



CHIEF PSYCHIATRIST
of Western Australia

Good Practice Guide:

Providing mental health care when there is community transmission of COVID-19

1 June 2022

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Clinicians are encouraged to provide feedback on this guide by contacting reception@ocp.wa.gov.au

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Enquiries Contact:	Reception, Office of the Chief Psychiatrist Tel: 08 9222 4462
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Purpose and Scope

This document is intended to provide guidance for mental health clinicians looking to support consumers living in Western Australia, during periods when there is high community transmission of COVID-19, defined as AMBER, RED or BLACK alert level based on the [WA Health System Alert and Response](#) (SAR). These guidelines are not a mandated policy requirement and do not replace standards and guidelines provided for safe, high quality care in day-to-day practice. Rather, these documents provide additional information to assist clinical mental health services to support consumers to prepare for the possibility of COVID-19 infection and/or to cope if a COVID-19 infection occurs. This document will be updated as new information emerges and clinicians are encouraged to contact the Office of the Chief Psychiatrist to provide feedback.

Complying with Public Health directives

Mental health services must maintain their awareness of current directives made under the Public Health Act 2016. For more information about applying these, refer to the [Chief Psychiatrist's COVID-19 Frequently Asked Questions](#). If services are using audio-visual communication to conduct mental health assessments, refer to the [Chief Psychiatrist's Audio-visual Communication Guidelines](#). Other relevant guidelines are available on the [Chief Psychiatrist's COVID-19 Information Hub](#).

State and National COVID-19 resources and updates:

- [WA Health COVID-19](#) (ww2.health.wa.gov.au) page provides the most up-to-date information for health professionals, community service providers and the general public.
- [COVID-19 Information on HealthPoint](#) provides links to resources.
- Preparing for COVID-19: Managing COVID at home and in the community (healthywa.wa.gov.au) information on testing, staying safe, children, symptoms, self care, COVID Care at HOME, TTIQ
- The [COVID-19 Testing Tracing Infection and Quarantine Plan](#) (TTIQ) provides guidance on outbreak management for businesses, facilities and service providers.
- The national Department of Health provides resources: [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) resources for health professionals, including aged care providers, pathology providers and health care managers](#)

Individualised COVID-19 preparation plans

It is recommended that mental health services proactively support consumers to plan how they would manage if they need to isolate due to COVID-19, or if they or a family member have COVID-19. It is essential that all plans are prepared collaboratively with the consumer and (with their consent) their personal support people, as consumers will use the information in these plans themselves. Where other services are involved in the consumer's treatment and care, they should also be consulted and involved wherever possible.

Services should take a risk management approach to prioritising the development of these plans, ensuring they are developed first for consumers at highest risk should they contract COVID-19 and who are least able to prepare for self-isolation independently. The plans can be used by the consumer to implement an isolation plan if needed but the information captured could also help the State Health Incident Coordination Centre (SHICC) assess the need for and suitability of alternative isolation facilities.

A template for a COVID-19 plan is provided in Appendix A. This is intended as a document that can be completed with a consumer and their personal support people and taken away for reference. When supporting someone to prepare the plan, clinicians should have a copy of the below checklist and use it as a prompt for what to include. Alternatively, it may be preferable for the plan to be incorporated into the usual Treatment Support and Discharge Plan (TSDP) or the Psychiatric Services On-Line Information System (PSOLIS) Care Plan. Whatever the format:

1. The plan should be clearly identifiable.
2. The consumer, and any personal support people they deem necessary, should receive a copy.
3. Clinicians should seek the consumers' consent to share the plan with relevant services including SHICC.
4. Clinicians should consider all elements listed below

Examples of COVID-19 Planning templates that are person centred and in an easy read format from the disability sector are available from:

- <https://www.health.gov.au/resources/collections/coronavirus-covid-19-easy-read-resources>
- <https://www.qld.gov.au/health/conditions/health-alerts/coronavirus-covid-19/information-for/people-with-disability-and-carers/pwd#prepare>

