

# Missing

A guide for families and friends of  
individuals with a mental illness  
who have gone missing



In Memory of Arun Sud

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This guide was developed to help families and friends who are searching for a person with a mental illness or mental health condition who has gone missing. It is a step-by-step resource designed to help families and friends understand their options and take concrete steps to help find their loved one. This guide is grounded in the belief that the more people who are aware that your loved one is missing, the more likely it is that he/she will be found. This guide outlines steps that family and friends can take to build awareness of the situation in the community and to supplement the efforts of the police.

MISSING contains information that may be used by anyone who is searching for a loved one, even if that individual does not have a mental illness. This guide does, however, draw attention to the special needs that exist for people with a mental health condition; those needs relate to medications, privacy laws that affect the release of certain kinds of personal information, etc.

The idea for MISSING came from the family of Arun Sud who went missing in Winnipeg, Manitoba in the spring of 2004. The content of the guide comes out of that family's experience, as well as the community-based search that was organized to help find Arun. We have also drawn on the resources of many community agencies that play important roles of support and guidance in the lives of individuals with a mental illness. This guide was compiled by MHERC Manitoba and members of the community, working collaboratively with Manitoba Health, the Winnipeg Police Department, and Child Find.

**This guide is meant to be used as a tool, but it does not provide absolute answers. Each missing person's case is unique. This guide should be used as a supplement to professional advice from appropriate sources.**

It is a very difficult and stressful time for family and friends when a loved one is missing. Ensure that you build a support network for yourself and take time to care for yourself through the search process.

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## What can I do immediately?

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### *The search:*

- Of course you are upset, but you must remain calm for the sake of your missing loved one. If this has happened before, note where the person previously went missing. The individual may have gone to the same location.
- Look inside the house (including the basement and attic, if there is one) before moving outdoors.
- Search the surrounding areas of the home/neighborhood and areas he/she frequented or where they were seen recently. Search the person's bedroom and home for any clues—a note left behind, unusual mail received, key items that are missing (such as clothing, suitcase, sentimental objects, medication, cell phone etc.).
- Prepare a list of key family and friends (near and far) whom the person may contact. Call them and tell them that the person is missing and, if comfortable, tell them that this person has a mental illness and therefore their judgment may not be clear.
- Assess whether he/she has their required medications with him/her. (Contact pharmacy or doctor to determine what medication was prescribed and when the last prescription was filled.)
- Notify doctors, mental health workers and any other support or self-help workers your loved one was seeing for professional assistance. Find out if he/she attended recent appointments. Ask if your loved one was behaving unusually during those appointments. Tell the front desk receptionist that your loved one is missing and ask them to contact the Police Missing Person Unit if he/she shows up.
- Notify workplace if applicable and see if the missing person was at work prior to going missing.
- Check with phone company, and cell phone if applicable, to get long distance and local call records. Check for any unusual calls made recently and forward the details to police.

### *The search continued....*

- If the missing person uses the Internet:
  - › check history of recent sites visited.
  - › see if you can obtain the individual's e-mail password to check for any unusual messages. (The police can help with unknown passwords and deleted computer files.)
- Prepare a list of places the person frequented (hangouts, bookstores, theatres, cafes, gyms, parks, grocery stores, malls, support groups, transportation routes).

## **When do I call the police?**

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There is **no minimum** time you have to wait before reporting a missing person. Once you have clearly assessed your loved one is missing, you should report to the police or RCMP immediately.

### *Notify the Police Missing Person Unit:*

- Prepare a short description of the person. Provide details of his/her mental illness, any risks posed to self/others, medications he/she is on, what identification they have, and whether he/she is likely to have money or bank/credit cards with them.
- Find a recent photograph of the missing person that most clearly matches how he/she currently looks. The photo should be clear and available in both printed and electronic formats.
- Gather details about your loved one's whereabouts in recent days and any clues as to where he/she may have gone. Provide this information to the police.

- Collect banking details (bank account & credit card numbers) along with details of other places the person goes that require a pass to be shown or swiped (e.g. workplace, library, school gym, movie rentals, pharmacy medication refills). Provide to the police so they can put a track on the bank accounts, or place a message on the person's file.
- If the person used the local bus system, have the police request that Transit send out regular bulletins to drivers on the missing person's usual routes. Distribute posters to the transit company garage; this will put a face on the 'missing person' bulletin the drivers hear.
- Request a hold to be put on any other cards (gym pass, movie rental stores, work pass, pharmacy refills) so that if the individual turns up, the Missing Persons Unit can be notified.

***Vulnerable Persons' Coordinator:***

- The Vulnerable Person's Coordinator (Missing Person's Unit) of the police department must be informed about the mental health condition of the missing person. This will ensure that the search addresses needs specific to their mental health condition.

***Alzheimer's:***

- If the missing person has Alzheimer's, and he/she are registered with the Alzheimer's Society's *Safely Home* program, tell the police.

