



*Mental Health Carers*  
**ARAFMI ILLAWARRA**  
*Caring for Carers*

# **A Crisis Manual for Mental Health Carers**

**An Unexpected Journey**

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The development of this Crisis Manual was funded by ClubsNSW through their ClubGRANTS program in 2017.

We thank the Collegians Football Club for their generosity. This grant enabled us to research and compile information that is useful to those caring for someone with a mental illness. We hope you will find the information enclosed helpful.

Thank you to all those carers, support workers, mental health professionals and others who contributed to the development of this Project.

The information and contact numbers contained in this booklet are relevant to those in the Illawarra Shoalhaven Local Health District and are current as at March 2018.

## REFERENCES

Mental Health Carers NSW/Users Guide to the NSW Mental Health System/Training Manual  
[www.mentalhealthcarersnsw.org](http://www.mentalhealthcarersnsw.org)

NSW Health/Mental Health for Emergency Departments

<http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/mentalhealth/publications/Publications/mental-health-ed-guide.pdf>

NSW Health/ Your Healthcare Rights and Responsibilities – A guide for NSW Health staff

[http://www1.health.nsw.gov.au/pds/ActivePDSDocuments/PD2011\\_022.pdf](http://www1.health.nsw.gov.au/pds/ActivePDSDocuments/PD2011_022.pdf)

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Disclaimer: This publication is for general information purposes only. It is not intended as advice on any particular matter and is not a substitute for professional or legal advice.

## Useful Numbers

**NSW Mental Health Line - 24 hours**

**1800 011 511**

**Lifeline Crisis Support - 24 hours**

**13 11 14**

**Mental Health Carers ARAFMI Illawarra**

**42 833 499**

**42 833 993**

Mental Health Carers (ARAFMI) Illawarra are pleased to be able to offer some information that may be useful in a Mental Health Crisis.

Further information that may be needed at a later time can be found at [www.arafmiillawarra.org.au](http://www.arafmiillawarra.org.au) as well as other web sites listed later in this booklet.

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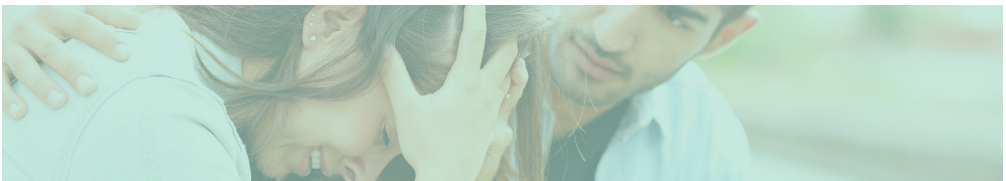
# During Crisis

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 issue 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.

## General Tips During Crisis

- Stay calm and centred
- Ensure your own safety and others safety
- Don't take unnecessary risks
- Assess the situation (Pages 5,6,7 )
- Contact the most appropriate support service for Help
- Ask someone else for assistance
- Keep instructions clear and simple to others, especially when communicating with your loved one
- Call/use your personal supports



# During Crisis Assess the Risk

## When VIOLENCE or AGGRESSION IS PRESENT

Are there safety concerns for you or others?

**YES**



Attempt to remove yourself and anyone else that is at risk of harm and **call 000**.

**NO**



You can stay with your loved one until you establish the next step.

## When VIOLENCE or AGGRESSION is NOT Present

Are there immediate concerns for the person in Crisis?

**YES**



You need to stay with your loved one and **call 000** immediately and ask for an Ambulance

**NO**



You can stay with your loved one until you establish the next step.

# THE NEXT STEP > > >

## What to Do? Who to Call?

You can contact the **NSW Mental Health Line** on **1800 011 511** for advice regarding the person you care for.

AND / OR

**Call 000** and give them as much information as possible.

AND

Locate a support person for yourself. A friend or relative to support you while your loved one is being assessed.

If needed contact one of the support services on Page 18.

Once in ED, you can ask to speak to a social worker and/or a peer support worker if you are unsure of the processes.



# Who to Call for NON-URGENT Advice

If your loved one is already under the care of a mental health service or professional, during normal business hours you can contact the service or professional involved, or visit your GP providing no-one is in immediate medical danger or threat.

