

**SAN DIEGO POLICE DEPARTMENT  
PROCEDURE**

**DATE:** NOVEMBER 5, 2025

**NUMBER:** 3.17 – INVESTIGATIONS

**SUBJECT:** MISSING ADULTS

**RELATED POLICY:** [3.17](#)

**ORIGINATING DIVISION:** INVESTIGATIONS II

**NEW PROCEDURE:** ☐

**PROCEDURAL CHANGE:** ☒ **MODERATE CHANGES**

**SUPERSEDES:** DP 3.17 – 09/23/2021 and 10/28/2025 (See section V.C.2.)

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**I. PURPOSE**

This Department procedure establishes guidelines for handling reports of missing adults.

**II. SCOPE**

This procedure applies to all members of the Department.

**III. BACKGROUND**

Penal Code section 14214 imposes a duty on all law enforcement agencies to immediately assist any person who is attempting to make a report of a missing person or runaway. Penal Code section 14215 defines “missing persons,” to include children and adults.

However, this procedure covers only missing adults. See Department Procedure 3.09, At-Risk Missing/Runaway Juveniles, for information relating to missing children.

**NEW**

The California Department of Justice (DOJ) requires that information on missing persons be entered into the California Law Enforcement Telecommunications Systems (CLETS) and the National Crime Information Center (NCIC) computer systems. Additionally, for persons considered at-risk or those under the age of 21, CLETS and NCIC submission shall be completed within 2 hours of being reported to SDPD. Cal. Penal Code § 14211(e).

Although it is not a criminal violation to be a missing adult, Penal Code sections 14211(c) and 14212 mandate that law enforcement agencies document such persons through an Attorney General required form and establish a priority for investigation. There is no minimum time requirement before a report may be taken, and the reporting party may provide information necessary to complete the report either in person or over the telephone. The missing person's report shall be taken without delay regardless of jurisdiction.

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This policy also describes procedures an officer must take when they find an adult person who has not been reported as missing, but who may be lost or unable to understand their whereabouts and are therefore possibly missing.

#### IV. **DEFINITIONS**

NEW

A. LPS Conservator –The LPS process is one in which the court appoints the Public Conservator (LPS Conservator) to make certain legal decisions for an individual because their mental health disorder has left them gravely disabled. The LPS conservator ensures that basic needs and proper mental health treatment is provided in order to help the individual regain their independence. While on an LPS conservatorship, secured placement facilities and forced medication can be authorized by mental health court. While the individual is an LPS conservatorship, the court may limit his/her right to vote, to enter into contracts, to drive, or to own a firearm. Welfare & Institutions Code § 5357. The LPS conservatorship can last for a maximum of one year at a time and can be renewed in court at the end of each year Welfare & Institutions Code § 5361.

B. Missing Person - any person whose whereabouts are unknown to the reporting party.

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C. Missing Adult Persons fall into two categories: “at risk” (Dispatch Priority 1) and “not at risk” (Dispatch Priority 2). The investigating officer should evaluate the facts in each case to determine if the missing person is at risk.

1. "At Risk" Missing Person circumstances include the following:

- a. The Missing Adult Person is the victim of a crime or foul play;
- b. The Missing Adult Person needs medical attention;
- c. The Missing Adult Person has made suicidal statements;
- d. The Missing Adult Person has no pattern of running away or disappearing;

- e. The Missing Adult Person is mentally impaired, including cognitively impaired or developmentally disabled; or
- f. Any other Missing Adult Person who is determined by the Department to be “At Risk,” including a person who has made recent suicidal statements.
- g. This definition does not include escapees from a mental health facility. See separate criteria below. Welfare & Institutions Code § 7325.

## V. PROCEDURES

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- A. A Missing Person Report shall be completed in NetRMS on ALL persons reported as missing. These reports shall be taken without delay, regardless of jurisdiction, and including any telephone reports.
  - 1. For missing persons at-risk and all missing persons under the age of 21, Teletype will assign the case number to the Event just after Communications Division obtains the pertinent information from the reporting party. **Even though Teletype has assigned the case number to the Event, officers shall contact Teletype upon completing their Missing Person investigation to confirm or update the information for the Teletype entry.**
  - 2. For missing persons not “at-risk” and age 21 or older, the responding officer shall contact the reporting party and investigate the circumstances of the call. If it is determined to be a genuine missing person case, the officer shall contact teletype to obtain a case number prior to leaving the scene or as soon as possible.
  - 3. Reports shall be completed during the officer’s current shift and shall not be held until the next day.
  - 4. Telephone Reporting
    - a. Between the hours of 0700 and 2200 hours, seven days a week, the Centralized Telephone Report Unit will take the report if the Missing Adult Person is considered to be “not at risk.”
    - b. When the Centralized Telephone Report Unit is not in operation, Communications Division will dispatch all Missing Adult Persons reports.
    - c. Communications Division will dispatch a unit on all calls of Missing Adult Persons at risk.

