



Australian Government

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade

# WHEN SOMEONE IS MISSING OVERSEAS

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Every traveller, every trip.

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Unexpectedly losing contact with a family member or friend who is travelling overseas can be very distressing. This brochure is designed to provide information about the process to follow if you're concerned about the welfare of a family member or friend overseas or need to get in contact with them urgently.

When Australians travel abroad, they leave behind Australia's support systems, emergency service capabilities and medical facilities. The Australian Government will do what it can to help families and friends to contact their loved ones. However, we can only provide this assistance where there is a well-founded concern. There are also legal and practical limits to what can be done and you should have realistic expectations about this.

## What can you do?

If you become concerned about a person's welfare overseas, there are some initial steps you can take:

- Attempt to phone, text, email or mail the person and their travelling companions.
- Establish contact with family, friends and travelling companions to ascertain if others may have heard from or had contact with the person.
- Check social media sites for information and recent updates.
- Find out from the families of the travelling companions if they have heard from their loved ones.
- Contact their financial institutions to report your concern and to check details of their latest credit/debit card transactions.
- Contact their last known address or employer to seek information about their possible movements.
- Contact their travel agent or airline to report your concern and to seek details of their travel arrangements. You may also be able to place an alert on their airline reservation for the person to make contact should they access their reservation.
- Contact their mobile phone provider to check if there has been any activity on their account.

There are some important things to remember when you begin trying to locate a person overseas.

- Remain calm. Most Australians are found safe and well.
- Gather as much information as possible from your enquiries.
- Maintain a record of all the information you gather so you can provide comprehensive details, if required, to others assisting to locate the person.

## Who can help you?

If, after making initial enquiries, you're still unable to locate your loved one or friend and have serious concerns for their safety or welfare, contact your local police station.

- You can submit a missing persons report at your local state or territory police station. Depending on the information you provide, your local police will determine if it's necessary to lodge a missing persons report with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) in Canberra.
- For the police to prepare a report, you'll need to provide the following in relation to the missing person:
  - full name
  - place and date of birth
  - passport number (if known)
  - details of any other citizenship or passports held (if known)
  - photographs, preferably recent
  - known travel details and plans, including itineraries
  - contact details overseas (including the names and contact details of employers and people they have been travelling with)
  - advice about the last contact they made.

## What happens next?

DFAT will only pursue enquiries that are based on a serious concern for the welfare of an Australian overseas and a belief that the person concerned needs consular assistance. If we assess that the missing person overseas needs consular assistance, we will:

- conduct enquiries using Australian embassies, high commissions and consulates to try to locate the whereabouts of the missing person
- contact and provide information to you on any developments where permitted

Privacy provisions operating in foreign countries can severely restrict the information provided to consular staff overseas by local law enforcement agencies.

If your missing loved one contacts you after you have commenced formal enquiries, please inform DFAT and the local police immediately.

### Privacy of consular clients

Personal information provided to DFAT is protected by law, including the Privacy Act 1988. We may collect, use and disclose personal information, including to overseas recipients where we reasonably believe it is necessary, to provide consular assistance. Important information about the privacy of personal information is contained in our Consular Privacy Collection Statement, which is available at [dfat.gov.au/dept/consular/privacy](https://dfat.gov.au/dept/consular/privacy) or by requesting a copy from the Department.

Unless consular officials receive the person's consent, they are unable to disclose personal information about them, even to their family or friends, unless this is required by the police, Australian law or a judgment is made that the life or health of the person or another person is being threatened.

Family members should be aware that if a missing person is located by a consular official and they have exercised their free choice to disassociate themselves from friends and family for legitimate reasons, including removing themselves from harmful environments, the consular official cannot pass on personal information.

### Who else can help you?

Depending on the circumstances, there are several other organisations that may be able to help you search for a missing person overseas.

### National Missing Persons Coordination Centre

The National Missing Persons Coordination Centre (NMPCC) is located with the Australian Federal Police in Canberra. The centre works with state and territory police services and government and non-government organisations to provide a coordinated approach to locating missing people in Australia and overseas. The centre's role is to facilitate the dissemination and distribution of information to the public via the NMPCC website. Only cases of missing persons that have a signed authority from the next of kin for the use of images and information are provided by state and territory police to the NMPCC. Further information is available from the NMPCC at [missingpersons.gov.au/nmpcc](http://missingpersons.gov.au/nmpcc) or by calling **1800 000 634** (toll free).

### Australian Red Cross

The International Red Cross/Red Crescent global tracing network reaches out to more than 185 countries to re-establish contact between relatives separated as a result of war, internal conflict or natural disaster. The service is provided free of charge to the public. You can contact the Australian Red Cross Tracing Service on **03 9345 1800**. Further information and contact details are available at [redcross.org.au](http://redcross.org.au).

### The Salvation Army

If you've lost contact with a family member, the Salvation Army Family Tracing Service may be able to help you locate them through their networks in more than 100 countries. A donation is usually accepted for this work. Further information and contact details are available at [salvos.org.au](http://salvos.org.au).

### International Social Service

The International Social Service traces immediate family members in conjunction with its social work across 150 countries. It requests a contribution towards costs for this work. Further information and contact details are available at [iss.org.au](http://iss.org.au).

## Getting help overseas

The Australian Government will do what it can to help Australians in difficulty overseas, but there are limits to what can be done.

### Consular services

DFAT provides assistance to Australians who find themselves in trouble overseas. This support is referred to as consular assistance; however, there are legal and practical limits to what can be done to assist travellers in other countries.

Consular services are provided through our headquarters in Canberra and through Australian embassies, high commissions and consulates.

The Consular Services Charter sets out the standards of service all Australians can expect to receive from consular staff, including what they can and cannot do, and is available at [smartraveller.gov.au](http://smartraveller.gov.au).

Contact details for Australian missions overseas are available at [dfat.gov.au/missions](http://dfat.gov.au/missions). Australia has an agreement with Canada to provide consular assistance to Australians in some countries. Canadian missions providing consular assistance to Australians are also listed at [dfat.gov.au/missions](http://dfat.gov.au/missions).

Not all countries have an Australian or Canadian diplomatic or consular post, but there is usually one in the region. Informal arrangements also exist with other consular services, which can lend assistance to Australians in need.

The 24-hour Consular Emergency Centre in Canberra can also be contacted for assistance from anywhere in the world on

**+61 2 6261 3305** or **1300 555 135** (local call cost within Australia).

### Counselling services

Australians overseas in need of counselling services can contact our Consular Emergency Centre on **+61 2 6261 3305** to be transferred to a Lifeline telephone crisis supporter.

**smartraveller.gov.au**

**Every traveller, every trip.**

1. **Register** your travel and contact details online at **smartraveller.gov.au** before you travel overseas so we can contact you in an emergency.
2. Check the latest **travel advice** for your destination at **smartraveller.gov.au** before you go. **Subscribe** to receive free email notification each time the advice is updated.
3. Take out comprehensive **travel insurance** to cover hospital treatment, medical evacuation and any activities you plan to undertake in the countries you intend to visit.

While every care has been taken in preparing this brochure, neither the Australian Government nor its agents or employees, including any member of Australia's diplomatic and consular staff abroad, can accept liability for any injury, loss or damage arising in respect of any statement contained herein.

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Information for travellers and travel advisories are available from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's Smartraveller website **smartraveller.gov.au**.

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