

The Community Visitor Program (Adult)

Rights protection and abuse prevention for adults with disability

The Office of the Public Guardian is a new independent statutory body—established on 1 July 2014—responsible for protecting the rights of vulnerable adults with impaired decision making capacity and children and young people in out-of-home care (foster care, kinship care) residential care and youth detention.

For adults, the Public Guardian replaces the existing Adult Guardian and takes on all the Adult Guardian's responsibilities for protecting the rights of vulnerable adults with impaired capacity to make their own decisions, including the Community Visitor Program for adults.

Why do we need community visitors?

The Public Guardian appoints community visitors on a casual basis to protect the rights and interests of adults with intellectual, psychiatric or cognitive disability.

Community visitors provide a rights protection and abuse prevention service to more than 6000 Queensland adults who may be subject to abuse, neglect or exploitation due to their impaired decision-making capacity resulting from disability.

Who is eligible for the service provided by community visitors?

Community visitors independently monitor three different types of accommodation called 'visitable sites'. These are:

- disability accommodation provided or funded by the Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services
- authorised mental health services
- private hostels (with level 3 accreditation).

We refer to residents in visitable sites who have an intellectual, psychiatric or cognitive disability as 'consumers'.

How do community visitors safeguard consumers?

Community visitors conduct regular unannounced visits to sites. They visit between 8am and 6pm any day of the week, including weekends. Visits are purposely unannounced so that community visitors can observe the standard of service delivery provided by the site on a typical day.

Community visitors apply their inquiry and complaint functions (as defined in section 41 of the *Public Guardian Act 2014*) to identify issues for or on behalf of consumers. They will escalate issues to management if required, or in some cases may refer the issue on to an external agency for investigation.

What do they do when conducting visits?

At each visit community visitors will seek information about whether:

- adequate services are provided for assessment, treatment and support
- the standards of accommodation, health and wellbeing are appropriate
- services are provided in a way least restrictive of rights
- adequate information is available for consumers about their rights
- there is an accessible and effective complaints process in place.

When possible, community visitors consider the views and wishes of consumers before asking questions of staff or inspecting site documents. However, community visitors have a legislative obligation to act in a way consistent with the proper care and protection of a consumer whose disability may prevent them from identifying the risks associated with certain elements of the service they receive.

Visit reports

At the completion of each visit community visitors produce a report of their findings which is sent to the service provider.

Each issue is linked to the relevant sector standard as a way of reinforcing for service providers their obligation to provide services in accordance with the Human Services Quality Standards, the National Mental Health Standards, or the *Residential Services (Accreditation) Act 2002*.

Copies of visit reports may also be provided to the Director, Mental Health, and the Director, Forensic Disability. When the accommodation supports adults with challenging behaviors and consequently restrictive practices are being used at the site—such as containment, seclusion, chemical (medication), physical or mechanical restraint—the report may also be sent to the Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal, an appointed guardian or administrator, or the Director-General, Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services.

If another party has concerns for the rights and interests of a consumer and wishes to obtain a copy of a visit report, their request will be referred to the Public Guardian for consideration.

How can you help us?

We are committed to ensuring that community visitors provide an effective and professional service for consumers. Your feedback is always welcome so we can continue to improve our practice.

If you have any concerns for the rights and interest of a consumer at a visitable site please let us know immediately.

Contact Us

Community Visitor Program

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