

**Arizona Department of Health Services  
Division of Behavioral Health Services  
PROVIDER MANUAL  
NARBHA Edition**

**Section 7.7**      **Duty to Warn**

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**7.7.1 Introduction**

Any mental health provider employed or contracted by a T/RBHA or its subcontracted providers, having determined that a patient poses a serious danger of violence to others, shall take reasonable actions to protect the potential victim(s) of that danger.

**7.7.2 References**

The following citations can serve as additional resources for this content area:

[A.R.S. § 36-501](#)

[A.R.S. § 36-517.02](#)

[Tarasoff v. Regents of the University of California, 551 P.2d. 334 \(Cal. 1976\)](#)

[Little v. All Phoenix South Community Mental Health Center, Inc., 186 Ariz. 97, 919 P.2d 1368 \(Ct. App. 1995\)](#)

[Hamman v. County of Maricopa, 161 Ariz. 58, 775 P.2d 1122 \(1989\)](#)

[Section 3.18, Pre-Petition Screening, Court Ordered Evaluation and Court Ordered Treatment](#)

[Section 4.1, Disclosure of Behavioral Health Information](#)

**7.7.3 Scope**

**To whom does this apply?**

This applies to all T/RBHAs and their subcontracted providers who provide services in Arizona's public behavioral health system.

**7.7.4 Definitions**

[Mental Health Provider](#)

[Patient](#)

**7.7.5 Objectives**

The objective of this section is to identify situations in which a T/RBHA or subcontracted provider may have a duty to protect potential victims of physical harm when a patient poses a serious danger of violence to others.

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**7.7.6 Procedures**

**7.7.6-A Duty to Protect Potential Victims of Physical Harm**

Mental health providers have a duty to protect others against the violent conduct of a patient. When a mental health provider determines, or under applicable professional standards, reasonably should have determined, that a patient poses a serious danger to others, he/she bears a duty to exercise care to protect the foreseeable victim of that danger. The foreseeable victim need not be specifically identified by the patient, but may be someone who would be the most likely victim of the patient's violent conduct.

While the discharge of this duty may take various forms, the mental health provider need only exercise that reasonable degree of skill, knowledge and care ordinarily possessed and exercised by members of that professional specialty, under similar circumstances. Any duty owed by a mental health provider to take reasonable precautions to prevent harm threatened by a patient can be discharged by any of the following, depending upon the circumstances:

- Communicating when possible the threat to all identifiable victims;
- Notifying a law enforcement agency in the vicinity where the patient or any potential victim resides;
- Taking reasonable steps to initiate proceedings for voluntary or involuntary hospitalization, if appropriate, and in accordance with [PM Section 3.18, Pre-petition Screening, Court Ordered Evaluation and Court Ordered Treatment](#); or
- Taking any other precautions that a reasonable and prudent mental health provider would take under the circumstances.