Elements of an individual COVID-19 plan

Clinical Information	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Vaccination status
<input type="checkbox"/>	Does this person usually take medication? <i>If yes:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Include name of medications, dose and frequency</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Include over-the-counter medications (e.g. pain relief, laxatives)</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Include details of prescriber</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Include details of pharmacy and dispensing method eg Webster</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Include details of whether the person self-administers or receives support</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>How would this person obtain a supply of medication if required to isolate?</i>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Does the usual medication include any medications which are contra-indicated for COVID-19 treatment?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Does the usual medication include clozapine? <i>If yes:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>What will happen if their routine monitoring is due while they are in isolation?</i>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Does the usual medication include Schedule 8 medications? <i>If yes:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>If person is required to isolate in an isolation facility, this information is needed.</i>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Is the person on a community opioid prescribing program? <i>If yes:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Include details of prescriber and pharmacy.</i>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Does this person need a supply of consumables (eg continence aids, catheters)? <i>If yes:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Do they have adequate supply for the isolation period and/or who will help them to access what they need?</i>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Does this person have risk factors for severe illness? Refer to: https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-guide-for-general-practitioners-to-inform-shared-decision-making-with-patients-around-risk-of-severe-illness-related-to-covid-19
<input type="checkbox"/>	Has this person had an inpatient admission for physical health in the past year? <i>If yes:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Include hospital and reason for admission.</i>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Does this person have a communication difficulty which may impact on them in an unfamiliar setting? <i>If yes:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>What strategies are there to support them?</i>
Testing and treatment	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Does this person have a substitute decision-maker? <i>If yes:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Has the substitute-decision maker given consent for COVID-19 testing by polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test and/or rapid antigen test (RAT)?</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>If COVID-19 treatment is needed, has the substitute decision maker given consent?</i>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Does this person have all the information they need, to decide when to undertake a COVID-19 test?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Is this person able to present for a PCR test independently? <i>If no:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Who would support this person to undertake a PCR test?</i>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Does this person have access to a supply of RATs?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Does this person need help to take a RAT? <i>If yes:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Who would support this person to take a RAT?</i>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Does this person know when and how to register the results of a RAT?

<input type="checkbox"/>	Does this person know when and how to register for the COVID Care at Home programme ?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Will this person need support if they are required to undergo treatment for COVID-19, for example, help to operate monitoring devices, help to talk through their decisions? <i>If yes:</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Who would provide this person with support?</i>
Isolation at home	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Does this person have all the information they need, to know when they need to isolate?
<input type="checkbox"/>	If required to isolate, does this person have a suitable place, with a bedroom to themselves?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Do they have access to their own bathroom? <i>If no,</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Is it possible for the people who share it to use it at separate times and for each person to clean it before/after use?</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Is it possible to ensure that towels and hand towels are not shared?</i>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Does this person require assistance with personal care? <i>If yes:</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Who will provide assistance?</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Does the person providing assistance have access to suitable PPE?</i>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Does this person require assistance with continence? <i>If yes:</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Who will provide assistance?</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Does the person providing assistance have access to suitable PPE?</i>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Can this person adhere to handwashing protocols?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Can hand towels be washed daily in 60-degree water? <i>If no,</i> <i>Do they have a supply of paper towels?</i>
<input type="checkbox"/>	What cleaning is needed and who will provide cleaning?
<input type="checkbox"/>	How will this person obtain food?
<input type="checkbox"/>	Does this person require assistance with eating? <i>If yes:</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Who will provide assistance?</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Does the person providing assistance have access to suitable PPE?</i>
Drug and alcohol	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Does this person smoke? <i>If yes</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Do they need a supply of cigarettes or would they prefer nicotine replacement?</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Who will provide access to cigarettes or nicotine replacement?</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>If required to isolate, do they have access to a smoking area?</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>If required to isolate away from their usual residence, would a balcony be a suitable smoking area?</i>
<input type="checkbox"/>	If required to isolate, is this person at risk of drug and/or alcohol withdrawal? <i>If yes</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Do they need a supply of alcohol and/or treatment for drug and/or alcohol withdrawal symptoms?</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>What other strategies are needed to ensure their safety?</i>
Dependents	
<input type="checkbox"/>	Does this person have any dependent children? <i>If yes:</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Who will care for them if the person needs to isolate?</i>
<input type="checkbox"/>	Does this person have any pets? <i>If yes:</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Who will care for them if the person needs to isolate?</i>

