

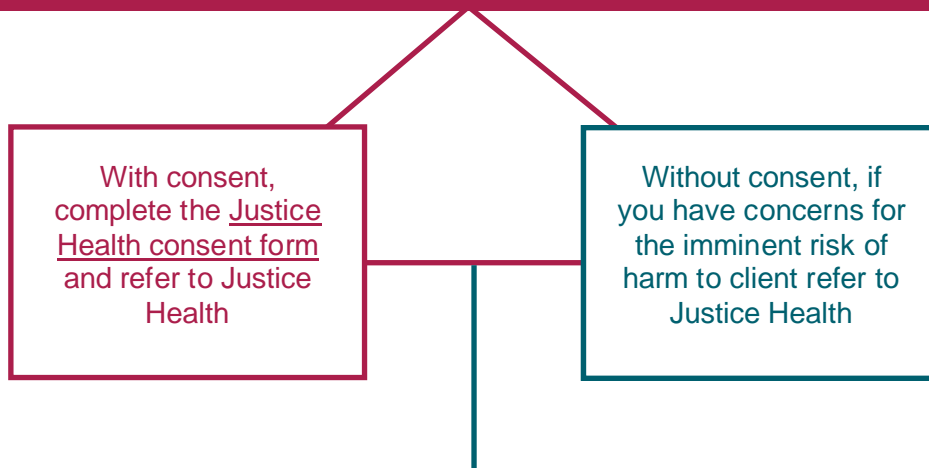
Working with clients in distress in a custodial setting

If you have concerns for your client's safety

It is not uncommon for clients in custody to express feelings of hopelessness, distress and to make statements which suggest they may be thinking of self-harm or suicide.

Engaging calmly, using active listening and asking the client about their distress and suicidal crisis may reduce, rather than increase, the risk of the client engaging in suicidal behaviour.

- I can see/ hear you are distressed. Are you safe now?
- How can I help you stay safe?
- Can we think about some ways you can take care of yourself while you're feeling like this?
- Is there anyone in custody you can reach out to or anyone you might be able to phone?
- I want to make sure you have the right help and support.
Would it be helpful for me to contact Justice Health to get you further support?



If your client is in a public correctional centre, call the **Mental Health Helpline number 1800 222 472**.

Private correctional centre contact details are provided on page 3

- You will need to provide: your name, the client's name and MIN, the centre where they are located, and your concerns.
- If you have information that may assist the client, you can advocate for them further, e.g., placing the client in a cell with another person who can support them.
- You can request to be informed about the outcome of a welfare check. The capacity to do this depends on staff resources.

What to do if client is very distressed or says they are thinking about suicide

Find out if the client is safe now

What you might say:

- *Are you safe now?*

Why this is important: The client can share any immediate threats to their safety.

Work with the client to help them find ways to stay safe

What you might say:

- *How can I help keep you safe now?*
- *Can we think of some ways you can take care of yourself while you're feeling like this?*
- *Is there anyone in custody you can reach out to or anyone you might be able to phone?*
- *I want to make sure you have the right help and support. Would it be helpful for me to contact Justice Health to get you further support?*
- *Would you like me to contact any family or friends to ask them to contact you?*

Why is this important: The client is supported to identify ways to stay safe and think of potential resources they have around them. The client feels they are not alone in the situation.

If you have client consent

If you have gained consent from the client to release health information and want to be informed about the outcome of a welfare check, it may be possible to receive a call back, but this will be dependent on staff resources. The Mental Health line does not have a call back function, it is only likely you will receive a call back if the client is in a prison with a dedicated Mental Health facility and the staff have time to return your call. Ultimately the information is the client's information and can only be released if they have signed a written authority. They can complete the Justice Health consent form themselves, with a lawyer or health worker.

If you do not have client consent

If you do not have client consent, but you have concerns for the imminent risk of harm to the client, you can call the Mental Health Helpline and pass on your concerns.

Without consent from the client, you are only able to pass on information to the Mental Health Helpline about their safety. You will not be able to receive information.

What will happen to the client if I request a welfare check?

Approaches differ across correctional centres and are dependent on whether the client is in a centre with a dedicated mental health facility or not. The response will also largely depend on how the client presents when reviewed by custodial staff.

If there are concerns that the client is at immediate risk of harm, a Mandatory Notification will be made, and the client may be placed in isolation where they can be observed.

However, there may be an opportunity to balance dignity and risk by placing your client in a cell with another person who is willing and able to support your client. If you know the factors that may assist your client, you can advocate for them to be in place.

What to do if your client is in a private correctional centre

For Junee

- use the Mental Health Helpline number 1800 222 472

For Parklea CC

- Nurse Manager phone 9678 4808, 9678 4228
- Health Records phone 9678 4151 • Email: svchparkleanursingadministration@svha.org.au

For Clarence CC

- Health Services Manager Ph. 6643 6534
- Nurse Unit Manager – Male Maximum Ph. 6002 1785
- Nurse Unit Manager – Female & Male Minimum Ph. 6604 1856
- Clinical Team Leader (Male Maximum) Ph. 6643 1781
- Clinical Team Leader (Female) Ph. 6643 1805
- Clinical Team Leader (Male Minimum) Ph. 6643 1820

About the Mental Health Helpline 1800 222 472

The Mental Health Helpline is available 24 hours a day, operated by trained Mental Health Nurses.

The Helpline can support you with information, referral and advice regarding your client in custody.

The Helpline has been set up to provide support to those in custody, their relatives, Corrective Services as well as Health and Legal services.

When calling the Mental Health Helpline, the Nurse answering the phone will ask you for your name, the name of the person you are calling about, their MIN, the centre where they are located and what we can do to assist.

They can take immediate action if you raise concerns around the wellbeing and safety of your client if there is a suicide or self-harm risk.

If, based on your familiarity with the client or your conversation with them, you have information about possible aggravating or protective factors, you can communicate those to the Mental Health Helpline. For example, the client may tell you that they have had panic attacks when they have been in a cell on their own in the past, usually feel better after a phone call to a particular person, or they feel calmer when they have something to distract them like books or other reading materials.

The Mental Health Helpline cannot always provide the level of detail you would like unless your client has signed a consent to liaise form. This enables the Helpline to provide details about their health and the care they are receiving.

If they do not have this form, the Nurse can still listen and make note of your concerns.

They take all matters seriously and encourage you to call if you have any concerns about your client.

Warrant Endorsement

If you have concerns about a client at court, inform the court about this concern and they can endorse the warrant for the client to obtain mental health attention and/or treatment. Justice Health will take steps to check on the client's welfare and to provide treatment, where possible, until the next court date.

Further resources and seeking support

Supporting clients experiencing suicidal crisis can also be distressing for practitioners.

The Law Society of NSW's [Solicitor Outreach Service](#) (SOS) is a confidential counselling service for NSW solicitors. NSW solicitors can call SOS on 1800 592 296 for access to up to three psychology counselling sessions per financial year and 24/7 telephone crisis counselling with a psychologist.

For barristers, [BarCare](#) is an independent and confidential counselling service for barristers with up to six consultations provided free of charge.