***Media Releases:***

- The police do not send out news releases in every missing person case, but it is legitimate for you to ask that they consider it in your case. Make it easy for them by providing a family spokesperson at the police media briefing who will be willing to make a statement and/or provide interviews to reporters. Also, provide a recent photo of the missing person to the police for inclusion in the news release.
- Ultimately, it is a decision for the police as to whether or not they put out a media release. They are experts in the area of missing persons and know how to weigh the factors on a case-by-case basis, taking into account all of the details concerning this particular case.



## Broadening the Search

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### *Police*

- Request that police assign one detective to the case and meet with the detective to provide detailed information that you have collected in the first few days. Request to have, at minimum, two uniformed officers look for the missing person.
- Request a summary of any sightings that have been reported to police. Then, follow up by distributing posters in that area.
- Establish a consistent process with the Missing Person's Unit. For example, call in once a day to get a summary of sightings and leads.
- Ask the police to contact the U.S. border patrol if you think there is a chance the person may have gone to the U.S.
- If you have reason to think that the person may have left the city by Greyhound, Via Rail or an airline, ask the police to initiate a check of passenger lists to see if your loved one has recently purchased a ticket. Go to your local bus station, train station and airport and ask security or the manager to put up your missing person posters.

### *Doctors and Support Groups*

- Meet with the missing person's doctor and ask as many questions as possible. Be aware that they may not be able to answer all of your questions due to the requirements of the *Personal Health Information Act (PHIA)*. Request any details of recent meetings and any information that may shed light on your loved one's whereabouts; for example, was he/she showing any signs of depression, or alienation? Request details about the individual's medication requirements.
- Inquire when next scheduled appointment is and ask that the Police Missing Person's Unit be notified if he/she show up for the appointment. Leave your contact phone number so that you can be reached easily.

## Broadening the Search continued ....

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- Contact any support groups the person attended to see if anything seemed unusual in recent meetings. Ask that people notify the police if your loved one shows up for his/her next meeting or appointment.
- Arrange for someone to call the local hospitals once a day (the intake number) to check if anyone with your loved one's name and/or description has been admitted. However, due to privacy laws, hospitals may not be able to give out this information to a family member, particularly if the person admitted specifically asked that no one be notified.
- Take posters (see pg. 12) to hospitals in your area and ask the front desk or supervisor if posters can be put in the emergency waiting room area, in the main cafeteria and other high traffic areas of the hospital.
- Take posters to shelters, hotels, hostels, soup kitchens, and street outreach units. (United Way in your area may be able to provide a list of local shelters and kitchens.)
- Get in touch with community venues and locations often frequented by your loved one and put up posters there.
- Contact the Canadian Amphibious Search Team (C.A.S.T.) who can assist in the search and recovery of a missing person in a body of water, Visit [www.castcentral.ca](http://www.castcentral.ca) or call Ken Lugg at (204)299-6074

### **ESTABLISH A JOURNAL / LOG BOOK**

1. To write down tips received and follow-up done by the police; this will help you determine where to focus your volunteer search.
2. To list key contacts with the police, media and volunteers. Page 35 in the back of this guide is designed for you to list important contact numbers.
3. To keep records of the progress of the search in case you need to refer back at a later date (i.e. phone log).

## Working with the Media

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### ***Media:***

It's possible that the media (newspapers – daily and community; radio – mainstream and campus radio; TV – local commercial as well as community cable stations) will be able to help with your search by reporting on your missing loved one as a local news or human interest story.

Do not be shy about contacting your local media – they are interested in, and have a responsibility to report on, things that are happening in the local community.

### **First contact:**

- Call the news desk of the media outlet.
- Identify who you are.
- Explain that your loved one has been missing for XX days or weeks
- Explain that you have a recent, good quality photo of your loved one and need the media to help spread the word. Explain that you want the media to show the photo as a way of helping to generate leads from people who may have seen your loved one recently.
- Be ready to provide a detailed description of your loved one, what he/she was last seen wearing and the places he/she are known to frequent.
- Be clear that if people have seen your loved one, they must contact the police to share the information.
- Offer to do an interview – live on the air or taped for use later.

### **Second, third etc. contact:**

- News gets “old” quickly in today’s fast-paced world, so you must be able to give the media a solid reason for why they should still be interested in your story.
- Be clear in your own mind about what’s new, about the progress that has (or hasn’t yet) been made. The more clear you are, the better your “pitch” will be.
- The “hook” the media needs can be a significant date (the two-week mark, the one-month mark of the search; your loved one’s birthday; a personal anniversary of some kind; a big holiday when families come together etc.) or a new development (new sightings received that the police have told you about; a volunteer search party that has been organized; a web site that has been developed etc.).

