

The service model will be based on therapeutic objectives rather than a correctional model of care and will be underpinned by a recovery approach.

The unit will provide specialised mental health treatment, care and rehabilitation programs that address the physical, psychological, social, cultural and spiritual needs of the person.

The treatment will be individually tailored with programs that maximise individual functioning and minimise the effects of long term care. The unit will include residential accommodation, recreational, vocational and therapy programs.

In the absence of suitable alternatives, can a person who has a mental disorder/dysfunction, without a mental illness, be admitted?

No. The SMHU will be a specialist mental health service for a people with a diagnosed serious and enduring mental illness or co-morbid presentations.

Will the SMHU provide for people in regional areas?

All eligible Australian residents under the Australian Healthcare Agreement 2012 are able to access care and treatment in the ACT, this will include the SMHU. As part of the care provided at the SMHU, arrangements will be made to repatriate people back to a service closer to their homes.

Bed Numbers and Expansion

Will all 25 beds open when the unit is commissioned?

Not all 25 beds will be open at commissioning. There will be a staged opening of the acute and rehabilitation beds of the SMHU. 25 beds allows for some growth in the need for secure care, so it is anticipated that a limited number of beds will open when the SMHU is commissioned. The exact number of beds that will be commissioned on opening is yet to be determined. This staged opening will allow also allow for recruitment of the workforce.

Will 25 beds enough to meet the community need?

Yes. The need for secure mental health beds in the ACT was determined through extensive consultation and review by interstate and ACT expert service providers.

Is ACT Health allowing for future expansion of the SMHU?

Yes, the current planning process is taking this into account.

Consumers with High Secure Needs

Will people with high secure needs be treated at the SMHU?

No. The SMHU is a low to medium secure facility that will respond to the community level of need. Provision of high secure beds for the very small number of ACT residents requiring them would be cost prohibitive as the needs of high secure consumers are exponentially greater. The ACT Government is aware that there is limited need to provide high secure mental health care for the community and so is in consultation with other States how this might best be provided.

Spiritual Care

Will people of various religions will be able to practice their faith?

Yes. The Spiritual Care Policy of Canberra Hospital & Health Services will apply to this unit and provision for a multi-faith space is part of the planning process for the SMHU.

Women

Will women and their babies be admitted?

Women will be admitted to the SMHU. One of the admission requirements of the SMHU is in regards to serious risk to self or others and therefore it is unlikely that a woman would be deemed suitable to have custody of her baby at the time of admission or throughout her stay at the SMHU.

The management and staff at SMHU will work closely with Care and Protection Services and any other government and non government entities involved in the care of the person to ensure the care arrangements of the baby are in the best interest for all parties involved.

Young People

Will there be oversight by a statutory body to ensure that all less restrictive options have been exhausted before a young person goes to the SMHU?

It will be rare for a young person to be admitted to the SMHU. In exceptional circumstances, services may be provided, following specific consideration by the Chief Psychiatrist, to a young person aged 16 years of age or older who cannot be safely managed in a less restrictive environment. In the event that a young person might require admission to the SMHU, a multi-agency review will take place before admission to consider all available treatment and care options for the young person.

Will young people be separated from adults?

In the rare event that a young person is admitted, that person will be cared for in the vulnerable persons suite.

Vulnerable Persons

How will a person be assessed as vulnerable?

The admission process will assess a person's vulnerability and risk factors. People differ in their exposure to risk as a result of their social group, gender, ethnic or other identity, age and other factors. Before a person is admitted, the Admission Panel will consider the existing consumer profile of the unit and the availability of segregation options.

Consumer Pathways

What will be the role of ACT Civil and Administrative Tribunal (ACAT) in the transfer, detention, release and discharge of consumers?

The role and function of the ACAT in the transfer, detention, release and discharge of consumer will be outlined in the amendment to the *Mental Health (Treatment and Care) Act 1994* and so cannot be elaborated on at this time. It is anticipated that this Bill will be finalised in 2014.

Will people under a Section 309 of the *Crimes Act 1900* still be assessed at Canberra Hospital Mental Health Assessment Unit (MHAU)?