They can help you decide what the best course of action might be and which service to access.

- If you have questions or non-urgent concerns about the person you support please call **Mental Health Line on 1800 011 511** for advice or information. Available 24hrs 7 days per week
- Does your loved one have a case worker? If so you can inform them of your concerns for your loved one
- Would they agree to have an ambulance attend their home, for a Mental Health Assessment, without the Police?  
(Only possible if no violence or aggression present)
- Would they agree to have the Community Mental Health Acute Assessment Team attend to assess their Mental Health without any emergency services?

**This service is available 7 days a week**

**8:30am – 8:30pm Mon to Fri**

**8:30am – 5pm on weekends and public holidays.**

**Accessed through the Mental Health Line.**

As a carer, if you are concerned about someone, you should feel free to seek advice or assistance even if the other person is not happy with the idea. When your loved one is unwell - usually you are the best judge of when assistance is required.



# Dealing with Emergency Services

**It is important to stay calm. Speak slowly and clearly.**

When contacting **000** be prepared to provide the following information when asked.

- Type of emergency/service - Ambulance or Police
- Give as much information as possible - communicate the risks i.e. person suicidal, person threatening harm to self or others. So an appropriate response can be determined
- Your name and phone contact
- Name, age and relationship of the person you are concerned about
- Are they breathing or conscious
- Your location, e.g. street name and number and the name of the nearest cross street
- Don't hang up until the operator has all the information they need

Under the Mental Health Act an ambulance officer may take a person who appears mentally ill or mentally disordered to a mental health facility or Emergency Department. The ambulance officer(s) can ask the police for help to do this if they resist.



# At the Emergency Department

# Emergency



## What happens when my loved one presents to ED?

### Triage -The triage assessment will determine:

- Urgency – using the mental health/behavioural indicators of the Australasian Triage Scale
- Initial risk assessment
- Observation/supervision level that the patient requires in the ED

### Assessment by Emergency Department Doctor

- A history is taken from patient if possible - as well as relatives, friends or accompanying police or ambulance officers.
- Treatment of any physical injuries or underlying medical issues. e.g. self harm, overdose
- Consultation with medical doctor who will rule out medical conditions which could mirror mental illness symptoms or identify underlying physical health issues.

### Assessment by Mental Health Team

- The Mental Health Team will see your loved one after they are cleared by the medical doctor

Sometimes an early Mental Health Assessment is not possible due to self administered medications, sedation, confusion or injury.

At times due to medical emergencies there may be long waits over 8hrs: You are able to request something to eat and drink for you and the person you are supporting.

# How can I be involved with the Assessment?

Information should be sought from the loved ones family or carers wherever possible. This information can aid in diagnosis, assessment of risk and may influence management and discharge planning.

**Patients must give permission** for a carer being consulted and included in healthcare discussions. If this permission is given, healthcare providers must listen to carers and give them the opportunity to provide and receive information about the patient's condition. If your loved one is over 18 and does not give permission for others to include you in discussions their rights must be respected. A medical officer can overrule this if he/she reasonably believes that the patient is incapable of making such a decision or it may put the patient or nominated carer at risk of serious harm.

That however does not stop you providing healthcare workers with information about their condition/behaviours.

**A child under 18** cannot exclude their parents.

## Who is the “carer” under the Act?

Designated Care Provider – a patient may nominate up to 2 designated care providers.

If there is no nomination, then the designated carer of the patient is:

- The parent of a patient who is a child
- If the patient is over the age of 14 years and is not a person under guardianship, a person nominated by the patient.
- The spouse or partner (if in a current and close relationship)
- Individual who is primarily responsible for providing support or care to the patient
- A close friend or relative of the patient

For further clarification and information please see <http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/mentalhealth/Pages/legislation.aspx>

# What does Involuntary Admission mean?

## When can someone be kept in hospital against their will?

People are often provided with mental health care under the cover of the Mental Health Act 2007 (NSW).

When a person is suffering a serious mental illness, is a risk to themselves or others, and refusing treatment they may be admitted or treated as an involuntary patient under the Act.

Involuntary treatment does not preclude someone from being involved in the decisions about their mental health care and is tightly regulated by the Act.