When you contact the media be polite, persistent and clear. Lots of people want the media to cover stories, but your story is especially important. Your persistence will pay off. One phone call won't necessarily make it happen. Be persistent. Be polite. Be compelling.

***Working with the media: Recap***

- Notify the media about the situation. Coverage with a picture of the missing person is the most efficient way to get the message to the public. Make a note that the police are to be called if the person is sighted.
  - › Identify family spokesperson (one person speaking is more effective than multiple people).
  - › Have photos and person's description available for media
  - › Prepare key messages for interviews. This could include a description of your loved one, what he/she were last wearing, places he/she typically goes, as well as any places he/she has been spotted since going missing.
  - › If comfortable, you may want to mention the type of mental illness and how your loved one may be vulnerable. Explain that being vulnerable may mean they are unable to look after him/herself or his/her judgment may not be sound
  - › Provide a phone number, preferably not your own, to call if the person is sighted.

**Making a Missing Person poster**

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- Develop and distribute posters to frequented places. If possible, have posters printed (colour would be best) and available electronically. (See sample missing person poster, on page 15)
- Have friends, family and community members post posters on their front doors.
- You may wish to create a *Missing Person* poster to distribute to various locations. When designing a poster include a picture as well as the vital information that may assist in finding the missing person. See sample on page 15.

**NOTE: The police are not able to produce and distribute posters. This is a task you and your volunteers must undertake.**

***Picture:***

- When selecting a picture, try to choose one that is most recent and reflects your loved one's everyday appearance. The photo should only show the head, neck, and the top of the shoulders.
  
- If there is a camera with any undeveloped film in it, get the film developed as it may contain a suitable picture.
  
- When choosing a picture for the poster or providing a picture for the police be sure to keep a copy for yourself to have on hand. Do not use your original copy of the selected picture.
  
- Ask family members and friends if they have any recent photographs of your loved one.

***Poster content:***

The following is a list of things to include on the poster:

- |                       |                     |  |
|-----------------------|---------------------|--|
| › Picture             | › Teeth Description | › Identifying features                 |
| › Name                | › Race              | › Circumstances prior to going missing |
| › Date of Birth       | › Height            | › Last seen where                      |
| › Date Missing        | › Weight            | › Last seen wearing                    |
| › Sex                 | › Hair Colour       | › Mannerisms                           |
| › Contact information | › Eye Colour        |  |

When supplying a phone number do not give out your own number, as you may receive unwanted calls, and should keep your line free to receive calls from the police. Check with the police for a tip number if applicable.

## Where can I distribute posters?

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Posters help get the word out that your loved one is missing and provide a photo image to help people identify your loved one's name with his/her face. Put up your posters:

- in locations that your loved one often goes to.
- in places where food and shelter is offered 24 hours a day to people who are without a home (or are missing from their home).
- in businesses whose employees travel and who are willing to keep their eyes open for your loved one.

Poster etiquette:

- |  |                                       |
|--|---------------------------------------|
| ▪ Any major event in the city                                      | ▪ Ethnic community meeting places     |
| ▪ Bookstore chains   | ▪ Restaurants                         |
| ▪ Bus companies (Greyhound)  | ▪ Family & friends' front doors       |
| ▪ Business drivers & delivery people<br>(cable, Canada Post, etc.) | ▪ Hospitals                           |
| ▪ Churches, other places for<br>religious worship                  | ▪ Libraries                           |
| ▪ City Parks & recreation facilities                               | ▪ Malls                               |
| ▪ Colleges & universities  | ▪ Shelters, soup kitchens, food banks |
| ▪ Community bulletin boards  | ▪ Utility buildings & drivers         |
| ▪ Community Centers  | ▪ Mental health support groups        |
| ▪ Convenience and grocery stores                                   | ▪ Police                              |
|  | ▪ Telephone poles, bus stops          |
|  | ▪ Trucking companies & truck stops    |

- Always ask for permission to put up your poster. Find the manager, security person or receptionist.
- Find the right person who can authorize your poster (maybe with their signature or a business stamp) or you could run the risk of your poster being taken down.
- Explain that your loved one is missing, that they are vulnerable and that they are known to frequent this location.
- Re-distribute posters where there have been sightings and tips.
- E-mail posters as a way of distributing posters. It's cheap and fast.

## Sample Poster for Missing Person

# MISSING

PLACE  
PICTURE HERE

## Jane Doe

If you have any information or have seen Jane  
please contact 1-800-123-4567

### MISSING PERSON INFORMATION (SAMPLE ONLY)

DATE MISSING	02/03/04
DATE OF BIRTH	01/01/01
SEX	FEMALE
RACE	CAUCASION
HEIGHT	5' 8"
WEIGHT	150 LBS
HAIR	BROWN
EYES	GREEN
COMPLEXION	OLIVE
TEETH	SPACE IN BETWEEN FRONT TEETH
CLOTHING	LAST SEE WERAING A BLUE SWEATSHIRT WITH BEIGE KHAKIS AND WHITE RUNNING SHOES
OTHER	MAY APPEAR DISTRACTED OR LOST

## Weeks 2 and 3—What can I do?

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### *Police:*

- Request regular updates from Missing Person Unit or detectives:
  - › You may request a list of recent sightings, whether bank card/ credit card or any other places requiring a swipe card have been visited by your missing loved one.
  - › Provide the police with any new information you uncover.