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B. Not “At risk” Case Report Procedures

1. Centralized Telephone Report Unit and patrol officers receiving information on a Missing Adult Person “not at risk” shall complete a Missing Person Report in NetRMS.

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C. “At risk” Case Report Procedures

1. The Communications Division dispatcher shall format an incident and dispatch an officer to evaluate. After formatting an incident, the dispatcher will fax a copy of the incident to the Adult Missing Persons Unit.
2. When the dispatcher formats the incident, an electronic message is automatically relayed to Teletype, who will immediately enter the missing adult information into the Missing and Unidentified Persons System (MUPS). Information entered in MUPS shall include why the person is believed to be at risk.
3. An “all units” broadcast will give a description of the missing person.
4. Field supervisors shall notify the Watch Commander and the on-call Missing Persons Detective of the “At Risk” individual and determine if Southwest Search Dogs (SWSD) is an applicable resource to use for the incident. The Watch Commander can provide the number to reach SWSD 24/7. Field supervisors should contact Communications to request an ALERT SAN DIEGO for the “At Risk” individual. An “At Risk” Missing Person flyer template is available at the Watch Commander’s office.
5. If the “At Risk” Missing Adult Person is an escapee from a hospital or other facility described in Welfare and Institutions Code section 7325, and the facility notification includes information that the escapee has been charged with any crime involving physical harm to children, the field supervisor responsible for the incident shall notify school districts:
  - a. In the vicinity of the hospital or other facility from where the escapee was held;
  - b. In the area the escapee is known or is likely to frequent; and,
  - c. In the area where the escapee resided immediately prior to confinement.

NEW

6. The on-call Missing Person Detective will assist patrol in determining whether a “Ebony Alert”, “Feather Alert”, or “Silver Alert” systems through the California Highway Patrol should be pursued.

- a. Ebony Alert

(California Government Code section 8594.14 provides authority for law enforcement personnel as follows:

(a) For purposes of this section, “Ebony Alert” means a notification system, activated pursuant to Government Code section 8594.14(b), designed to issue and coordinate alerts with respect to Black youth, including young women and girls, who are reported missing under unexplained or suspicious circumstances, at risk, developmentally disabled, or cognitively impaired, or who have been abducted.

(b) (1) If a person is reported missing to a law enforcement agency and that agency determines that the requirements of subdivision (c) are met, the law enforcement agency may request the Department of the California Highway Patrol to activate an Ebony Alert. If the Department of the California Highway Patrol concurs that the requirements of subdivision (c) have been met, it may activate an Ebony Alert within the appropriate geographical area requested by the investigating law enforcement agency.

(2) Radio, television, cable, satellite, and social media systems are encouraged to, but not required to, cooperate with disseminating the information contained in an Ebony Alert.

(3) Upon activation of an Ebony Alert, the Department of the California Highway Patrol may assist the investigating law enforcement agency by issuing a be-on-the-lookout alert, an electronic flyer, or changeable message signs in compliance with paragraph (4).

(4) Upon activation of an Ebony Alert, the Department of the California Highway Patrol may use a changeable message sign if both of the following conditions are met:

(A) A law enforcement agency determines that a vehicle may be involved in the missing person incident.

(B) Specific identifying information about the vehicle is available for public dissemination.

(c) A law enforcement agency may request that an Ebony Alert be activated if that agency determines that an Ebony Alert would be an effective tool in the investigation of missing Black youth, including a young woman or girl. The law enforcement agency may consider the following factors to make that determination:

(1) The missing person is between 12 to 25 years of age, inclusive.

(2) The missing person suffers from a mental or physical disability.

(3) The person is missing under circumstances that indicate any of the following:

(A) The missing person's physical safety may be endangered.

(B) The missing person may be subject to trafficking.

(4) The law enforcement agency determines that the person has gone missing under unexplained or suspicious circumstances.

(5) The law enforcement agency believes that the person is in danger because of age, health, mental or physical disability, or environment or weather conditions, that the person is in the company of a potentially dangerous person, or that there are other factors indicating that the person may be in peril.

