

Partner Update – CWP to pilot Mental Health Crisis Assessment Service (MHCAS)

From **Monday 1st December**, CWP is expanding the support available to people experiencing urgent mental health needs to include a Mental Health Crisis Assessment Service.

The service will initially be based on the **Countess of Chester Health Park** (to the rear of Bowmere Hospital) and will operate as part of the **CWP First Response Service**, ensuring close working with existing urgent and crisis care pathways.

Initially as part of the phased implementation, the MHCAS will be limited to patient presentations from the Cheshire West area.

Referral into MHCAS will be managed by the Liaison Psychiatry team within A&E and there will be no impact to existing urgent and crisis care pathways for our acute Trust colleagues. Additionally, patients may be directed to MHCAS from our Home Treatment Team service as an alternative to attending Emergency Departments.

What is an MHCAS?

The Mental Health Crisis Assessment Service (MHCAS) offers a calm, safe, and purpose-designed environment for people aged 18 and over who are experiencing mental health distress. It provides an extended period of assessment and treatment away from the busy and often overstimulating Emergency Department setting, while remaining fully connected to urgent and community-based services.

Open 24/7, MHCAS allows time and space to explore difficulties in depth in a therapeutic environment. Working alongside VCFSE partners, the service promotes self-management skills through interventions such as coping strategies, anxiety management, medication support, and self-care advice.

With consent, family members, carers, and friends can be involved in the assessment process. The team will help plan ongoing support, which may include GP follow-up, community mental health services, home treatment, inpatient admission, or support from VCFSE organisations such as Crisis Cafes.

Key Features

- **Eligibility:** Open to anyone over 18 who would otherwise attend an Emergency Department for mental health reasons and does not have an urgent medical need (e.g., overdose).
- **Referral process**



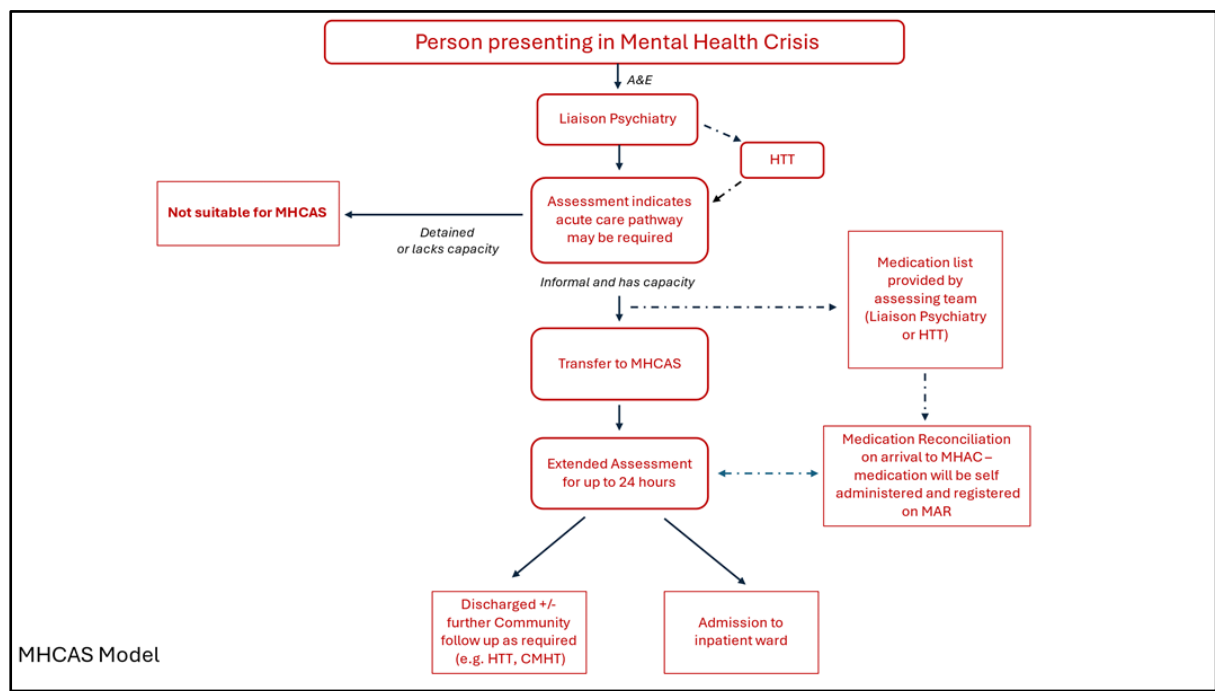
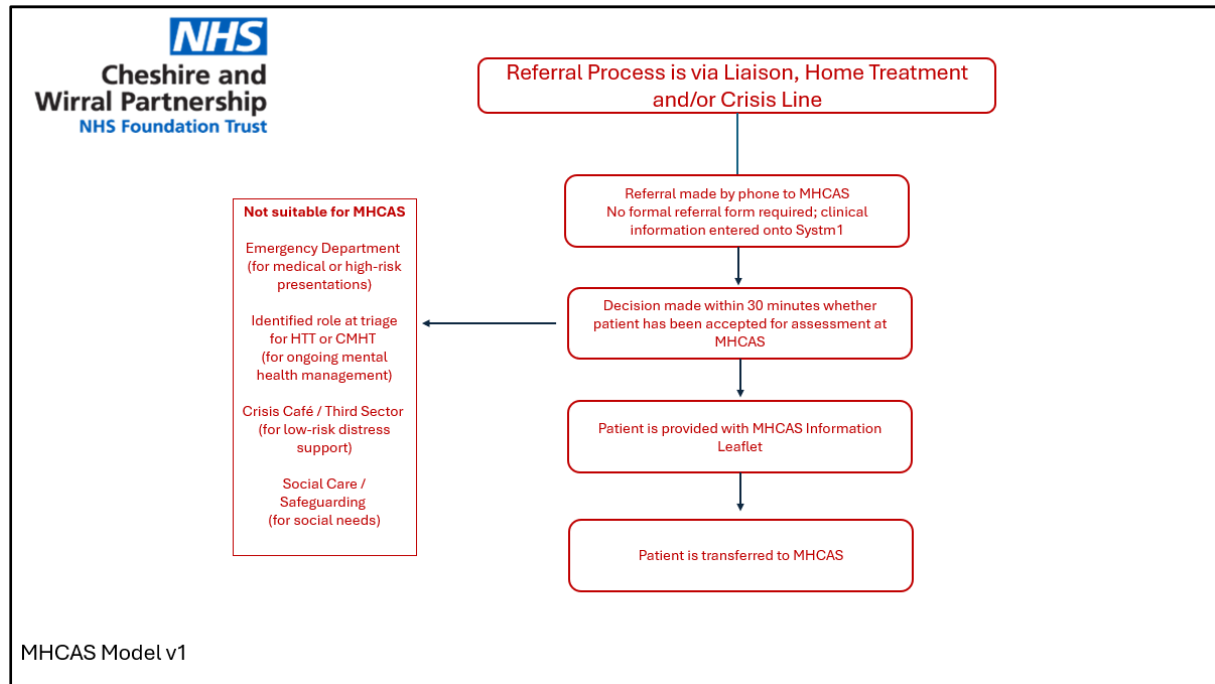
Patients will be referred through FRS, this will be either liaison and home treatment practitioners. **People will not be able to self-present to MHCAS or be directed through partners.**

