

# NSW Health Child Wellbeing Unit

The *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998* has been amended to allow all registered medical practitioners and general practice nurses access to the NSW Health Child Wellbeing Unit. This legislative change reflects the important role private health professionals play in identifying and responding to vulnerable families.

Registered medical practitioners and general practice nurses can now contact the NSW Health Child Wellbeing Unit to seek advice if they have concerns about the safety, welfare and wellbeing of a child, young person, or an unborn child.

## What is the NSW Health Child Wellbeing Unit?

The NSW Health Child Wellbeing Unit is a telephone support service staffed by child protection professionals proficient in the assessment and management of risk to children and young people.

The service can:

- assist you to identify appropriate actions and referrals in response to concerns
- give you relevant information held about past child protection related concerns; and
- provide guidance around how to raise your health, safety and wellbeing concerns with parents.

All contacts with the NSW Health Child Wellbeing Unit are documented in a statewide interagency database. Where required, the NSW Health Child Wellbeing Unit can report high risk matters to the Child Protection Helpline on your behalf.

## When should you call?

You should call the NSW Health Child Wellbeing Unit when:

- the outcome of completing the NSW Online Mandatory Reporter Guide directs you to do so; and/or
- you need advice about the safety, welfare or wellbeing of a child, young person or unborn child and their family.

If you suspect a child or young person is at imminent risk of significant harm, call the Child Protection Helpline (24/7) directly on 13 36 27.

## Contact details:

The NSW Health Child Wellbeing Unit is available Monday to Friday between 8:30am – 5pm on 1300 480 420.

If you are calling after hours, please leave a message, or use the [After Hours Contact Form](#) to provide some specific information about your concerns. A Child Wellbeing Unit worker will normally respond the next business day, using the contact details you provide.

## BE ALERT TO THE SIGNS

Do you have concerns regarding:

- The presence of domestic violence in the family home?
- Parents of a child or young person who are unwilling or unable to follow medical advice for serious health issues such as morbid obesity, asthma, diabetes?
- An infant who is failing to thrive or a new mother with unmanaged post-natal depression?
- An infant, child or young person who presents with suspicious physical injuries and bruising?
- A parent (including an expectant parent) misusing alcohol or drugs, or who has an unmanaged mental health condition?
- A child or young person who may have been sexually abused (e.g. presents with a STI or age inappropriate sexualised behaviour)?
- Parents' inaction where a child or young person is self-harming or has expressed thoughts of suicide?



# Exchanging Information and Coordination of Services with Private Health Professionals

The *Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Act 1998* has been amended to allow certain private health professionals to share information relating to the safety, welfare and wellbeing of children and young people. This legislative change reflects the important role private health professionals play in identifying and responding to vulnerable families.

Specified private health professionals are now included in the scheme for information exchange and coordination of services under [Chapter 16A of the Children and Young Persons \(Care and Protection\) Act 1998](#) (the 'Care Act'). Under this scheme, 'prescribed bodies' are required to take reasonable steps to proactively exchange information, and co-ordinate the delivery of services with other prescribed bodies in NSW (e.g. NSW Health, Police, schools, non-government organisations) to promote the safety, welfare and wellbeing of vulnerable children, young people and their families.

## Who has been included?

From 6 May 2016, the following private health professionals were included as prescribed bodies for the purposes of Chapter 16A:

- Nurses (enrolled and registered)
- Registered medical practitioners
- Registered midwives
- Registered psychologists
- Occupational therapists (other than students)
- Speech pathologists (eligible for membership of Speech Pathology Australia)

## What type of information can be shared?

Information can be shared under Chapter 16A if it relates to the safety, welfare or wellbeing of a child or young person and pertains to:

- A parent or other family member
- A child or young person's history or circumstances
- Any person/s having a significant or relevant relationship with the child or young person
- Other agencies working with the child or young person, including past support or service arrangements

## What about privacy and consent?

The legal framework for information exchange under the Care Act takes precedence over the protection of confidentiality or of an individual's privacy because the safety, welfare and wellbeing of children and young people is considered paramount. Providing you act in good faith when sharing information under Chapter 16A, you cannot be found liable to any civil or criminal action, or any disciplinary action for providing the information; or be held to have breached any code of professional etiquette or ethics, or departed from any accepted standards of professional conduct.

## How is information exchanged?

Information can be exchanged verbally (over the phone or in person), or in writing (including email) provided it is done in a secure way. A written record of any exchange of information with another prescribed body should be kept on file, consistent with organisational policies and procedures.

## Do I have to comply with a request for information?

You are obliged to comply in a timely manner with a request for information providing it satisfies the requirements under Chapter 16A. It is important to note that only information to address current child safety, welfare or wellbeing concerns should be shared, not entire files or medical records. If you choose to decline the request, you may be asked to demonstrate due cause for your decision.

If you have questions regarding exchanging information, contact your Department's Child Wellbeing Unit, your medico-legal advisor or refer to the Community Services website [www.community.nsw.gov.au](http://www.community.nsw.gov.au)