### *Doctors and Support Groups:*

- Contact local mental health agencies/organizations. Ask them to help by distributing posters through their network and joining in any physical searches conducted, or volunteering elsewhere in your search.
- Notify the dentist that your loved one is missing and give the name of the dentist to the police. If possible, provide dental and fingerprint records to the police.

### *Website:*

- So much information is shared online these days and the Internet can be a valuable search tool for you. If you have the time and access to someone who knows how to build a basic website, create one with information about your missing loved one, recent photos of them and include a downloadable/printable version of your *Missing Person* poster.
- Keep the web site name simple: *www.helpfindjohn.com*, for example.
- Create a contact e-mail address through which you or your family's designated spokesperson can be reached. An e-mail address will make it easy for people to report a sighting or offer their services to help in the search.



## Taking care of yourself

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Searching for a missing loved one is a very stressful and strenuous time for the family and their friends. It is very important that, while you are looking for the missing person, you also take care of yourself. Here are some tips from people who have gone through this experience themselves. They know how important self-care is to *your* mental health:

- Never lose hope.
- Be good to yourself, pamper yourself. Self-care is important.
- A balanced diet, exercise and rest can help to reduce your stress. Be aware of your health on a day-to-day basis. Eat right, exercise and get enough sleep.
- Find a way to relax with relaxation techniques to help you remain calm.
- You must allow your life to continue outside of the search.
- Engage in positive activities with friends and extended family members.
- Do not feel embarrassed about the situation.
- Get help. Do not try to go through this alone. Contact close friends and family members you trust for support. You may find support through other families who have had the same experiences. Check with local agencies involved with mental illness and missing persons.
- Do not feel guilty for taking time to take care of yourself.
- Remind yourself that the police are doing everything they can to help find your loved one.
- Remain positive. Never lose hope.

## When your loved one is found

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### **What happens when the missing person is found?**

- When the missing person is found, the police will do their best to inform the complainant (family member or friend) of the missing person's status.
- By law, the police are not required to tell the family members or complainant of the individual's status, if the missing person is an adult. (This may be different if the missing person is a youth.)
- When found, the individual may ask that his/her family not be notified, and the police must respect the individual's wish and not inform the family of the found person's whereabouts. Just like every other individual, the missing person has the right to keep their whereabouts private and undisclosed to his/her family. However, the police may be able to tell you that your loved one has been found, and is safe and well.

### **Will the substitute decision maker be notified?**

In the case of an appointed substitute decision maker, the police are allowed to inform the substitute decision maker of the whereabouts and status of the found individual.

### **If the missing person is found can the individual be detained by the police?**

If the individual appears stable to the police and there is no report of the individual being a danger to themselves or others, the police **cannot** detain the person. The police may inform the family that the missing person has been found in stable condition, but they may not be able to disclose any more information.

### **If the missing person is found or has been hospitalized will the family be notified?**

If the missing person is found or has been hospitalized the police and hospital authorities will do their best to inform the family, unless the individual has specifically requested they not be notified.

## Suicide Risks & Prevention

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### *Risk:*

Certain groups may be at a higher risk for suicidal behavior. Some of the suicidal risks to be aware of include:

- **Previous suicide attempts**
- **Mental illness**  
Depression, bipolar or schizophrenia are common risk factors for suicide.
- **Gender**  
Males are four times more likely to die by suicide than females. However females are, more likely to attempt suicide.
- **Marital status**  
Single, separated/divorced and widowed individuals are at a higher risk than married individuals.
- **Major life changes**  
Employment changes, divorce, family stress or death of someone close increases the risk of suicide.

### *Warning signs:*

Although motives for suicide vary, there are some common warning signs, which include:

- threatening suicide, talking about wanting to die
- social isolation—little interaction with others
- a sense of hopelessness
- unusual changes in behavior, appearance, or mood
- abuse of drugs and/or alcohol
- unusual interest in getting their affairs in order
- deliberate injures or harmful behavior toward him/herself
- appears depressed, sad, or withdrawn.

## Suicide risks & prevention continued ...

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### How you can help?

There are a variety of ways one can help a suicidal person.

- Take all threats seriously.
- Stay calm & listen.
- Let them talk about his/her feelings.
- Be accepting; do not judge.
- Ask if they have suicidal thoughts.
- Don't swear yourself to secrecy—tell someone.
- Do not leave them alone.
- Encourage them to call the Manitoba Suicide Line at 1-877-435-7170 (24/7) or Crisis Response Centre @ 204-940-1781

Adapted from the Suicide Information & Education Centre (SIEC) Suicide in Canada Facing the Facts, 3rd Edition, 1999.

