

Getting help overseas

“Limited financial assistance in real emergencies”

The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade provides help to Australians who find themselves in trouble overseas. Through this support, known as consular services, the Department's consular officers provide a lifeline to Australians who are away from home.

The Australian Government will do what it is able to help Australians in difficulties overseas. Whether this is helping Australian victims and survivors of a terrorist bombing, assisting Australians to repatriate the body of a loved one from overseas, or providing comfort and advice for a young Australian in an overseas prison, the consular staff often help Australians through the worst days of their lives.

But Australians need to appreciate that, when they go abroad, they leave behind Australia's support systems, emergency service capabilities and medical facilities.

There are legal and practical limits as to what consular officers can do for travellers overseas and Australians need to have realistic expectations.

Australians are now making over 4.7 million overseas trips each year, compared to 3.4 million three years ago. In the last year alone, the Department assisted over 25,000 Australians in difficulty in over 152 countries and handled over 350,000 public inquiries.

The Australian Government cannot decide for Australians where to travel and how to behave when they get overseas. Australians are intrepid travellers and are going in ever greater numbers to out-of-the-way, sometimes dangerous places. These are personal choices which the government respects. But, Australians need to accept responsibility to minimise risks to themselves. Consular functions are governed by international agreements and the Australian Government cannot impose Australia's laws, rules or standards on other countries.

Examples of what they can do to help Australians overseas include help during crises, such as civil unrest and natural disasters, by confirming the number of

Australians involved and providing advice to family members at home; provide advice and support in the case of an accident, serious illness or death, or if an Australian is a victim of a serious crime, and arrange for next-of-kin to be informed. This may involve facilitating communication between the local hospital, the victim and their family, monitoring the victim's welfare and if necessary, assisting in arranging a medivac. Visit or contact Australians who are arrested and arrange for their family to be informed (if they wish); contact relatives and friends on an Australian's behalf and ask them to assist with money or tickets; provide some limited financial assistance in real emergencies (subject to very strict criteria); provide information on a government scheme under which eligible Australians can apply for financial assistance in limited circumstances to help with legal costs overseas; provide a list of local doctors and lawyers; issue passports, including emergency passports.

However there are limits to the levels of assistance consular officers can provide. For a list of examples of what they cannot do to help Australians overseas and for more information, visit www.smartraveller.gov.au



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