The hospital cannot continue to keep them against their will unless at least two doctors find that they are a mentally ill person or a mentally disordered person. At least one of the doctors must be a psychiatrist.

## How long can they be kept in hospital against their will?

If they are found to be a mentally disordered person, they can only be kept in hospital for up to 3 working days, excluding weekends and public holidays.

If they are found to be a mentally ill person, they can be kept in hospital until they see the Mental Health Tribunal which will hold an inquiry, usually via teleconference, to decide what will happen to them.

If the doctor has applied to the Mental Health Review Tribunal for an inquiry, they can administer treatment before the inquiry where it is necessary to:

- Prevent them hurting themselves or someone else
- Prevent them doing something that is likely to harm you or someone else
- Prevent them from becoming more unwell.

# What does Voluntary Admission mean?

Voluntary admission to a mental health unit occurs in much the same way as admission to a general hospital. A patient may be admitted to a hospital at their own request or on the advice of a doctor, parent, carer or guardian – this may be at a time when they need some extra support.

Any person over the age of 14 can request voluntary admission or a parent or guardian of the person who is under the age of 18 can request voluntary admission on their behalf.

Many people find spending time in a mental health unit a very helpful way to:

- Find out what is happening to them and why
- Stabilise medication
- Get intensive treatment by medical and allied health staff with specialised training

The length of stay will depend on a range of factors. These may include, the condition being treated, the type of treatment needed and what the treating team decides will benefit you the most.

When the patient first arrives they will have a consultation with a doctor. The doctor will conduct an assessment.

**TIP: Have a list of questions ready that you would like answered**

A medical officer may discharge a voluntary patient at any time if the doctor is of the opinion that the patient is not likely to benefit from further care or treatment as a voluntary patient.

A voluntary patient can be held for up to two hours for the purposes of assessing whether to detain them as an involuntary patient.

# Rights of Carers of Involuntary and Voluntary Patients

All reasonable practicable steps must be taken within 24 hours of a person being admitted to notify any designated carer or principal care provider of admission and where applicable of any proposed mental health inquiry.

When requested by a nominated carer, the details of types and dosages of medications, currently or recently administered to a patient must be provided.

As far as is 'reasonably practicable', steps must be taken to notify the principal care provider and designated carers when the patient:

- Is absent from the facility without permission
- Is discharged from the hospital
- Is reclassified as a voluntary or involuntary patient
- Is transferred or a transfer is proposed
- If an application is made to the tribunal for consent to a surgical operation or special medical treatment,
- If a surgical operation is performed on the patient



A notification must be made as soon as the medical officer is aware of the occurrence. The relevant rights also apply to a carer of someone under a Community Treatment Order.

It is at the voluntary or involuntary patient's discretion whether or not to choose a carer. However, doctors can nominate a principal care provider or designated carer/s.

## **Legal Advice**

Legal Aid Commission Wollongong office

Provides free legal advice - phone 42 288299 - ask for civil law

<https://www.legalaid.nsw.gov.au/>

## **Mental Health Advocacy Service**

Provides free legal advice - phone 9745 4277

Illawarra Advocacy Service 42294999

[www.illawarraadvocacy.org.au](http://www.illawarraadvocacy.org.au)

## **Designated Carer Forms is available at**

<http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/mentalhealth/Documents/Legislation/NH606713a.pdf>

# Discharge and other Planning

All reasonable and practicable steps must be taken to ensure that the patient, any designated carer and/or principle carers are:

- Consulted when planning discharge and any further treatments/ actions,
- Provided with appropriate information as to follow up care.

When planning discharge and any subsequent treatment, all reasonable practicable steps must be taken to consult with any agencies involved in providing relevant services to the patient, their carers and dependents.

Ask that a discharge summary be sent to your GP, and make sure you get a copy for yourself.

## Things you need to know on Discharge

- What medication if any has been prescribed, the dosage and frequency required, any side effects - do they have a script?
- Do they have a few days supply or do you have to organise to pick some up today?
- Are there follow up appointments organised with other services? e.g. community mental health, private psychiatrist or psychologist. Where are these located? How do you contact them?
- Following discharge the Acute Care Team will follow up via phone with the client to check on their health and wellbeing. Carers can assist the person they support by reminding them to have their phone with them. If you are worried about the person you support following their discharge you are welcome to call the **Mental Health Line 1800 011 511**



# Your Healthcare Rights and Responsibilities

In Australia everyone shares a fundamental right to basic health care. In 2008 Australian Health Ministers agreed to a national charter and the seven basic rights summarised in the Australian Charter of Healthcare Rights:

## Access

The right to receive health care

## Safety

The right to safe and high quality care

## Respect

The right to be treated with respect, dignity and consideration.