### Suicide prevention

Suicide can be prevented. Individuals, communities, professionals and governments can decrease the risk of suicide by:

- learning to recognize the suicide warning signs
- being aware of the risk factors commonly associated with suicide
- encouraging supportive families and communities.
- helping the individual to seek treatment for disorders such as depression and schizophrenia
- learning to recognize signs of alcohol and drug abuse, and helping the individual to change his/her behavior.

### What can the police do?

- File a missing person report.
- Collect information about the missing person (where he/she might be, was seen last, medical information from the family).
- Search the missing person's home or bedroom for clues.
- Dispatch field officers, notify them of a missing person in the area.
- Question family, friends and neighbours.
- May issue a media release (determined on a case-by-case, high risk assessment).
- Follow up on sightings and tips.
- Notify some agencies and hospitals of missing person report in local area.
- Establish whether the missing person is classified as a 'vulnerable person'.

### What is outside the police's role?

The police will not:

- Issue and distribute posters. The police are busy with the investigation on a daily basis.
- Contact the media.

You can work as a team with the law enforcement to ensure a productive investigation and search.

### What numbers should I call to report a missing person?

Police -- Missing Person Unit

Call **986-6250** in Winnipeg

Police — non-emergency

Call **986-6222** in Winnipeg

Police — emergency

Call **911**

Note: There are a few communities in Manitoba that **do not** use 911 for emergency contacts. In those locations, you must dial the 7-digit local number for emergency assistance.

RCMP —  
RCMP outside of Winnipeg

Call **983-5420** in Winnipeg  
Check your local phone book.

### **How long should I wait before I report a missing person?**

There is **no minimum** time you have to wait before reporting a missing person. Once you have clearly assessed they are missing, you should report to the police or RCMP immediately.

### **Do the police have a specialized department within their missing persons division focusing on those with a mental illness?**

The Vulnerable Persons Division within the police department focuses on mental health related crimes and missing person concerns within the city; this includes physical and/or mental disabilities. A missing person case involving an individual with a mental illness may be reported to the Vulnerable Persons Division. Outside Winnipeg, missing person cases are handled by the RCMP.

### **What is a risk assessment?**

A risk assessment is a mandatory check the police complete for each missing person's case to assess the level of risk the missing person case possesses, (low or high risk). A risk assessment covers all aspects of the missing person that may impact the investigation such as mental illness, Alzheimer's, the missing person's age etc. A risk assessment will also look at whether or not the missing person is a danger to him/herself or to others.

(See page 24 for a sample Winnipeg Police Missing Person's Report.)

### **What should I do if I believe the missing person is a danger to him/herself and/or a danger to others?**

Tell the police immediately. This question will also come up during the risk assessment.



## **What should I tell the police?**

When reporting a missing person who has a mental health issue or concern, it is helpful to share as much as possible with the police. Here is information you may want to gather and share with the police:

- A full description of what your loved one looks like and what he/she was last wearing.
- How long has the person been diagnosed with a mental illness?
- What is the history of the missing person with regards to their mental health?
- Has the missing person ever tried to harm him/herself?
- Has your loved one attempted suicide in the past?
- What types of medication is the missing person on, and is he/she likely to have it with him/her?
- What happens when the missing person goes off their medication?
- Provide a list of their doctors' names and numbers, as well as any other mental health workers.
- Has the missing person left the family before, and if so where did he/she go and for how long? How were he/she found?
- Is there a risk of danger to others?
- Does the missing person have money or food, or a means of travel?
- What type of identification does he/she have with him/her?
- Bank and credit card account numbers
- Provide your loved one's cell phone number if applicable.
- Give a detailed list of the places the individual frequents.
- List any current or past friends, romantic relationships or co-workers.
- Relate anything troubling that may have recently occurred.
- Detail patterns of missing person's behaviour.
- What is the person's attitude towards the police? Friendly? Hostile?
- Provide information on any e-mail or other computer related accounts.

