

Advantages of a 24/7 Medical Alarm Monitoring Service **Providing the best possible care to at-risk Australians**

There is an emerging trend for care-agencies to supply non-monitored personal medical alarms to their clients. Non-monitored alarms call family and friends rather than a professionally trained emergency operator in the event of an emergency. Non-monitored alarms send text messages to responders and display the user's location on a Google map on their smartphone. Some also make voice calls.

Although, on the surface, this may look an attractive proposition considering cost alone, there are some important safety considerations.

Limitations of non-monitored medical alarms

Non-monitored medical alarms do not offer the same level of assurance or quality of emergency response compared to professionally monitored alarms. Rather, the emergency response is dependent on the availability of family and friends to take the emergency calls, and their ability to respond. In many cases they may be busy at work, taking other calls, unable to respond due to distance, or their mobile phone may be switched-off or not in a mobile service area.

Modern telecommunications networks do not guarantee the delivery of text messages, and text messages may suffer very long delays during periods of network congestion.

Additionally, it is PERSLs understanding that, if the 000 emergency service is listed as a direct responder to a non-monitored alarm, and there is no voice contact with the user, there is no way to determine if the call is a genuine emergency, and the alarm activation will not be given a high priority by ambulance services, or may not be otherwise acted upon. It is also PERSLs understanding that ambulance services may not be able to retrieve the GPS location from the text messages.

Conversely, in a 24/7 monitored service, every emergency call is answered by a professionally trained operator, they will have access to the user's information, medical history, and their location. The operator will attempt to speak to the person needing assistance to determine the nature of the emergency, and will give reassurance that help is on-hand. A significant number of alarm calls are non-emergency calls or false-alarms, and the ability of the operator to determine the nature of the emergency very often avoids an unnecessary ambulance call-out.

If an ambulance is required, the operator will pass the details, including the location details, to the Emergency Services Operator and ensure the appropriate priority. If voice contact with client is not possible the operator will follow a procedure previously agreed with the client or the client's representative.

Monitoring services have extensive redundancy in both equipment and telecommunications paths, thus avoiding single-point failure and ensuring backup communications mechanisms available in almost every situation.

Additionally, monitoring companies automatically test each medical alarm on a very regular basis to ensure the equipment is operating correctly. Clients are also encouraged to make manual test-calls, and the monitoring service will follow-up with the client if a manual test-call has not been received as expected. This ensures the client knows how to use the alarm system in an emergency, and gives greater reassurance that help is close-by should they need it.

These capabilities go well beyond simple monitoring and alerting, and set the monitored medical alarm industry participants well apart from non-monitored alarm alternatives, resulting in significantly better care for their clients.

Many of PERSL's member monitoring services add further services such as an ability to share critical information with emergency services including health and home access details and also provide valuable feedback to family and care providers to ensure continuity of care. This information can be critical to prompt and better health outcomes.

Australian Standard AS4607

AS4607:1999 is the Australian Standard for the provision of Centrally Monitored Medical Alarms. It specifies the minimum Standards for alarm equipment, alarm installation, and alarm monitoring services. As largely an outcomes driven Standard it is relevant to all new generation medical alarms operating over the mobile phone service that call into a Central Monitoring Service.

Alarm centers complying with AS4607 record detailed information on all alarm events, and can make this information available within the terms of their privacy policy.

Conversely, there is no Australian Standard for the provision of non-professionally monitored medical alarms. (Generic EMC, Safety, telecommunications and radiocommunications Standards only relate to the electrical safety and the technical characteristics of the equipment).

There is also little ability to measure the outcomes or cost-effectiveness of providing non-monitored medical alarms.

Organisations which arrange or fund these systems on behalf of their clients should be wary of using any systems which do not comply with recognized Australian Standards. Funding, recommending, or arranging non-Standards compliant systems may legally expose the Organisation when hardware or systems fail.

Summary

The reliability and quality of medical alarm provision can only be assured if all medical alarms use a 24/7 professional medical alarm monitoring center.

Providing professionally monitored medical alarms assures that all clients receive the same quality of equipment and services, and that all emergency events will be handled with the same high degree of professionalism and effectiveness.

Conversely, the provision of non-monitored medical alarms will result in disparate outcomes, and would also result in a large number of unnecessary ambulance call-outs at significant cost.



Advocacy, standards, and direction for
Personal Emergency Response Services

As the peer industry association in this field, PERSL recommends the use of systems which adhere to AS4607. PERSL members also adhere to high standards for quality services and ethical conduct.

Mr. Phil Wait
Chair, PERSL
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The Personal Emergency Response Services Limited (PERSL) is the Australian peak body representing manufacturers, suppliers, monitoring services and consumers of 24/7 monitored Medical Alarms and Personal Response Services (PRS). We estimate there are circa. 300,000 aged and at-risk Australian's using professionally monitored medical alarms, both in their own homes and in residential aged-care facilities.

In making this submission the medical alarm industry seeks to ensure the highest possible level of service, standards, access, and equity in the delivery of Personal Response Services in Australia.