Health care will be provided in a manner that shows courtesy and consideration for a person's culture, religious beliefs, sexual orientation and issues arising from a disability

## Communication

The right to be informed about services, treatment and options in a clear and open way.

Patients have a responsibility to be honest and open in providing information

## Participation

The right to be included in decisions and choices about health care.

Patients have the right, where circumstances permit, to have a relative or other support person with them at all times

## Privacy

The right to privacy and confidentiality regarding personal information

## Comment

The right to comment on care and have concerns addressed



HEALTH CARE IS  
A RIGHT NOT  
A PRIVILEGE

# Resources for Carers

If support is required, there are many places you can call for information and support, some are available 24/7 others only during certain hours.

## Available 24/7

If you need support call one of the following numbers

**NSW Mental Health Line** – 1800 011 511

<http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/mentalhealth/Pages/contact-service.asp>

**Lifeline Australia** – 13 11 14

Anyone experiencing a personal crisis or thinking about suicide

<https://www.lifeline.org.au>

**Kids Helpline** – 1800 55 1800

Staffed by professional counsellors for young people 5 to 25 years

<https://kidshelpline.com.au>

**MensLine Australia** – 1300 78 99 78

For men of any age who would like support

<https://mensline.org.au/>

**Suicide Call Back Service** – 1300 659 467

Provides crisis counselling to people at risk of suicide, carers for someone who is suicidal and those bereaved by suicide. People without current support can access up to 6 sessions of ongoing counselling with the same counsellor at scheduled times.

<https://www.suicidecallbackservice.org.au>

**Beyond Blue** – 1300 22 4636

Staffed by trained Mental Health Professionals

<https://www.beyondblue.org.au>

**Veterans and Veterans' Families Counselling Service** – 1800 011 046

Provides supportive, confidential counselling to members of the veteran and ex-service community who need support or are in crisis.

<http://www.vvcs.gov.au>

# Resources for Carers

## Available only restricted hours

**Mental Health Carers National Helpline** - 1300 554 660

9am to 5pm Mon – Fri

<https://www.mentalhealthcarersnsw.org>

**Carers NSW** – 1800 242 636

9am to 5pm Mon – Fri

<https://www.carersnsw.org.au>

**Mental Health Carers (ARAFMI) Illawarra** – 42833 499 / 42833 993

9:00am to 4.30pm

<http://www.arafmiillawarra.org.au>

**Aftercare Wollongong** 4229 7254 **Nowra** 4222 1574

**Sane Helpline** – 1800 18 7263

10am to 10pm

<https://www.sane.org/get-help>

**Online Lifeline Crisis Support Chat** 7pm – Midnight 7 Days

<https://www.lifeline.org.au/get-help/online-services/crisis-chat>

## Useful Web Addresses

**Mental Health Carers ARAFMI**

**Illawarra**

[www.arafmiillawarra.org.au](http://www.arafmiillawarra.org.au)

**Beyond Blue**

[www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au)

**Headspace**

[www.headspace.org.au](http://www.headspace.org.au)

**Blackdog Institute**

[www.blackdoginstitute.org.au](http://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au)

**Mental Health Carers NSW**

[www.mentalhealthcarersnsw.org](http://www.mentalhealthcarersnsw.org)

**Sane**

[www.sane.org](http://www.sane.org)

**One Door Mental Health**

[www.onedoor.org.au](http://www.onedoor.org.au)

**Kids Help Line**

[www.kidshelpline.com.au](http://www.kidshelpline.com.au)

# Financial Considerations

Due to the unpredictable nature of caring, many carers are unable to keep full-time work and find making ends meet difficult. Carers may be eligible for benefits through Centrelink.