(6) The investigating law enforcement agency has utilized available local resources.

(7) There is information available that, if disseminated to the public, could assist in the safe recovery of the missing person.

b. Feather Alert

Under California Government Code section 8594.13(c), SDPD may request a Feather Alert to be activated if the Department determines all of the following conditions are met:

1. The missing person is an indigenous woman or indigenous person.

2. The investigating law enforcement agency has utilized available local and tribal resources.

3. The law enforcement agency determines that the person has gone missing under unexplainable or suspicious circumstances.

4. The law enforcement agency believes that the person is in danger because of age, health, mental or physical disability, or environment or weather conditions, that the person is in the company of a potentially dangerous person, or that there are other factors indicating that the person may be in peril.

5. There is information available that, if disseminated to the public, could assist in the safe recovery of the missing person.

c. Silver Alert Criteria

Under California Government Code section 8594.10 , a Silver Alert may be activated if the following are criteria are met:

1. The missing person is 65 years of age or older, developmentally disabled, or cognitively impaired.

2. The investigating law enforcement agency has utilized all available local resources.

3. The law enforcement agency determines that the person has gone missing under unexplained or suspicious circumstances.
4. The law enforcement agency believes that the person is in danger because of age, health, mental or physical disability, environment or weather conditions, the person is in the company of a potentially dangerous person, or other factors indicating that the person may be in peril.
5. There is information available that, if disseminated to the public, could assist in the safe recovery of the missing person.

#### 7. Missing Alzheimer's Disease Patients

- a. In addition to following the normal "At Risk" case procedures outlined above, a field supervisor will be notified when an Alzheimer's disease or dementia patient is reported missing.
- b. If the Missing Adult Person has not been located after an initial search, a Crisis Intervention volunteer may be requested. The volunteer will assist the family as a resource and referral aid. Crisis Intervention volunteers will generally not be called if the person is missing from a mental health facility or board and care home.
- c. If an extensive search is in order, a field supervisor may request that Retired Senior Volunteer Patrol (RSVP) units from various commands be mobilized as the primary search units. If the units are not on duty, they may be called back at the discretion of the Watch Commander, via the Volunteer Services Coordinator.
- d. At the earliest opportunity, the Missing Person Report will be faxed to the Adult Missing Persons Unit at (619) 525-4826. In addition, a photograph of the "at risk" Missing Adult Person shall be sent directly to the Adult Missing Persons Unit and entered into NetRMS.

#### D. Adult Missing Persons Unit

1. Investigates reports of Missing Adult Persons.
2. Assist with creating Missing Adult Person flyers and dissemination of them, when needed.
3. If facts dictate, alerts the Watch Commander of appropriate "at risk" Missing Adult Persons.
4. Reviews "courtesy" reports and contacts the appropriate agency.

5. Forwards dental X-rays and DNA samples to the California Department of Justice (DOJ) when required.
6. Receives and processes runaway/missing juvenile cases forwarded by area command juvenile detectives after the juvenile turns 18 years of age if the case warrants further follow-up.
7. Processes impounded and found property related to Missing Adult Person cases.

E. Reports

1. The Missing Person Report must be as complete and detailed as possible, and should include, if available:
  - a. The reporting party's address and phone number;
  - b. A complete physical, dental, scar, and tattoo description of the Missing Adult Person is necessary and could be an aid in identification;
  - c. The Missing Adult Person's complete name, social security number, address and phone number of their dentist, and any information regarding their social networking accounts (Facebook, email address, etc.); and,
  - d. In "at risk" cases, it is necessary to obtain a photograph of the Missing Adult Person as soon as possible. The photograph should be forwarded to the Adult Missing Persons Unit.
2. Non-residents
  - a. A Courtesy Report will be taken on a Missing Adult Person who is not a resident of San Diego.
  - b. The agency having jurisdiction over the Missing Adult Person's place of residence has the ultimate responsibility of investigating the case. A copy of the report will be sent to the agency where the Missing Adult Person resides. However, the Adult Missing Persons investigator will assist other agencies with the local investigation.

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F. Reporting Party Interaction



1. Reports may be taken from family, friends, landlords, employers, or roommates where circumstances warrant.
2. The investigating officer should ensure that the reporting party understands:
  - a. It is not against the law to be a missing adult;
  - b. Checking jails, hospitals, friends, banks, Medical Examiner, etc. is the reporting party's responsibility;
  - c. The location of the missing person will be revealed only if he or she (missing person) so desires;
  - d. This Department cannot force the return of a Missing Adult Person; and
  - e. The reporting party must notify this Department when the Missing Adult Person is located or their whereabouts are known.
3. Do not suggest or promise the reporting party that this Department will initiate an all-out search.