**Be clear with your information and tell the police anything you can remember.**

## SAMPLE MISSING PERSONS (MP) POLICE REPORT

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### INFORMATION REQUIRED TO COMPLETE & ENTER MP REPORTS

**LOCATION:** WHERE MP WAS LAST SEEN OR HEARD FROM (ADDRESS)  
 DESCRIPTION OF ADDRESS (i.e. HOME/GROUP, HOME/FOSTER HOME)  
**DATE & TIME:** MP LAST SEEN OR HEARD FROM  
**REASON:** WHERE WAS THE MP GOING?, WHY DID THEY LEAVE?  
**HISTORY:** HAS MP EVER GONE MISSING BEFORE, REPORTED OR NOT?  
**COMPLAINANT:** NAME  
 ADDRESS  
 HOME PHONE #  
 WORK PHONE #  
 RELATIONSHIP TO MP  
**MISSING PERSON:** FULL LEGAL NAME  
 ALIAS NAMES  
 AGE  
 DATE OF BIRTH  
 PLACE OF BIRTH  
 RACE  
 HEIGHT  
 WEIGHT  
 HAIR COLOUR AND LENGTH  
 EYE COLOUR  
 GLASSES  
 BRACES  
 MARKS / SCARS / TATTOOS / BODY PIERCINGS  
 FACIAL HAIR  
 CLOTHING DESCRIPTION / JEWELLERY  
 RISKS –MEDICAL-MENTAL-DRUGS-ALCOHOL-GANGS-PROSTITUTION- SUICIDAL  
 DOCTOR NAME OR CLINIC  
 DENTIST NAME OR CLINIC  
 SCHOOL– NAME/GRADE—CHECKED?  
 CFS WORKER—NAME & PHONE # WHAT AREA OR OFFICE?  
 RETURN INSTRUCTIONS—WHERE IS MP TO BE TAKEN IF LOCATED?  
 HANGOUTS—MALLS, PARKS, COMMUNITY CLUBS, etc.?  
 POSSIBLE ADDRESSES / PHONE #s—FAMILY / FRIENDS

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EMPLOYER—NAME / PHONE#  
 VEHICLE—PLATE #, MAKE , MODEL, YEAR, COLOUR?  
 BANK—BRANCH, ACCOUNT #, OWN NAME OR JOINT ACCOUNT?  
 CREDIT CARDS—TYPE, ACCOUNT #, OWN NAME OR JOINT WITH COMPL?



## **What is the Vulnerable Persons Living with a Mental Disability Act?**

*The Vulnerable Persons Living with a Mental Disability Act of Manitoba* promotes and protects the rights of adults living with a mental disability who need assistance to meet their basic needs. The legislation applies to persons who have a mental disability that appeared before the age of 18. It provides for the appointment of a substitute decision maker if one is required. It also provides for the protection of vulnerable persons from abuse or neglect.

## **What is a substitute decision maker?**

A substitute decision maker is an individual appointed by the Vulnerable Persons Commissioner to assist in making decisions for the vulnerable person who is unable to make the decisions for him or herself. A substitute decision maker has the legal authority to make decisions for the vulnerable person in those specific areas in which he/she has been given power by the Commissioner.

The Commissioner will determine those areas in which the substitute decision maker has the right to make decisions on behalf of the individual. Any area not specified by the Commissioner remains the right of the individual to handle as they choose. The substitute decision maker's decisions must respect and encourage the participation and independence of the individual.

For more information visit the following website:  
[www.gov.mb.ca/fs/pwd/vpact\\_protection.html](http://www.gov.mb.ca/fs/pwd/vpact_protection.html)



**How does *The Vulnerable Persons Act Living with a Mental Disability* impact a search for the missing person?**

- *The Vulnerable Persons Act Living with a Mental Disability* may impact the search for the missing person if the individual is a vulnerable person, as there are rules and regulations that must be followed in order to conduct a proper search. Like all other citizens, the police must obey the law.
- The police should be informed of any substitute decision makers for the missing person and this may impact their search process.

For more information contact:

Office of the Vulnerable Persons' Commissioner  
204-945-5039 or toll free 1-800-757-9857,  
[www.gov.mb.ca/fs/prvd/vpact.html](http://www.gov.mb.ca/fs/prvd/vpact.html)

**How does *The Personal Health Information Act (PHIA)* impact the process of finding a missing person?**

PHIA is focused primarily on two important rights:

1. the right to access your personal health information
  2. the right to have your personal health information kept private.
- these rights are applied to everyone receiving health services, including individuals with a mental illness.
  - Hospital staff and administrative officials cannot report to the family that their missing loved one is seeking treatment if the patient has directed them not to. This respects the patient's right to autonomy to make decisions about his/her care.

- PHIA allows the sharing of personal health information about a missing person in a certain circumstance, including if:
  - › the person has previously authorized the sharing
  - › the person is injured or ill, family can be contacted and advised of his or her condition
  - › the sharing is between health care providers who have provided care to the individual and is necessary to provide further care
  - › the sharing is necessary to prevent a serious and immediate threat of harm to the individual, another person or the public generally
  - › warrant allowing access to the information has been lawfully obtained
  - ›

Personal Health Information Act

(204) 788-6612

Website: [www.gov.mb.ca/health/phia](http://www.gov.mb.ca/health/phia)

### **What is the Mental Health Act?**

*The Mental Health Act* governs the rights of a person with a mental illness. It regulates the treatment of those who are patients in a mental health facility and governs the compilation of information about the patient and his/her treatment. It sets out the rights of the patient to have access to his/her information and to determine who it can be shared with. It allows for the appointment of a person to manage the financial and personal affairs of a person with a mental illness who is not competent to manage these affairs on their own. It outlines the duties and powers of the person who is appointed.