- **Extended Assessment:** Enables clinicians to work with individuals and families to develop tailored treatment plans, which may include community provision, third-sector support, or acute care interventions.
- **Therapeutic Design:** Purposefully created to reduce environmental stressors, with comfortable furnishings to promote calmness, dignity, and safety.
- **Crisis Support:** Provides space for de-escalation, crisis stabilisation, and short-term care within a needs-led approach.
- **Integrated Care:** Operates within the First Response Service, ensuring effective partnership working across urgent care and community teams for smooth transitions and continuity of care.

The MHCAS is not a mental health ward. It offers time-limited, specialist clinical interventions and assessment prior to appropriate community support or admission to a mental health bed if clinically indicated.

General Criteria for MHCAS

- Aged 18 years or over.
- Person in mental health crisis or requires urgent mental health support.
- Medically stable and does not require ongoing medical or nursing intervention.
- Not acutely intoxicated or withdrawing from alcohol or substances.
- Voluntarily attends and has mental capacity to consent to attend and engage with assessment or support.
- Risk is manageable and poses no immediate threat to self or others that cannot be safely managed in an open, non-restrictive environment on hourly observations.
- Able to safely remain in the MHCAS environment without the need for continuous physical health monitoring.
- Able to self-manage prescribed regular or PRN medications
- Has access to safe accommodation (has fixed abode)



Is the MHCAS permanent?

Our commitment is to improving care and services for our local population. The new MHCAS will initially run as a 6 month pilot for us to review how the model is working. During the pilot up to **four assessment spaces will be available for patients** to access enhanced assessment and intervention, 24/7 days a week.

Why are CWP opening an MHCAS?

Urgent and emergency care is an identified improvement area for CWP. We know from listening to patients, staff and partners that experiences aren't always what we would want them to be, including stays in busy Emergency Departments, people experiencing longer waits for admission and a limited range of safe alternatives in the community. We are committed to improving this for both our patients and the wellbeing of our colleagues and partners.

In line with the ambitions of the 10-year health plan, the development of an MHCAS represents an opportunity for us to strengthen crisis pathways, complement existing urgent care provision, and ensure that people receive timely, compassionate, and specialist support in the most appropriate environment.

Dave Appleton, CWP Head of Operations for First Response, explains: "From listening to feedback from CWP and COCH colleagues and patients, we recognised a step change is needed to make our service more flexible to patient needs and provide a different pathway to help assure multi-disciplinary decision making when making critical assessments.

"Similar services in Liverpool and London not only show improved outcomes for patients but staff in these Trusts have also spoken positively about the MHCAS giving professionals, patients and families more options, time and confidence when choosing the least restrictive option to meet their needs. We're excited about the opportunity the MHCAS pilot will give us to do things differently for patients away from a busy A&E setting, working with community partners and enabling people to be treated in the most appropriate place for their needs."