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- G. The following persons are NOT considered bona fide missing, unless extenuating circumstances exist:
1. A deserting spouse. A spouse is legally free to come and go as he or she pleases;
  2. A person who has left a note or told someone they are leaving. An exception would be a suicide note; and,
  3. A person who simply has not been in touch with the reporting party for an extended period of time, unless extenuating circumstances exist.

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H. Found Missing Persons and Alzheimer's Disease Patients

1. "At risk" Missing Adult Persons (not escapees or conservatees from hospitals and other facilities)
  - a. Unless the Missing Adult Person is an escapee from a mental health facility or is an LPS conservatee. (W&I § 7325), the located missing person's whereabouts cannot be divulged to anyone unless the Missing Adult Person specifically authorizes it. If, however,

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the Missing Adult Person is incapacitated, hospitalized, or has died, then the information may be released to next of kin.

- b. Generally, the Missing Adult Person should be advised of the report and released, unless 5150 criteria or other legal justification is met. See Department Procedure 6.20, Mental Health Procedures.
- c. The officer should then notify the Adult Missing Persons Unit of the contact.
- d. Upon contacting an individual(s) reported as an Adult Missing Person. Officers shall notify Teletype of the individual's information.

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## 2. "At risk" Escapees from Hospitals and Other Facilities

- a. Welfare and Institutions Code section 7325 requires that peace officers apprehend, and return committed or placed patients who have escaped from designated mental health facilities, only upon written request of the facility or the patient's LPS conservator.
- b. A mental health facility may include a state hospital, veterans' facility, or the facility designated by a county.
- c. A facility representative or LPS conservator must make a written request for the return of the escaped patient. A telephonic notification may also be made by the facility. If telephonic notification is given, the officer shall note:
  - i. the time and date of notification,
  - ii. the person notified, and
  - iii. the person making the notification
- d. A warrant or court order for the apprehension, custody, and return of the escaped patient is not required. However, in cases involving an LPS conservator, the officer should request that the LPS conservator provide a detention order. The facility will be named in the Missing Persons System entry or Officer Notification System entry.
- e. If the located "at risk" Missing Adult Person is known to be missing from a facility in another jurisdiction, the person will be taken to the San Diego County Psychiatric Hospital for evaluation.

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## 3. Found Not "At-Risk" Missing Adult Persons

- a. When officers contact an individual who has been reported missing, if they are reported missing by the San Diego Police Department, officers shall complete a case report in NetRMS under the existing case number documenting the contact. If the individual is reported from an outside agency, the officer shall contact Teletype to send a locate message through NCIC.
- b. No involuntary apprehension is used unless 5150 criteria (W&I § 5150) or other legal justification is met. See Department Procedure 6.20, Mental Health Procedures.

4. Found Alzheimer's Disease Patients

- a. A person suffering from Alzheimer's Disease can easily be frightened when approached in a threatening manner. Great care should be exercised when making initial contact.
- b. Check the person for a medical alert bracelet. The bracelet will have a coded number and a toll-free telephone number to call. The code number, when given to the operator, will identify the person.
- c. If the found person does not have a bracelet, call the National Safe Return Program at 1(800) 272-3900. By giving a physical description of the person to them, they can check their database and provide a list of possible names. The Safe Return Program has the capability of faxing photographs of possible patients.
- d. If the person does not have a bracelet or identification, does not know his or her name or address, and has not been reported as missing, the officer can request Communications Division to call the appropriate mental health care facility in the immediate area. Communications Division will maintain a current list of all facilities by service area.
- e. The San Diego County Psychiatric Hospital, located at 3851 Rosecrans Street, (619) 692-8200, will hold several geriatric beds for such unidentified Alzheimer's Disease patients.
- f. The Adult Missing Persons Unit will be responsible for identifying the found person if all other avenues fail.
- g. Generally, a Found Alzheimer's Disease Patients will willingly be taken home. However, if they refuse transport, no involuntary apprehension is used unless 5150 criteria (W&I § 5150) or other

legal justification is met. See Department Procedure 6.20, Mental Health Procedures.