**What is a committee and how can someone become one?**

- A committee (com-mit-tee) is someone appointed under *The Mental Health Act* to manage the financial or personal affairs of a person who is not competent to manage his/her affairs. A person does not have to have a mental illness to be declared not competent. The committee can be the Public Trustee appointed by the Director of Psychiatric Services under Part 8 of *The Mental Health Act* or a person appointed by the Court of Queen's Bench under Part 9.
- A person appointed as a committee for financial and personal affairs has the legal authority to make decisions about things such as consenting to medical treatment, determining what health information can be shared with and making decisions about where the person will live.
- A committee appointed by the Court can be appointed to manage the financial affairs of an incompetent person but not the personal affairs such as consent to treatment etc. If the person is capable of making decisions about personal care, then he/she can continue to make those decisions.
- The Court cannot appoint a committee for a person who is covered by *The Vulnerable Persons Act*.
- A person with a mental illness does not have to voluntarily consent to committee-ship. However, there must be enough evidence and support in the Court (through a psychiatric assessment) to show that the person alleged to be incapable due to mental incapacity actually is. This is determined through such things as the individual being incapable of managing his/her property, needing decisions to be made on his/her behalf about their property, their personal care etc.
- To find out more, call the Office of the Chief Provincial Psychiatrist at 788-6676 in Winnipeg or visit Manitoba Health's web site including *The Mental Health Act*:  
[www.gov.mb.ca/health/mh](http://www.gov.mb.ca/health/mh).

### **How can the doctor or service provider help?**

- Doctors and other health care providers must comply with *The Personal Health Information Act*, or if applicable, *The Mental Health Act*, with respect to their patients' health information. This means that they cannot share such information with family or the police unless these Acts allow it.
- However they can offer their advice as to whether the missing person might be considered a risk to harm him/herself others and, if so, how serious a risk. If the risk of harm is serious and immediate, limited health information may be made available to prevent or minimize the harm.



You may wish to try to have the doctor establish how vulnerable the individual is and/or how dangerous they may be to others. This may affect how you or the police search for the missing person.

**Sample questions to ask the doctor—it's worth a try!**

- “Do you know whether or not my loved one was taking his/her medication regularly and keeping all medical appointments?”
- “When was the next scheduled appointment? Will you notify the Missing Persons Unit or family if my loved one does (or does not) show up for an appointment?”
- “Did my loved one attend their last scheduled meetings and/or appointments?”
- “Can you provide any information my loved one gave you about his/her mental health prior to going missing?”
- “Do you have any clues about where my loved one might be?”
- “Was my loved one showing signs of depression or alienation the last time you saw him/her?”

**Will the hospital notify the police of a missing person who has been admitted?**

- The hospital will not make a report to the police or family if the missing person is admitted. Moreover, the hospital may not even be aware the person is missing or that search efforts are underway.
- You can, however, try to call hospitals (start with the emergency ward) to enquire whether anyone with the missing person's name has been admitted to the hospital recently.
- Consider that the missing person may be using a false name if they've been admitted into hospital.



**Suggestions for reducing the stigma often associated with individuals who have a mental illness:**

- It is important for families to report to the police the mental state of the missing person. Whether or not the public is notified is entirely the family's choice.
- In discussion with the police, the family should be able to come to some conclusion about what the best choice is for reporting their loved one missing and describing his/her illness.
- When a family is reporting a missing person with an illness it is up to the family and friends whether or not they want to publicize the missing person's mental illness or condition. Depending on the family situation, reporting the mental illness can have both positive and negative effects.
- Disclosing information about the mental illness is a personal decision dependant upon how much information the family is comfortable sharing with the public. Use phrases such as "lives with a mental illness" or "is vulnerable and without medication" or "may be disoriented and confused but does not pose a risk to others" — whatever is accurate and the family is comfortable sharing publicly.
- Avoid stigmatizing labels when referring to your loved one. For example use "person living with schizophrenia" rather than "is a schizophrenic".



