



Hon Lawrence Springborg MP  
Minister for Health

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17 FEB 2014  
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Ms Glenys Wilkinson  
Chief Executive Officer  
Australian Association of Social Workers  
PO Box 4956  
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12 FEB 2014

Dear Ms Wilkinson

Thank you for your letter dated 23 December 2013, in relation to the Department of Health's decision to improve security in Queensland's 16 acute adult mental health inpatient units from 15 December 2013 and to expand the use of monitoring devices. I apologise for the delay in responding.

I very much appreciate you taking the time to share with me the views of the Australian Association of Social Workers in relation to this matter. I would like to take this opportunity to clarify the purpose of the Department's decision. First and foremost, strengthening the security of acute units is aimed at improving patient care. The decision was made following a number of incidents regarding involuntary patients absconding from inpatient facilities. These events pose a risk both for the patients concerned and the community. It is important to note that this decision has not been taken in isolation. Rather, securing wards is one of a number of strategies to improve patient care and safety, along with increased clinical oversight and improved local escalation processes and risk assessments.

I understand the importance of ensuring that all patients in acute mental health inpatient facilities are able to receive appropriate care in an environment that is conducive to meeting their clinical needs. Please be assured that the Department of Health is collaborating with Hospital and Health Services to ensure that implementation of security arrangements at the local service level is conducted in the context of contemporary mental health service delivery and in accordance with the principles of least restriction and respect for individual rights and dignity. Ms Janet Ceron, Director, Mental Health, Health Service and Clinical Innovation, Department of Health, has issued policy and practice guidelines to support services to implement the decision to secure acute adult mental health inpatient units with a view to ensuring no unintended consequences and has a statutory responsibility to monitor compliance with the Act and associated policy and guidelines.

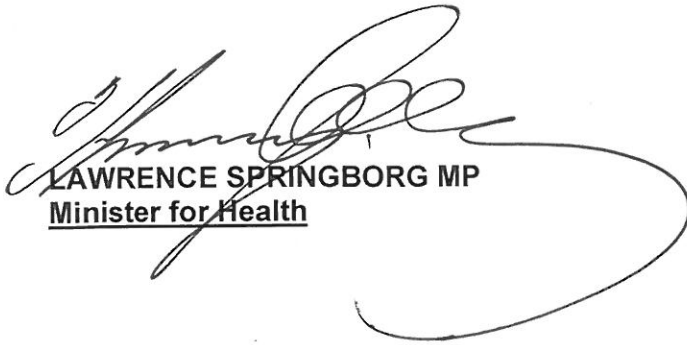
In relation to the use of GPS monitoring devices, the Queensland Health policy states that a monitoring condition may be applied only if it is the least restrictive mechanism for managing a patient's leave and there is no suitable alternative. It is therefore intended that GPS devices will only apply in circumstances assessed as being of high risk.

I acknowledge the unfortunate manner in which this matter has been reported in the media to date, and understand that media portrayal of mental illness is an important factor influencing community attitudes. I can assure you that Queensland Health is committed to improving social inclusion and contributing to the recovery of people with mental illness.

I note your advocacy for investing in community-based early intervention and other important services that contribute to effective mental healthcare. Queensland public health facilities are committed to working together to provide responsive and effective mental health services for all Queenslanders.

Thank you again for bringing this matter to my attention.

Yours sincerely



**LAWRENCE SPRINGBORG MP**  
**Minister for Health**