Yes. Not all people referred to the Canberra Hospital under a Section 309 from the Magistrates Court will require admission to a Mental Health service. The assessment at the MHAU will determine what treatment and care is needed.

Will the ACAT be required to authorise non-emergency transfers of civil persons to the SMHU?

No. The ACAT will be able to refer people for admission to the SMHU. The decision to admit will be based on a clinical assessment and then review by the Admission Panel, as outlined in the Model of Care.

Should any referral to the SMHU not be found suitable, the SMHU team will provide specific feedback to the referring team about the decision and also offer strategies for managing risk and promoting recovery in alternative settings.

Will the Admission Panel be able to consider a referral for an emergency admission?

Yes. If there is need of an emergency admission the Admission Panel can be convened at short notice.

What step-down facilities from the SMHU are being provided?

People may be discharged to the UCPH Mental Health Rehabilitation Unit or to mental health care in the community. MHJHADS has an established community based forensic mental health service. The service specialises in the appropriate management of offenders and alleged offenders in the community.

Safety and Security

Will there be segregation or separation of certain groups of people? E.g. young people, women remanded, sentenced and civil?

When a person is admitted to the unit from a correctional facility, their status as a sentenced or remanded person continues. However, as the primary reason for admission to the facility will be for mental health treatment and care, it is imperative that the person is able to receive this without discrimination. For this reason, there will be no differentiation of admitted persons on the basis of their status within the criminal justice system, apart from observing any necessary requirements imposed by legislation or security needs. However ongoing risk assessments will be conducted by staff and appropriate measures will be implemented to ensure that the safety of all consumers, visitors and staff is maintained.

The segregation of vulnerable groups can be achieved by use of the vulnerable person's suites.

What are the comparative security arrangements with AMC?

The SMHU is a health facility and not a correctional environment. The SMHU will have a secure perimeter, security staff and management over entry and exit.

Will staff and visitors be searched?

A condition of entry to the unit will be a preparedness to undergo security checks similar to those undertaken at airports including the searching of baggage prior to entry. The SMHU will have a list of contraband that all persons will be expected to observe. Everyone entering the SMHU, including staff, will go through an identification check and walk through a fixed metal detector. Searches within the SMHU will take place if and when necessary.

Personal information provided to gain access to the facility will be protected under the *Privacy Act 1988*.

What will happen if someone leaves the SMHU without authorisation?

The SMHU will have robust security measures designed to prevent people from leaving the unit without authorisation. If a person was able to depart unauthorised, the police would be immediately notified and search procedures implemented. ACT Police will notify neighbours of the SMHU as required.

How will a consumer's safety and that of the community be maximised when a person is on leave?

The SMHU will have rigorous assessment protocols that will take into account the person's rehabilitation needs and the protection of the community. The Chief Psychiatrist or the ACAT will have the authority to grant leave.

Appearance and Amenity

Will there be comparable amenity to the AMC and the AMHU?

The SMHU will be a fit for purpose facility. The amenity is being planned to be consistent with a therapeutic environment and not a custodial environment. Design and planning of the SMHU is currently underway.

How identifiable will the SMHU be from the street? Will it look like a correctional facility?

The design of the SMHU will not reflect a custodial setting. Some of the unit's environmental security will be visible from the outside. The layout of the unit will reflect a health environment.

Artist's impressions of the SMHU design will be made available for public information in May 2014.

Workforce

Does ACT Health have the staff to enable the SMHU to open? If not, where will they come from?

ACT Health will undertake a comprehensive recruitment program to recruit adequate numbers of suitably qualified staff for SMHU. ACT Health will also up-skill or re-skill current staff who choose to work at the SMHU. A specialist forensic psychiatrist will be recruited to lead the service and begin planning and recruiting staff as early as possible.

There will be a staged opening of SMHU and the workforce required will be recruited and developed for each stage.

ACT Health is reviewing options for the provision of security staff at the SMHU.

Will there be a role for peer support workers?

Plans are underway to incorporate peer support workers into the ACT Health workforce.