

# How do I find a mental health professional?

## How do I access a Mental Health Professional?

The truth is that we all struggle from time to time... Sometimes we just need a helping hand.

So, when it is time to take that next step and connect with a mental health professional for the first time it can feel daunting – especially if you're not sure what to do or how to go about it?

It may even seem easier to put it off by telling yourself that “it's not that bad” or “I'll do that another day when I have time”. The problem with putting it off is that the earlier you connect with support the easier it will be, and the faster that you will likely see positive results.

If, like many others, you do put off connecting with a professional you significantly increase your risk of needing to access professional support later – when you or your life is then in a state of crisis.

We've put together this guide to make it super easy for you to connect with a mental health professional. Just like your hairdresser or your mechanic it's important to get a professional that you like and trust. Don't be disheartened if you don't find one you like straight away. Sometimes it takes a few goes to find the very best person to suit your individual needs.

## Different Types of Professionals

There are different types of mental health professionals and many different types of treatment options available – it's important to find the best fit for you.

### What do they do?

#### GP (Family doctor)

- Your GP should be your first port of call if you are worried about your mental health.
- They can advise on the best course of action, provide referrals to accredited mental health professionals, prepare a Mental Health Treatment Plan (for Medicare), prescribe medication (and monitor any side effects) and also follow up with ongoing care.
- GPs have a medical degree and several years of supervised experience.

#### Psychologist

- Psychologists have completed a minimum of six years of study (including a Masters or Doctorate level qualification) on how people think, feel and behave.
- They can diagnose mental illness, provide psychological treatments (such as cognitive behavioural therapy) and test for intellectual and psychological function.
- All psychologists are registered with the Psychology Board of Australia. Some are general psychologists and others may have an area of 'practice endorsement', which means they have an extra qualification in a particular area (such as clinical, health or developmental psychology).

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### **Mental Health Social Worker**

- Accredited Mental Health Social Workers hold a degree in Social Work plus an extra mental health qualification. They generally work in private practice, hospitals or community centres.
- They can help with psychological, social and other environmental issues.

Counsellor/Therapist • Counsellors and therapists range in terms of their qualifications, level of training and area of expertise.

- They will generally talk through problems with you and help you to work through these difficulties.

### **Psychiatrist**

- A psychiatrist is a medical doctor who has specialised in mental health.
- They are able to diagnose mental illness, prescribe medications and psychological treatment, help with both physical and mental health and admit people to hospital if necessary.

## **Options to access a mental health professional**

### **1. Visit your GP (Family doctor) for referral to a professional under Medicare**

Your GP will be able to advise you on what type of professional may be the most beneficial for you to connect with.

They will confirm your eligibility for a Medicare rebate for up to 10 sessions with a psychiatrist, psychologist or mental health social worker under what's called the Better Access Initiative. To do this, you will need to complete a Mental Health Treatment Plan.

Your GP will then refer you to their recommended professional. You will then need to call the professional and arrange an appointment.

Some professionals will "bulk bill", so that there are no out of pocket expenses, while others may charge a 'gap payment' or a small fee to make up the difference between their hourly rate and the Medicare rebate.

### **2. Private providers:**

Mental health professionals who work in local private practices

You don't need a referral from a GP to see a psychologist, mental health social worker or counsellor. But be aware that if you don't have a referral from a GP with a Mental Health Treatment Plan you won't be eligible for a Medicare rebate.

Without a Mental Health Treatment Plan you can expect to pay the full rate that the privately practicing professional charges (fees generally range from \$80 - \$250 per hour).

You may be eligible for a rebate from your health insurance provider, but you would need to contact your health fund to check.

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### 3. Government Funded or Community Programs

There are several government or community organisations that offer programs, or mental health services for free or for a small fee.

Visit your GP to see what programs are available in your area, or visit the websites of community providers to see what they offer.

Some examples of providers are: Relationships Australia, Beyond Blue, Mission Australia and Gambling Help Online.

Headspace is the National Youth Mental Health Foundation providing early intervention mental health services to 12-25 year olds.

### 4. Crisis care

If you or someone you know is in a crisis and requires immediate support, you should contact emergency services by calling 000.

You can also call Lifeline on 13 11 14 or chat them online.

Other crisis services in Australia include:

NSW: Mental Health Line  
1800 011 511

VIC: Suicide Help Line  
1300 651 251

QLD: 13 HEALTH  
13 43 25 84

TAS: Mental Health Services Helpline  
1800 332 388

SA: Mental Health Assessment and Crisis Intervention Service  
13 14 65

WA: Mental Health Emergency Response Line  
1800 676 822

NT: Top End Mental Health Service  
08 8999 4988

ACT: Mental Health Triage Service  
1800 629 354