

# Taking care of challenging behaviour

## Caring for patients, consumers, carers and staff

SA Health recognises that patients, consumers, carers, volunteers and staff all want health services in which health care can be both delivered and received without personal threat or risk.

## What is challenging behaviour?

Challenging behaviour is any behaviour with the potential to physically or psychologically harm another person, or self, or property. It can range from verbal abuse through to threats or acts of physical violence.

## Where / how does challenging behaviour commonly present?

Challenging behaviour can more commonly occur:

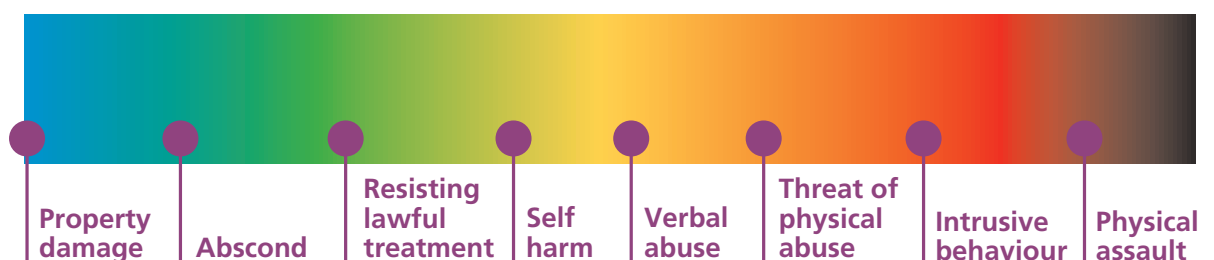
- > with patients / consumers who have a particular clinical condition (such as cognitive impairment, mental illness or substance abuse)
- > in emergency, traumatic, stressful or emotional situations (such as emergency presentations, intensive care, surgery or childbirth)
- > where there is limited access to assistance for workers (such as ambulance services, community mental health or home visits)

## What can cause challenging behaviour?

Sometimes, it can occur when;

- > thoughts, feelings, emotions, physical or mental health status can impact on someone's daily activities
- > feeling that there is inadequate treatment or management of symptoms such as nausea, pain or anxiety
- > alcohol or drugs have been used.

The diagram below shows the range of challenging behaviour from property damage to physical assault.



Finally, regardless of its limit, challenging behaviour is a barrier to the delivery of care that is safe for consumers and health care workers.

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### What are we doing to prevent challenging behaviour?

SA Health has developed a challenging behaviour strategy. This includes a comprehensive framework, such as a policy, guideline and toolkits.

The framework supports health services to focus action on preventing and responding to challenging behaviour in a systematic way. This includes:

- > providing health care in a way that minimises risk of physical or psychological harm to patients / consumers, carers and to health care workers
- > providing patient / consumer centred care
- > respecting all rights of patients / consumers, and carers including their health care rights
- > ensuring that patients / consumers, carers and workers are treated with equality and respect, and that their rights and responsibilities are central to promoting safety
- > providing a health service environment that is safe for workers, patients, consumers, carers and families
- > preventing and responding to challenging behaviour with early intervention, promoting recovery, review and quality improvement.



An online learning module has been developed which outlines what challenging behaviour is.

The module outlines the types of strategies that can be put in place to prevent, and when necessary to respond to these incidents.

Further information is available on the SA Health website at:

[www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/safetyandquality](http://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/safetyandquality)

#### For more information

**Safety and Quality  
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Telephone: 8222 6539  
[www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/challengingbehaviourstrategy](http://www.sahealth.sa.gov.au/challengingbehaviourstrategy)**

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This document has been reviewed and endorsed by SQCAG\* for consumers and the community May 2015.

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\*SA Health Safety and Quality Community Advisory Group



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