



Australian Government  

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Department of Health and Ageing

# *Better Access to Mental Health Care*

## Your mental health and wellbeing

Mental illness is common. About one in five Australians will experience a mental illness at some stage in their lives.

For many people, talking to a doctor is the first step towards getting help. Your doctor is interested in your mental health and wellbeing.

Each year around *half a million* Australians seek help from a doctor for a mental illness.

If you feel you might need help to improve your mental health and wellbeing, you should talk to a doctor. There is a range of mental health services available, depending on your needs.



## How can a doctor help?

A visit to a doctor should be your first step in seeking help with your problem.

Your doctor can discuss any concerns you have and give you advice on what to do next.

### **After you discuss your problem, your doctor may:**

- diagnose you with a physical condition
- refer you to a community-based service
- refer you to a mental health specialist for assessment and/or treatment; or
- advise you to continue seeing your doctor for ongoing support and/or treatment

Your doctor may assess you as having a mental illness, and suggest that you will benefit from a **GP Mental Health Care Plan**.

Developing a GP Mental Health Care Plan allows you and your doctor to talk about the mental health problems you are having.

*Together, you can then work out how best to get help.*

## The GP Mental Health Care Plan

This involves you and your doctor discussing your medical history, lifestyle and social situation to better understand why you feel the way you do.

The GP Mental Health Care Plan is tailored to your needs, to find the treatment that is right for you, check your progress and to help you reach your goals.

Your doctor can give you advice and work with you to decide the approach that will suit you best, to improve your mental health.

After completing your GP Mental Health Care Plan, your doctor should offer you a copy of the plan.

Your doctor may refer you to a psychiatrist, psychologist or other mental health professional, depending on your needs. If you agree, your doctor may give them a copy of your GP Mental Health Care Plan.

Your doctor will probably ask you to return for a review of your mental health plan to ensure you are getting the help you need. If you feel that the mental health treatment is not right for you it's also a good idea to go back to your doctor.

## How can Medicare help you?

Rebates are available through Medicare for mental health care services for eligible people, including preparation of a GP Mental Health Care Plan. Rebates are also available for assessment and treatment by a psychiatrist (on referral from a doctor).

Your GP may refer you for Medicare-subsidised sessions with a psychologist, or an appropriately trained doctor, social worker or occupational therapist only if you have a GP Mental Health Care Plan. A psychiatrist or paediatrician may also refer you for Medicare-subsidised treatment with a psychologist, an appropriately trained social worker or occupational therapist. You may receive up to 12 sessions of individual therapy in a calendar year. An additional six sessions may be available in exceptional circumstances.

Group sessions (up to 12) are available, in addition to individual sessions, in a calendar year.

**In addition to assessment and treatment by a psychiatrist, Medicare rebates are available to eligible people for the following:**

**Focussed Psychological Strategies** can be provided by a psychologist, or by an appropriately trained doctor, social worker or occupational therapist. The aim of this treatment is to help you understand more about your mental disorder and to learn strategies to manage the difficulties you are experiencing. A session involving Focussed Psychological Strategies can be one-on-one or in a group.

**Psychological Therapy** is also available as a treatment option under a GP Mental Health Care Plan and is provided by a clinical psychologist. The aim of this treatment is for you to learn to manage your mental disorder through looking at your thoughts, emotions, the way you behave and your relationships with others. A session involving Psychological Therapy can be one-on-one or in a group.

*If you would like to know more about these options, please talk to a doctor.*

## **YOUR HEALTH RECORD**

As with other medical services, when these services are provided to you they will become part of your medical records held by your doctor and also by Medicare Australia (where a claim is made from Medicare for these services).

Your medical record is private to you. However, you should be aware that you may be asked for permission by other people or organisations, such as insurance companies, to view this information.

# Handy hints

- Make sure you book a long consultation with your doctor to allow you and your doctor enough time to prepare a GP Mental Health Care Plan and discuss your treatment options.
- You can discuss with your doctor options for involving family members, friends or your carer.
- Everyone's treatment needs are different; your doctor can help you work out what services are best for you.
- Remember to tell your doctor about all the medications you are taking, including over the counter and herbal medicines, as they may affect the way you feel.
- Your health professional's receptionist should be able to tell you if bulk-billing services are available, what fees are charged and how much you'll get back from Medicare.
- If you need language assistance please call the Translating and Interpreting Service on 13 14 50.

## More information for patients and carers

### *beyondblue*

[www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au)

### Multicultural Mental Health Australia

[www.mmha.org.au](http://www.mmha.org.au)

### Australian Government

[www.mentalhealth.gov.au](http://www.mentalhealth.gov.au)

### SANE Australia

[www.sane.org](http://www.sane.org)

### Mental Illness Fellowship of Australia

[www.mifellowshipaustralia.org.au](http://www.mifellowshipaustralia.org.au)

## 24-hour crisis counselling services

### Lifeline

13 11 14

### Kids Help Line

1800 55 1800

### Mensline Australia

1300 789 978