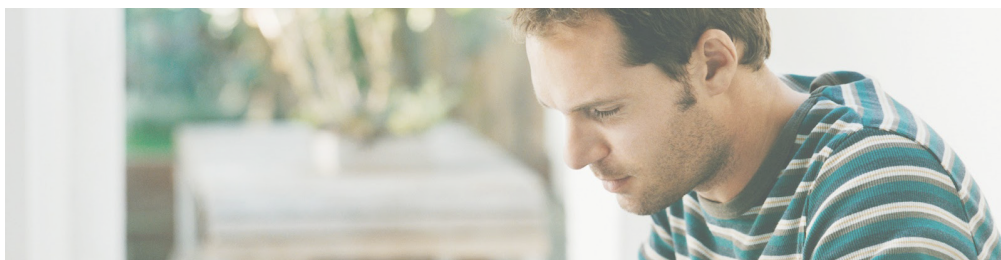
**Carer Payment is asset tested** and provided to support carers in maintaining their caring role and recognises the difficulties for carers to maintaining paid employment. Carers may still be eligible for Carer Payment if they have part-time work or are studying.

**Carer Allowance is not asset tested** and can be paid to eligible carers who are employed. The Carer Allowance is paid on top of the Carer Payment or Aged Pension for eligible carers.

Centrelink Social Workers are located in service centres and on the phone to help people who are experiencing a crisis, have no support or are unsure how to access the right assistance.

People of all ages can talk to social workers about things such as domestic and family violence, homelessness, relationship breakdown, loss and bereavement, mental health and addictions.

They can help during difficult times by providing confidential counselling, support and information.



# Private Health Insurance Psychiatric Cover

Some health funds may provide earlier cover than others and some may provide up-grades to earlier cover but we strongly encourage you to check with your fund.

Independent, commission free advice on private health insurance is available on the [PrivateHealth.gov.au](http://PrivateHealth.gov.au) website.

If this cover is important to you, ask:

- Does this policy cover **in-patient psychiatric care** in a public and private hospital? Is there an annual maximum number of admissions or days covered in hospital? And does it cover **re-admission** to hospital within days of a previous hospital stay?
- Does it cover **day programs** in private hospital? Is there a limitation on the number of visits per year and on how many hours per visit are covered?
- How about **outreach nursing**? Are day program and outreach nursing covered at the same time?
- Is there cover for specific treatments? e.g. **electroconvulsive therapy**
- Does it cover **all public and private hospitals** or only a selection? Different private hospitals specialise in the treatment of different mental health conditions, and you want to be able to access the best one for your needs.

There are many private health insurance companies and a range of coverage levels available. If you have private health cover, it is recommended that you contact your private health insurance company to find out if you are covered by psychological services.

South Coast Private Hospital is a private mental health facility in Wollongong.

# Complaints in the Mental Health Setting

If there are concerns about the standard of care your loved one receives as a patient in a Mental Health Facility or under a compulsory treatment order, you can call the Official Visitor.

## How can an Official Visitor help you?

They will listen to your concerns and help you resolve them, or, with your permission, act to resolve them on your behalf.

## Who can contact an Official Visitor?

Patients (consumers), carers, family, friends, staff and other people with an interest in the care and treatment of people with a mental illness.

## How can you contact an Official Visitor?

- Let staff know if you want to see an Official Visitor during their next monthly visit.
- Phone: **1800 208 218** Monday to Friday between 9am and 5pm  
Free of charge. Leave a message outside these hours.
- Ask a staff member to arrange for you to see or speak to an Official Visitor. The Official Visitor must be notified of your request within two days.
- Leave a letter in the Official Visitors Box in the inpatient unit
- Write to: Official Visitors, Locked Bag 5016, Gladesville NSW 1675
- Visit the website at [www.ovmh.nsw.gov.au](http://www.ovmh.nsw.gov.au)

You have the right to access mechanisms of complaint and redress if you are dissatisfied with the treatment or support provided to the mental health consumer.

**The Health Care Complaints Commission is also available to talk about your concerns. Phone 9219 7444**

# Questions I need to Ask

Consumers and family members are encouraged to ask as many questions as needed. Some questions you might ask the mental health professionals or your pharmacist. Most hospitals also have social workers who may be able to assist with any concerns.

