



The Mother & Family Unit

Ballarat Health Services

Information for Professionals

The Mother & Family Unit (MaFU) is a 5 bed purpose built unit, designed to provide care to parents and their infants up to 12 months of age with mild to moderate mental illness.

About the MaFU

The MaFU is a 5 bed, specialist perinatal mental health inpatient unit, treating parents and infants who experience mild to moderate mental illness within the perinatal period (from conception through to 12 months of age).

The MaFU is an exciting initiative, presenting the opportunity to provide a therapeutic inpatient perinatal mental health program for parents and their infants.

The service widens the support and treatment options available for parents and their infants who need more intensive support and mental health treatment than their General Practitioner, Maternal & Child Health Nurse or other Health Professional can offer.

For families experiencing mental health difficulties during the perinatal period, an inpatient admission will assist in stabilising symptoms, safely commence biological treatment if required and assist in facilitating the relationship between parents and their infants.

Personalised client centred, evidence based, biopsychosocial treatment is tailored to the individual needs of our families by our multidisciplinary team within the MaFU. Our team is derived of Psychiatrists, Mental Health Clinicians, Nurses, Midwives and Psychologists, with frequent visits and clinical input from Paediatricians, Lactation Consultants and Carer/Consumer support.

There are options for a family member or support person to stay overnight however is dependent on room availability and the needs of other admitted clients. It is encouraged families discuss this during the assessment/admission process to determine feasibility. If partners/family are unable to stay, we do encourage them to participate in group programs facilitated on the ward daily. Unfortunately, we are unable to accommodate older siblings staying.

Who can access MaFU?

The MaFU is a free service to parents who have a Medicare card and accessible to parents and infants (up to 12 months) in the Grampians and South West Area Mental Health region.

Grampians shires; Ballarat, Golden Plains, Moorabool, Hepburn, Ararat, Pyrenees, Northern Grampians, Horsham, Yarriambiack, Hindmarsh and West Wimmera.

South West shires; Warrnambool, Glenelg, Southern Grampians, Moyne and Corangamite.

Hours of operation

The MaFU runs from a 5-day program with the unit open from 9am Monday – 12noon Friday. As a Monday-Friday inpatient unit, the parents who are admitted are of voluntary status and spend four nights on the unit before returning home for the weekend. Giving families the opportunity to return home over the weekend forms an integral part of the therapeutic framework offered at MaFU and allows families the opportunity to implement the strategies and interventions they have learnt during the week in MaFU prior to formal discharge.

Length of stay

The length of stay varies on an individual basis. The program is designed so that the parent and infant will stay for the first week, return home over the weekend and then return the following week to review and consolidate on their improvement.

Each family's treatment is reviewed on a regular basis and there is capacity to extend the admission should this be required.

Weekend support

Varying weekend support can be arranged should a family require this.

Follow up from the Adult Community Mental Health Team either face to face or phone support can be arranged if required.

It is important families feel supported and confident to return home and it is ensured they have the appropriate contact/support numbers to utilise if needed.

We understand the large geographical area our mental health catchment services and this may often be a barrier for families engaging in treatment. For families out of the Ballarat region, the MaFU team can offer accommodation options in the Ballarat region over weekend leave periods as well as having access to fuel vouchers to assist with covering some of the associated travelling costs.

Discharge support

Discharge planning will be discussed with the family throughout the admission and referrals to the most appropriate community support services determined and made.

Follow up and referrals may include, but are not limited to, services such as Specialist Perinatal Services, M&CHN Services, General Practitioners, other Mental Health Practitioners including Private Services and Child and Family Services.

Admission criteria

The MaFU provides specialist perinatal mental health assessment and treatment for families and their infant in the perinatal period where;

- The parent and/or infant has a mental health concern, or is at risk of developing a mental illness given the presence of clinically significant vulnerabilities.
- There is an associated functional impairment as a result of the mental illness
- The family would benefit from an intensive daily program of biopsychosocial treatment for the mental illness and parent-child relationship, in an inpatient setting.
- There are no acute, significant safety/risk issues which may compromise the safety of the mother, infant or others within in the MaFU environment.

Access to the service will be based on clinical and psychosocial need, determined by vulnerability and impairment with an aim of early intervention and prevention of the development of a mental illness or the exacerbation of pre-existing mental illness.

The service is voluntary with admissions assessed according to clinical need and risk management.

The service can accommodate a dual diagnosis presentation that would be assessed on an individual basis and this would need to be clinically well managed. The adult must be able to safely care for their infant. Alcohol and other drug use is not tolerated and active use would exclude a parent and infant from a MaFU admission.

The parent is required to care for the infant for a reasonable amount of time throughout the admission. Any immediate safety/child protection issues should be addressed as a priority before referral/admission.

Parent and infant must be medically stable to be considered suitable for an admission at the MaFU.

The service offers evidence based interventions, flexible to meet clinical need and support the recovery process, covering specialist perinatal mental health care for the parent, infant mental health and promoting family inclusive education.

Referral process

Families and the infants can be referred to the MaFU by health professionals including General Practitioners, Paediatricians, Maternal & Child Health Nurses, Mental Health Clinicians or Psychiatrists. Clients are also welcome and encouraged to self-refer.

MaFU is a voluntary service and the family must give consent for the referral.

Referrals can be made to MaFU by contacting the unit directly, Monday-Friday 9am-5pm on (03)5320 8712.

Alternatively, if you are unsure if the family meets the admission criteria, or are unsure of what alternative mental health services would be suitable, you are encouraged to contact for a secondary consultation.

All assessments and admissions will be planned. MaFU does not have capacity for emergency assessment or admissions. If the family require urgent assessment and/or admission, contact Ballarat Mental Health Services Triage service on 1300 661 323.