Financial	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>Is this person at risk of financial hardship if required to isolate? Also refer to COVID-19 coronavirus: Test Isolation Payment Scheme (www.wa.gov.au)</p>
Personal Support People	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>Who are this person's usual support people?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Consider family, friends, cultural or religious supports, nominated person, guardian, administrator, other e.g. NDIS</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Provide names</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Provide contact details</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>State the type of relationship</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Identify the order in which the person would prefer them to be contacted</i>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>What assistance could support people provide, if this person needs to isolate?</p>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>What are the risks if this person is not able to access their usual support people?</p>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>What alternatives to face-to-face contact would this person accept?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>If technology is to be used to facilitate contact, do they have access?</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Can they operate the technology independently?</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>If they need help to operate technology, who will provide assistance?</i>
Activities and coping strategies	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>How does this person usually fill their days?</p>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>What are the risks to their mental health if they do not have access to their usual activities?</p>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>What alternatives would this person accept?</p>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>Do they have access to their preferred activities or alternatives while in isolation?</p>
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>Do they have any preferences or fears which would be relevant, should they need to isolate off-site or require hospital admission?</p>
Mental health deterioration	
<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>If a care plan, RAMP and/or BRA have already been completed, do they include details of the person's risk factors and early warning signs, along with a pathway for escalation of care? <i>If not:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>What are this person's known risk factors for mental health deterioration?</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>What are the known signs and symptoms which indicate a need for escalation of mental health treatment and care?</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>What is the pathway to escalate mental health treatment and care if needed?</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>What is this person's risk of harm to self?</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Are there any situations or factors known to increase this risk?</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>What strategies could be implemented to mitigate against risk of harm to self?</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>What is this person's risk of harm to others?</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Are there any situations or factors known to increase this risk?</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>What strategies could be implemented to mitigate against risk of harm to others?</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>What is this person's risk of harm from others?</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>Are there any situations or factors known to increase this risk?</i> <input type="checkbox"/> <i>What strategies could be implemented to mitigate against risk of harm from others?</i> <p>Also refer to Management of Acute Behavioural Disturbance in COVID-19</p>

Adults without the capacity to consent

Treatment and testing for COVID-19 is often time-critical. Testing should occur as soon as possible after the onset of symptoms. For antiviral treatments to be effective they must be administered within the first 5 days of onset of symptoms, so time is critical and any delay in obtaining consent may pose a risk to the patient if they are in a high-risk group eligible for antiviral medication.

As part of individual COVID-19 preparation plans, clinicians are encouraged to work with substitute decision-makers and have a plan in place to ensure efficient communication in the event that consent needs to be given for testing and/or treatment for COVID-19. The [WA Health Consent to Treatment Policy](#) contains the *Form C: Adults without the capacity to consent to treatment or investigation* which can be used to obtain consent for:

1. Rapid-Antigen testing as required,
2. PCR tests as required
3. Antiviral treatments

As per the above policy, the consumer and guardian decision-maker must be informed regarding the risks and benefits of the testing and treatment. Information on the general community risk in the context of a rising COVID-19 community caseload together with the risks particular to the individual's health and circumstances need to be communicated. Clients at high risk from COVID-19 infection as identified in the SAR.

Information on COVID-19 testing and available treatments are available on the Australian Dept of Health website:

- [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) – Rapid antigen tests](#)
- [Easy Read Testing](#)
- Easy Read [If you think you have Coronavirus \(shows pictures of PCR and PPE\)](#)
- [How to self-collect a COVID-19 swab \(PCR\) pdf](#)

Videos to demonstrate RAT testing to aid consent:

- First Nations Disability Network: [How to do a COVID RAT test at home \(Rapid Antigen Test\) - YouTube](#)
- Western Sydney Local Health District: Information for people with disability and carers: [Getting tested for COVID-19 video PCR test](#) video pictures and how to prepare.

If there are concerns that the consumer may decline treatment or testing when the substitute-decision-maker has given consent, refer to the [Chief Psychiatrist's COVID-19 Frequently Asked Questions](#).

Medications which interact with COVID-19 treatment

Some medications used in psychiatry, particularly some antipsychotic medications, are contra-indicated for currently available COVID-19 treatments due to serious and/or life-threatening reactions.

Some psychiatric medications, along with other medications that may have been prescribed and some herbal substances that consumers may be taking, have significant interactions with some of the currently available COVID-19 treatments.

As treatment may be time-critical, it is essential that any handover general health services providing COVID-19 treatment clearly outlines any risks relating to medications. Clinicians are encouraged to consider risks and benefits as part of preparing COVID-19 plans.

Product information about medications which have been approved for COVID-19 use can be found on the [Therapeutic Goods Association](#) website.

