

Forensic Pass System

Conversation Guide

We invite you to use the information on this page to support informed conversations about the system of passes and privileges for forensic patients at CAMH. CAMH is committed to ongoing education about the forensic mental health system, and the forensic program at CAMH.

What is CAMH?

- CAMH is one of North America's leading mental health hospitals and one of the world's top mental health research centres. We offer world-class programs and services to more than 37,000 unique patients a year.

Who are CAMH patients?

- CAMH provides services to patients of all ages, across a wide range of illnesses. We focus on prevention, treatment and recovery.

What is the CAMH forensic mental health program?

- The CAMH forensic mental health program delivers care to people who come into contact with the law because of a mental illness. These individuals are sometimes referred to as "forensic patients" because they receive treatment in the forensic mental health program.
- CAMH is part of the provincial mental health system. It's one hospital among 10 in the province that have a forensic mental health program. The program is overseen by the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, the Ontario Review Board and a series of rules and regulations that are set out in law.
- The goal of forensic mental health programs are to treat people's illnesses so that they may recover and reintegrate into the community.
- The forensic program is just one of CAMH's many health care programs.

Why does CAMH allow patients to leave on passes?

- Authorized passes are standard in all forensic hospital programs and play a vital role in a patient's recovery. Hospitals can only restrict a patient's freedom of movement under very specific circumstances outlined in law.

What are passes?

- Passes in the forensic program are allowed once a patient has reached a defined level of stability, and are based on a careful risk assessment performed by a specialist and reviewed by the CAMH forensic services senior team.

- The types and length of passes depend on how well patients are doing in their recovery, the safety of the patient and the community, and the parameters that have been approved for that patient by the Ontario Review Board.
- Hospitals must work within laws and standards. Limiting people's freedoms in Ontario and in Canada is governed by a number of federal and provincial laws, and the forensic mental health system draws on what's set out in those laws.

Does the pass system work?

- Yes. The goal of the forensic mental health care system is to help people recover so that they may reintegrate into the community. Passes are a well-established and routine practice in health care that is foundational to helping people recover.
- Issues resulting from authorized passes in the forensic program are rare – in fact, one in 3,000 passes results in a forensic unauthorized leave of absence, and 1/3 of these are due to someone returning late.
- Authorized passes for patients are routine and happen daily at CAMH, and at every hospital.

Why do people say CAMH patients are criminals?

- People found not criminally responsible or unfit to stand trial because of their mental illness receive mental health care at a hospital with a forensic program. They do not go to jail.
- The forensic mental health system is often poorly understood and stigmatized. Illnesses associated with the brain and mind are often also poorly understood and the behaviours associated with these illnesses can stoke fear.

Is it safe?

- There is a myth that all people with mental illness are dangerous or violent. This is not true. Some people with mental illness can be violent, and so can people who do not have a mental illness. People with mental illness also experience violence at the hands of others.
- The risk that someone will be violent because of their mental illness can depend on whether they are receiving treatment for their illness. People receive health care treatment in the forensic program. Some people in the forensic mental health system are there as a result of a non-violent offence such as mischief, theft or breaching a court order.

What is the role of Toronto Police Services (TPS) and why do we see notices from them?

- Each of the organizations that support the CAMH forensic program – the Ministry of Health, the TPS, the Ontario Review Board and CAMH – have defined roles set out in law that guide what role they play.
- The TPS is responsible for issuing public notifications about unauthorized leaves and missing persons. They are also the only partner that is legally allowed to bring someone back to the hospital to continue their mental health care.

- CAMH's role is to notify the TPS and then work closely with them to ensure the safety of our patients and the community.

When does TPS notify the community?

- Forensic mental health programs must notify their local police when a forensic patient has not returned from a pass at the appointed time or has left a hospital without permission.
- As a law enforcement agency, TPS decides whether or not to enlist the public in locating missing persons.

Why did CAMH call an external review?

- In the summer of 2019 there were high profile news reports about unauthorized leaves from patients from the CAMH forensic mental health program.
- In response, the hospital called an external review of the system used to grant passes and privileges to forensic patients.
- An external review is a practice in health care for quality improvement. External reviews and their findings are autonomous from the hospital.
- This review had leading mental health, health management and safety experts examine the procedures of the hospital to ensure safety of our staff, the community and those within our care.
- The leadership at CAMH took steps to proactively implement measures to improve processes at the hospital.

What did the reviewers find?

- In December 2019, the panel submitted their report. The reviewers recommended improvements to the system of passes so that CAMH can further improve and balance public safety and patient recovery.
- The external review found that despite the work to improve processes and procedures, it is unrealistic to expect that the forensic program can achieve zero unauthorized leaves, and it confirmed that passes are critical to the recovery process.
- The reviewers made 12 specific recommendations as to how CAMH can improve including:
 - physical and infrastructure improvements, to ensure facilities are secure
 - increased communications with TPS
 - better information management
 - improvements to programming for patients, passes and communications at CAMH.

What is CAMH doing now?

- CAMH accepted all the recommendations from the review and immediately began implementing immediate actions to protect public safety and improve care for patients.
- The CAMH leadership team will continue to work closely with the provincial government and other partners on an implementation plan.

The forensic mental health system is often misunderstood and forensic mental health patients are often heavily stigmatized. CAMH remains committed to improving understanding about this program and the patients it serves. We appreciate the support of our local community and partners as we work together toward continuous improvement.