

You do not have to wait

24 hours before reporting

someone as missing



NATIONAL MISSING PERSONS COORDINATION CENTRE

FACT SHEET

## Myths and facts

A missing person is defined as anyone who is reported missing to the police, whose whereabouts is unknown and there are fears for the safety or welfare of that person.

**Myth:** I have to report a missing person to the Police Station closest to where they were last seen

**Fact:** To report a missing person, you can visit any Police station and make a report in person. Reports via telephone are only accepted in South Australia. If the investigation has to be conducted in another town, State or Territory the case may be transferred.

**Myth:** Adults cannot be reported as missing

**Fact:** In Australia, anyone can be reported as missing regardless of age.

**Myth:** People 'choose' to go missing

**Fact:** Circumstances can limit people's choices and make them more vulnerable to leaving their usual environment and go missing. There are a number of triggers such as mental illness, personal crises, financial problems and bereavement.

**Myth:** When children are missing, they are likely to have been abducted

**Fact:** Common reasons for children going missing include a breakdown in communication, family conflict/ domestic violence, mental health issues, peer pressure and drug/alcohol abuse. Only a small percentage of missing children are the result of stranger abductions.

**Myth:** Details about missing persons are not confidential

**Fact:** All details about missing persons are kept confidential and are not made available to the public unless permission has been granted by the family of the missing persons and investigating officers.

**Myth:** A person cannot be reported missing more than once

**Fact:** Each time a person goes missing, even if they have gone missing before, it is treated as an individual report.

**Myth:** When a missing person is located their address is provided to the person who reported them missing

**Fact:** When located, a missing person must give permission before their whereabouts are released. In the case of a located missing child, information and decisions regarding their circumstances and their location may be made in consultation with relevant agencies.

**Myth:** If an Australian is missing overseas there is nothing that can be done

**Fact:** In this circumstance, a missing person's report can be lodged with State/Territory police, who will liaise with NMPCC and Interpol to facilitate international cooperation in investigating such cases. Tracing agencies such as the Australian Red Cross, the Salvation Army and the International Social Service Australia also work to reunite people missing overseas.

## Key facts

- Going missing is not a crime.
- An estimated 35,000 people are reported missing each year in Australia - one person every 15 minutes\*
- 99.5 per cent of people are located - 85 per cent within a week of being reported missing+
- Key groups at risk of going missing are people suffering from a mental illness, youth (aged under 18 years of age) and the elderly\*
- Young people account for more than half of all missing persons report i.e. approximately 20,000\*
- Approximately one-third of missing persons go missing more than once+
- Parental abductions are handled by the Family Court of Australia and the Australian Federal Police (not NMPCC)
- For every missing person reported, it is estimated that 12 other people are directly affected whether it is emotionally, psychologically, physically or financially+
- People go missing for a number of reasons - whether voluntarily or involuntarily.

\* James, Anderson & Putt (2008)

+ Henderson & Henderson (1998)