5. Found Persons with Developmental Disabilities

- a. People with developmental disabilities or medical conditions may have an increased risk of becoming lost and confused. Members of this group may not be able to identify themselves or provide accurate information to first responders about their immediate needs.
- b. The San Diego Police Department's *Take Me Home* program is intended to assist officers in obtaining identifying information, behavioral considerations, medical conditions, special care instructions, a detailed description of the person, and a photo.
- c. Officers who encounter a person who is unable to identify themselves may use SDLaw to access the *Take Me Home* database (See DP 3.29 for further information). Department employees who have authorized access to SDLaw can enter the database from eMug Web on the SDLaw main menu page. Once eMug Web is open, use the drop-down menu, change the database to "Take Me Home," and select "retrieve" to begin your search.
- d. By entering known data (e.g., gender, race, age range, height, weight), officers now have a tool to identify lost individuals. An officer may also enter the zip code to search the area in which they were found. A photo or series of photos will appear matching the criteria entered. Clicking on the photo that represents the person found will provide critical information about the at-risk individual to include, name, address, phone number, medical condition(s), and caregiver information.
- e. Generally, a Found Persons with Developmental Disabilities will willingly be taken home. However, if they refuse transport, no involuntary apprehension is used unless 5150 criteria (W&I § 5150) or other legal justification is met. See Department Procedure 6.20, Mental Health Procedures.

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I. Unconscious and Unidentified Persons At Hospitals

- 1. Hospitals may call the Communications Division to request a law enforcement follow-up on patients who are unconscious and unidentified. This usually occurs when an unconscious person with no identification is

brought to a hospital by ambulance. The following procedures shall apply in these situations:

- a. Upon being dispatched, officers shall respond to the hospital and contact the reporting party.
- b. Ensure the reporting party is a hospital employee.
- c. Ensure the patient is, in fact, unconscious, disabled, or impaired to the point where the patient cannot identify himself or herself.
- d. Ensure the hospital staff members have taken reasonable steps to identify the patient on their own (i.e. checking for identification, interviewing paramedics or friends of the patient who may be present, etc.).

## 2. Fingerprinting

- a. For unconscious and unidentified persons at hospitals, the officer shall attempt to have a sworn Department member, with fingerprint scanner issued to them, respond to the scene. The sworn Department member who has been issued the fingerprint scanner will take the subject's fingerprints and attempt to identify the subject through the various databases accessible on the device.
- b. If the fingerprint scanner does not provide an investigative lead, the officer shall take a full set of fingerprints from the patient sufficient to be checked through Cal-ID with the San Diego County Sheriff's Department (SDSO).
- c. The officer shall use a fingerprint card form (FD-249), filling out all available information (sex, height, weight) and listing the charge as "POSSIBLE MISSING PERSON."

The officer shall take the prints to the San Diego County Sheriff's Crime Laboratory at 5590 Overland Avenue, in the City of San Diego, where the officer will submit the fingerprint card to the Cal-ID staff. After business hours, the SDSO CAL-ID Unit can be reached at (858) 974-2145 and an employee will meet the officer to collect the print card. The officer shall leave their contact information with the laboratory employee in order to obtain the results.

- d. SDSO CAL\_ID staff shall run the fingerprints through the Cal-ID system. The results of the Cal-ID search, either positive or negative, shall be noted in a Case Report or Officer's Report. The

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original prints and Case Report or Officer's Report shall then be forwarded to the Missing Persons Unit for follow-up.

- e. Fingerprint scanners may be used to identify persons under exigent circumstances when the person has been involved in an accident or has had some other medical emergency and has no identification or is unable to provide identification. Identification of the person is necessary to provide information to next of kin. **This information is for investigative purposes only and shall not be released to the hospital if the only reason for doing so is to provide the hospital with billing information.** (

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- f. Officers may provide the unidentified person's name, birthdate, and next of kin information. Field supervisors shall evaluate additional requests for assistance in locating next of kin based on resource availability and pending calls for service. Information gained from criminal records checks (including criminal history, rap sheets, etc) shall not be shared with unauthorized persons including hospital staff.

- 3. Officers responding to hospitals should be alert to any circumstances that would necessitate an immediate or more thorough follow-up. For example, if the appearance of the unconscious patient or the circumstances surrounding his or her presence at the hospital indicates the patient might be a victim or a suspect in a crime, the officer should initiate an immediate investigation and complete a Case Report or Officer's Report to reflect the circumstances of the initial call to the hospital and what the investigation revealed.
- 4. **Under no circumstances shall officers take fingerprints from deceased persons. If such a request is received from a hospital, the hospital staff shall be advised to contact the Medical Examiner's Office.**