## Questions about the illness

- What is the diagnosis?
- Where can I get more information about the illness?
- What are the early warning signs for becoming unwell again?
- What kind of therapy or medication options are available?

## Questions about medication

- What is the name of the medication; what is it supposed to do?
- Which symptoms should this medication help with?
- How long will it take to work?
- What are the likely side effects?

## Questions about discharge

- What service is my family member/friend being discharged to?
- Is there a follow-up appointment organised with that service?
- What are the contact details for the service?
- Is there a copy of a discharge plan that I can have?

# What Happens After the Crisis

Having to care for someone with a mental illness is very stressful. Caring can be overwhelming and unpredictable. Taking care of your own mental health is just as important as taking care of your physical health. Getting some support from a carers group such as Mental Health Carers (ARAFMI) Illawarra or Aftercare is recommended, as they can provide education, support (one on one), carers support groups and programs. Carers can find it helpful to talk about their concerns with professional counsellors who understand the caring role.

Inform yourself about every aspect of the illness.

As a carer you must take care of yourself, this can be something that is overlooked by many carers,

## Some of the most important tips for carers include:

- Maintain a social life outside work and/or home, however limited it may be
- Above all, don't allow yourself to become a victim or slave to an illness
- You have your own life to manage

**The WayAhead Directory** is a comprehensive online database used to find local mental health services using your postcode.

The WayAhead Directory is free to access for people living with a mental health condition, carers and service providers.

<https://directory.wayahead.org.au>

**“My Health Record”** If a person with Mental Health problems is happy to have their medical information recorded on this system the doctors, specialists and hospital staff could access and see the history of the person including medications etc when there is an emergency situation

<https://myhealthrecord.gov.au>



# PLAN – Create a Crisis Plan

People can still experience a crisis when they have utilized the best resources available. It is important to have a written plan in place in case of a crisis.

Formulate a plan of action before the crisis happens - wherever possible, involve the person who has a mental health condition in this plan.

A good plan will:

- Identify people willing to help
- List the phone numbers of the mental health providers and the mental health crisis team
- Include a list of current medications and their dosages
- List treatments that have been used in the past (e.g., talk therapies such as CBT, DBT, medications, peer support, crisis lines, etc.)
- Identify key words or calming techniques that have worked in the past
- Identify preferred treatment facilities
- Talk with others in the household about how to stay safe during a crisis.

Samples of a Crisis Plan and a Carer Plan are available on the ARAFMI website [www.arafmiillawarra.org.au/resources](http://www.arafmiillawarra.org.au/resources)

**DONT FORGET YOUR OWN SELF CARE  
DURING A CRISIS.**

# Terms used in Mental Health Settings

**ED** – Emergency Department

**ISLHD** – Illawarra Shoalhaven Local Health District

**Registrar** - a doctor completing specialist training to become a psychiatrist

**RN** - Registered Nurses

**CNC** - Clinical Nurse Consultant - usually the first Mental Health professional to assess patient.

## Mental Health Facilities in the ISLHD

**Wollongong Hospital**

**PECC** - Psychiatric Emergency Care Centre

**Psych Ward** – Mental Health Inpatient Unit

**SMHSOP** – Specialist Mental Health Services for Older People

**Shellharbour Hospital**

**Eloura Acute Assessment Area**

**Eloura High Care Unit**

**Mirrabook** - Mental Health Inpatient Units

**MH Rehab** – Mental Health Rehabilitation Unit

**AMHIPU** - Adolescent Mental Health Unit (Day Program)

**Shoalhaven Hospital**

**Sub-Acute Mental Health Unit**

**Port Kembla Hospital**

**Illawarra Community Mental Health Rehabilitation Service  
Community**

**CAYMHS** – Child, Adolescent and Youth Mental Health Service

Illawarra Shoalhaven Community Mental Health Service

**Private Facilities**

**SCP** - South Coast Private Hospital

# Questions I Need to Ask

# Information I Need to Find

## We would like your feedback

Please tell us if you have found this booklet useful in your time of crisis.

Is there some information or resources that you feel we have not included?

Contact us at Mental Health Carers ARAFMI Illawarra on 42 833 499

or 42 833 993. You can email us at [mhc.arafmiillawarra@gmail.com](mailto:mhc.arafmiillawarra@gmail.com)



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