



# Navigators Guide

For Family and Friends

2008

Mental Health Services in  
Hunter New England

New South Wales

Second Edition

HUNTER NEW ENGLAND  
NSW HEALTH





## Welcome & Introduction

The Navigator's Guide has been developed to help families and friends negotiate their way through mental health services within the Hunter New England region. People experiencing a mental illness or health problem may be unclear who to contact and speak to, especially if they are in crisis or experiencing a mental health problem for the first time. The first person they may turn to is their partner, parents, brothers and sisters, someone they live with or a close friend. This guide was developed by consumers, carers and clinicians including staff from our health services and a number of non-government organisations, who regularly come into contact with families and carers and appreciate the difficulties they often face. It has been produced by Hunter New England Mental Health in partnership with the Association of Relatives and Friends of the Mentally Ill (ARAFMI).

Life is a journey and the challenges we face and how we handle them are part of that journey. Mental illness interrupts our lives and our ability to cope with every day life, work, relationships and home. It affects our self-esteem, our self-confidence, it may cause distress and anxiety, it puts stress on our work, social life, our health, and those we care about and care for. There is still considerable misunderstanding and social stigma around mental illness and both carers and consumers frequently relate stories that indicate this can be even more disruptive and distressing than the illness itself. If you have a close family member or friend who is experiencing difficulties associated with a mental illness or disorder, you are not alone. There are a range of services offered by Hunter New England Health, non-government organisations in the community and volunteers who understand what you are going through and are in a position to help. The question is - Who are they? Where are they? And how do I get support and help from the right people? This guide is specifically designed for family and friends to help them through this journey, providing useful information on our services, how to contact them and what to expect from these services. It also provides useful tips to assist you in making decisions about accessing appropriate care for your family member and support for yourself. It includes information on rights and responsibilities, what to do in a crisis, descriptions of services in the hospital and community, involuntary treatment under the NSW Mental Health Act, Guardianship legislation, and how to look after yourself as well. Whether you live and work in Armidale, Tamworth, Taree, Maitland, Newcastle or somewhere in between, this guide will answer some of your essential needs and questions.

Don't let mental illness or life itself overwhelm you or cause broken dreams. People with mental illness may face loss of job, income, home, friends and social support networks, causing serious hardship. Don't wait for this to happen. Research tells us that appropriate and early intervention, treatment and support has a significant impact on helping people get their lives back together. Recovery may take some time and many do recover fully or learn to live with their illness and lead ordinary, meaningful, creative and highly successful lives. If you are a carer yourself, you don't have to miss out either, not having to worry about someone else all the time, knowing there is hope and your relative or friend can get help – Help in getting better and leading a productive life. This guide will hopefully help you find a way through this, through the often complex arrangement of services that exist, how they work, referrals and self-referral, giving you the information you need to make some of those choices, and to assist you to find that extra courage to find us and discover how we can help.

The following page in this introductory Fact Sheet provides a list of topics covered by each of the Navigator's Guide Fact Sheets – There may be one or two in particular which provide the information you need right now. The following page covers information about the Navigator's Guide and how to use it, and the final page is a list of acknowledgments in appreciation of all who have been involved in writing and developing it.



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## Guide Notes for Use

The Navigator's Guide has been divided into two sections. Section 1 [NG1-18], fully completed in August 2008, is a full review of all the original Fact Sheets in the first edition in 2002, totalling 14, with some new ones added. Section 2 is an entirely new section being created, covering new topics and information on services not found in the first edition. Section 2 will gradually become available as they are written and if a topic has [NEW] written next to it, this means it is now available. So you can also keep track of new Fact Sheets as they become available. These Fact Sheets are available on the Hunter New England Mental Health Internet Website. If you can click on the topic on the website, the Fact Sheet is available and will open as a PDF for you to view, download or print off a hard copy. If you are unable to click on the topic and/or it is a different font or font colour, this indicates it is not currently available. A Fact Sheet may be unavailable for a number of reasons:

- It has been proposed and not yet completed
- It has been withdrawn for correction
- It is currently being reviewed

The Navigator's Guide will be under a constant cycle of review. This is a new and improved feature. Fact Sheets will be reviewed periodically or whenever the content needs to be updated due to changes in services, contact details or information. Occasionally a Fact Sheet may be permanently removed, re-written or re-titled depending on the feedback we receive, its accuracy or usefulness. Similarly, new Fact Sheets may be added to the list.

Fact Sheets have been divided according to primary focus. Those which focus mainly on information associated with and description of *specific services* are identifiable by the words **Navigators Guide** in red font at the top and bottom of each Fact Sheet with red tables. Fact Sheets which focus mainly on a *specific topic* providing general information and advice on that topic are identifiable by the words **Navigators Guide** in green font at the top and bottom of the Fact Sheet with green tables. The background graphics are also interchanged.

Footnotes have been used and numbered in association with the text and topic. This may be a reference, source of information or a cross-reference to a related Fact Sheet, which you are invited to read in association with the one you are reading. This way the topic may unfold to two or three Fact Sheets in sequential order, adding to your knowledge and understanding of particular services or topics and how they may be related. This is a helpful way to handle the information when you need it, as most people don't have time to read all of them, nor may all be relevant to your situation – After all, section 1 amounts to over forty pages of information, and on completion of section 2, this will be equivalent to modest book. You can read, collect and store these Fact Sheets for future use in the convenience of your own home, at a library, a waiting room, clinic or surgery, wherever a PC and Internet are accessible, any time of day or night. Some surgeries or clinics may print off specific Fact Sheets to display in their waiting rooms and you may be able to ask staff in one of our hospitals or community mental health services for a copy of a relevant Fact Sheet.

We have refrained from duplicating information provided by other organisations. For instance the Mental Health Association (NSW) have a range of Fact Sheets on Mental Disorders at [www.mentalhealth.asn](http://www.mentalhealth.asn). NSW Health provide a range of Fact Sheets and government publications on mental health issues and concerns at <http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/living/mental.html>. The Commonwealth Government provide a range of national publications and Fact Sheets on *What is Mental Illness?* at <http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/mental-pubs>. You will find other useful websites and resources on specific mental health topics and services throughout this Navigator's Guide.

Finally, if for any reason you would like to provide us with feedback, you come across any inaccuracies, contact details are incorrect or you have a suggestion on how we might improve the Navigator's Guide from hereon, you can complete the on-line feedback form **or** give HNEMH a call and speak direct to the officer for *Promotion & Prevention* on **02 4924 6523** or give ARAFMI Hunter a call on **02 4961 2842** or **02 4961 6717**.

If you would like more information on the Navigator's Guide you can email one of the following editors:

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