Clinical flow-charts to support understanding of how these medications are used in treatment can be found on the [National COVID-19 Clinical Evidence Taskforce](#) website.

Supporting Consumers who have contracted COVID-19

WA COVID Care at Home Program – clinical monitoring for people with risk factors

WA COVID Care at Home program enables access to essential monitoring and treatment for individuals with COVID-19 who require it due to having risk factors which put them at greater risk of hospitalisation. This may include mental health consumers. WA COVID Care at Home will enrol patients based on risk factors such as age, severity of symptoms, medical history and social factors.

WA COVID Care at Home patients will receive phone calls from the health care team to check their vital health signs and welfare. They will need to have access to a telephone.

WA COVID Care at Home can screen patients and refer them back to their GP for prescription of anti-viral medication.

The stress-vulnerability model may inform decisions during the 7 day isolation period and ongoing isolation due to treatment. To prevent deterioration of health and to support treatment, clinicians are encouraged to:

- Assist COVID-19 positive consumers to [register online for WA COVID Care at Home](#), noting that clinicians, carers or a GP can register consumers on their behalf. Alternatively, this can be done over the phone by calling 13COVID. Consumers will be asked to consent to enrol in the program. Pre-registration (when not COVID-19 positive) is not available.
- Complete regular, brief check-ins with carers and consumers over preferred means (phone/telehealth/text)
- Liaise with medical services (GP), NDIS providers, carers and other supports, as needed on consumer's behalf; provide advocacy.
- Step-up mental health care early should mental health needs escalate.
- Address practical support needs (e.g. activities of daily living, access to food, medication, finance, childcare); these may increase during isolation or from being unwell.

The decision to step-up care earlier may be informed by the person's capacity and support available as well as mental health and medical symptoms.

COVID Care at Home information for the public is available at [WA COVID Care at Home \(healthywa.wa.gov.au\)](#) - registration and information.

Most people with COVID-19 will be able to safely monitor and care for themselves at home, with some support from their GP and/or their additional clinical and informal supports.

COVID Care Assistance Team – For people requiring psychosocial support in isolation

The COVID Care Assistance Team (COVID CAT) provides a collaborative approach to address the social supports for positive cases and close contacts whilst isolating in community, as recognised through Public Health Operations (PHOs).

COVID CAT aims to increase capacity for assessing and providing an appropriate community response for COVID-19 cases to minimise the risk of overburdening the hospital system and non-compliance with isolation requirements. COVID CAT provide specialised case management and support for consumers and patients whilst isolating in community or in identified SWICC hotels. Assistance includes:

- Social and emotional wellbeing
- Mental health complexities
- Psycho social support
- Drug and alcohol

- Domestic violence
- Medications
- Disability
- Homelessness

There is no direct public referral pathway to COVID CAT. Access to COVID CAT is possible if a PCR test is positive or a [positive RAT is registered online](#). After testing positive, the person is required to complete a Public Health survey, which is sent out via text. If a risk is identified in the survey, COVID CAT will complete an initial assessment and provide culturally appropriate support, community linkages for further assistance, referral pathways to primary health and allied health services, individual case coordination and follow up for the period of isolation.

Consumers temporarily relocated for the purpose of COVID-19 isolation

Self-isolation at home is the preferred option to avoid spreading COVID-19 to other people, however there may be circumstances when a person is moved to an alternative location for an isolation period. The decision to move someone to an isolation facility will be made by State Health Incident Coordination Centre (SHICC) accommodation will be provided through State Welfare Incident Coordination Centre (SWICC) .. If this occurs, it is very important to maintain continuity of mental health treatment and care.

People who usually receive care from a public clinical community mental health service (CMHS)

People who are active with a CMHS should continue to receive treatment and care from their usual mental health service while residing in a temporary location for the purpose of isolation. During clinic hours, if their usual doctor and/or case manager is not available, care should be provided by an alternative member of staff from that service, preferably someone who knows the consumer and/or is familiar with their care. Outside of clinic hours, support staff, carers and consumers can contact Mental Health Emergency Response Line (MHERL) who can provide advice.

Where possible, assessment should occur via audio-visual means. If a face-to-face care is clinically necessary, mental health staff should wear appropriate Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) equivalent to what would be used if providing care to a confirmed or suspect COVID-19 case in a clinical area, as mandated by the [Identification and Use of Personal Protective Equipment in the Clinical Setting During the Coronavirus \(COVID-19\) Pandemic Policy](#).