**How can I best prevent my loved one from going missing again?**

- Talk to your loved one. Be open about your concern that he/she may be going missing again.
- Stress the importance that your loved one must carry identification at all times.
- Discuss the benefits with your loved one of having a substitute decision maker or committee act on his/her behalf.
- Inform your neighbours, close friends, and family members of the possibility your loved one may go missing — and how his/her behavior may change just before going missing. Have them notify you if your loved one appears to be wandering.
- If your loved one has Alzheimer's, consider registering with the Alzheimer's Society of Canada's *Safely Home* program, which is geared toward the safe return of individuals with Alzheimer's who have wandered away.  
*www.alzheimers.ca*

**How can I best prepare myself in case my loved one goes missing again?**

Maintain an ongoing logbook that lists important information about your loved one. For example:

- Keep a record of your loved one's habits of movements — where does he/she tend to spend time?
- Keep a record of personal cues and patterns of behaviour that precede unusual or disturbing behaviour (that could lead to your loved one going missing). For example, how does he/she behave when off medication?
- Keep a record of your loved one's car — the registration details, the license plate number etc. Or, keep track of the bus and walking routes he/she usually takes.
- If it's not too invasive, ask your loved one to provide fingertips and dental records for your logbook.
- Talk to your loved one about you becoming his/her committee in the event he/she can no longer make choices for him/herself. If he/she is agreeable to giving you this power of attorney, you must see a lawyer who will guide you through the court process.
- Always have a fairly recent photo tucked into the logbook, and jot down the file name of the digital version saved on your personal computer. This will make retrieving it much faster.

**Should your loved one go missing again, be sure to tell the police all the information that might relate to the case. This will help improve their chances of finding your loved one.**



## Contacts and Agencies

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*Please note:*

*The following numbers are for Winnipeg –based organizations and agencies. Out-of-town or toll-free numbers are indicated by an area code or a 1-8XX-prefix.*

### ***Emergency Contacts***

Police Missing Person Unit	(204) 986-6250
Police non– emergency	(204) 986-6222
Website	<i>www.city.winnipeg.mb.ca/police</i>
Police Vulnerable Persons Coordinator	(204) 986-6287
RCMP (Royal Canadian Mounted Police–Winnipeg)	(204) 983-5420
RCMP—rural-check your local phone book for office nearest you.	

### ***Government Agencies***

Vulnerable Persons Commissioner	(204) 945-5039
Outside of Winnipeg	1-800-757-9857
Emergency after hours access	(204) 945-0183
Website:	<i>www.gov.mb.ca/fs/prvd/vpact.html</i>

### ***Community Organizations***

Alzheimer Society	(204) 943-6622
Website:	<i>www.alzheimer.ca</i> 1-800-378-6699
Anxiety Disorders Association of MB	(204) 925-0600
Website:	<i>www.adam.mb.ca</i>
Canadian Mental Health Association Manitoba	(204) 982-2350
Website:	<i>www.cmhamanitoba.mb.ca</i>
Child Find Manitoba	(204)945-5735
Website:	<i>www.childfind.mb.ca</i>
Klinik Community Health Centre	(204)784-4090
Website:	<i>www.klinik.mb.ca</i>

## Contacts and Agencies continued ...

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*Please note:*

The following numbers are for Winnipeg-based organizations and agencies. Out-of-town or toll-free numbers are indicated by an area code or 1-8XX-prefix.

Mental Health Education Resource Centre of Manitoba <i>Website: <a href="http://www.mherc.mb.ca">www.mherc.mb.ca</a></i>	(204) 942-6568 1-855-942-6568
Manitoba Schizophrenia Society <i>Website: <a href="http://www.mss.mb.ca">www.mss.mb.ca</a></i>	(204) 786-1616
Mood Disorders Association of Manitoba <i>Website: <a href="http://www.depression.mb.ca">www.depression.mb.ca</a></i>	(204) 786-0987
Manitoba Farm and Rural Support Services <i>Website: <a href="http://www.ruralsupport.ca">www.ruralsupport.ca</a></i>	1-866-367-3276
OCD Centre Manitoba, Inc. <i>Website: <a href="http://www.ocd.mb.ca">www.ocd.mb.ca</a></i>	(204) 942-3331
Parent Help Line <i>Website: <a href="http://www.parenthelpline.ca">www.parenthelpline.ca</a></i>	1-888-727-5889
Manitoba Suicide Line	1-877-435-7170

**Other community supports you may want to consider contacting include:**

- church and faith groups
- the Employee Assistant Programs (EAP) at your workplace
- other people you have come into contact with who have also experienced a loved one being missing: see Child Find for possible contacts
- professional counsellors and therapists
- friends and family

**PERSONAL CONTACTS AND PHONE NUMBERS**

**Friends:** # \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Family Doctor / Psychiatrist** # \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_ # \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Mental Health Worker:** # \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Medication type and dosage:**  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Work:** # \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Therapists / Counselor:** # \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Missing Person Case Investigator:** # \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_



Mental Health Education Resource Centre of Manitoba  
4 Fort Street, Suite 100  
Winnipeg, Manitoba  
R3C 1C4

Phone: (204) 942-6568  
Toll Free: 1-855-942-6568  
Fax: (204) 942-3223

Email: [info@mherc.mb.ca](mailto:info@mherc.mb.ca)  
Web site: [www.mherc.mb.ca](http://www.mherc.mb.ca)



Funded by Manitoba Health



MHERC is operated by the  
Manitoba Schizophrenia Society