Refer to the [Chief Psychiatrist's COVID-19 Information Hub](#) to find up-to-date information about [COVID-19 Mental Health Infection Control Directions](#).

People who usually receive care from private outpatient services

When people are in isolation for COVID-19, it is not appropriate for them to attend face-to-face appointments at private outpatient services. Private outpatient services should use a risk management approach to monitor consumers for mental health deterioration.

People who do not usually receive care from specialist mental health services

People who do not usually receive care from specialist mental health services, but whose mental health deteriorates while in isolation away from their usual place of residence can access support from the Mental Health Emergency Response Line (MHERL) in the metropolitan area 24 hours/day. MHERL will assess the immediate needs and if needed will refer to the Assessment and Treatment Team that covers the person's current temporary location. Refer to the [Chief Psychiatrist's COVID-19 Information Hub](#) to find up-to-date information about [COVID-19 Mental Health Infection Control Directions](#).

Consumers who decline to comply with public health directions

Wherever possible, mental health services should support consumers to understand and comply with public health measures and Public Health directions. People who do not comply with Public Health directions may be prosecuted, however, some consumers may have difficulty complying with public health requirements.

Masks

[This Easy Read flyer](#) provides information about wearing a mask. [COVID-19 Coronavirus: Current measures – frequently asked questions](#) includes information about when masks must be worn, and the limited exemptions for mask wearing.

Testing

The process of testing can be uncomfortable and can be stressful so put the person at ease. by communicating with the person as much as possible, providing reassurance and using clear instructions.

- Listen to their concerns and validate their point of view.
- Walk the person through the steps so that they know what to expect– encourage them to ask any questions. Use videos or easy read information as needed.

- Present factual information in a way which aligns with their values - avoid providing excessive data or giving ultimatums.
- Consider having two staff/carers present so that one can reassure the person while the other conducts the test.
- Consider a reward, similar to the procedure used for flu vaccinations.

Assisting consumers' access to the range of available testing improves convenience and supports choice for consumers and families. Eligible concession card holders can get 10 free RATs at participating pharmacies until 30 April 2022. All Western Australian households are eligible for five free RATs, which can be obtained by [registering online](#). Supporting mental health consumers and carers to obtain RATs and to know when to use them is encouraged, especially for those living high risk setting such as psychiatric hostels.

For more information about testing in specific scenarios, refer to the [Chief Psychiatrist's COVID-19 Frequently Asked Questions](#).

Isolation

Collaborative planning prior to isolation will reduce the distress that a person will experience if faced with the prospect of going into isolation. If an individualised COVID-19 plan has not been prepared before the need for isolation is established, work through the elements of the plan with the person, to the fullest extent possible.

- Listen to and validate/normalise their concerns in the context.
- Use a problem-solving approach to weigh up and implement strategies to increase their comfort and capacity to cope in isolation.
- Emphasise strengths by identifying preparations the person and carer have already made to stay safe and arrange support.
- Remind them of their coping skills already developed in relapse prevention and personal safety planning which can be used in COVID-19 planning.

For more information about isolation in specific scenarios, refer to the [Chief Psychiatrist's COVID-19 Frequently Asked Questions](#). If a person is insistent in their refusal to isolate, escalate to SHICC.

Up-to-date requirements for testing and isolation is available from the [WA Government Guidance of Testing and Isolation Guide](#).

What to do when COVID-19 positive and how to test and isolate information is available from [Healthy WA Quarantine and Isolation page](#).

COVID-19 Preparation Plan



Preventing COVID-19



When and how to have a test



If I needed to isolate

Where would I stay?

What would I need to take with me?

What help would I need?

Who would look after the people who rely on me?

What is a trigger / makes me worse?

What could I enjoy / look forward to?



My medical history



My medications



When I need more mental health care

What are the signs I am becoming unwell?

How do I prefer to get help?



My supports

Name	Relationship	Contact Details

Use the checklist as a prompt when preparing this plan. Give a copy to everyone the consumer thinks should have a copy. With the consumer's consent, also share the clinical care plan and risk assessment with relevant people.

*The Chief Psychiatrist aims to ensure that
Western Australians receive the highest standard
of mental health treatment and care.*

Perth Business Hub
Western Australia 6849
Telephone: 08 6553 0000 Facsimile: 08 6553 0099
Email: reception@ocp.wa.gov.au

www.chiefpsychiatrist.wa.gov.au

