

Mental & behavioral health: Understanding different types of providers

With so many types of behavioral health providers, it can be hard to figure out who's right for you. Understanding the differences and who offers what type of care can help you know what to expect. Here's an overview of the types of behavioral health professionals.*

Therapists & counselors

These behavioral health professionals have master's degrees and clinical licenses. They're also trained to evaluate a person's mental health and provide counseling. This includes therapists, like marriage and family therapists, and counselors.

Clinical social workers

Like therapists and counselors, clinical social workers have master's degrees and clinical licenses. They're also trained to evaluate mental health and provide counseling. They're also trained in case management and advocacy services.

Psychologists

Psychologists have doctorates in clinical psychology (PhD or PsyD) or other specialties, such as counseling or education. They can evaluate your mental health using clinical interviews, psychological evaluation and diagnostic testing. Psychologists tend to focus on social, cultural and environmental factors. In most states, they can't prescribe medication.

Psychiatric or mental health nurse practitioners

These nurse practitioners hold Master of Science degrees or doctorates. They specialize in psychiatry and are trained to work in the mental health field. They assess, diagnose and provide therapy for mental health conditions, and in some states, they're qualified to prescribe medications.

Psychiatrists

Psychiatrists are licensed medical doctors (MDs or DOs) who've completed psychiatric residence training. They can diagnose mental health conditions, provide therapy and prescribe medication. They focus on exploring biological and neurological factors, and often treat complex conditions, such as bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, severe depression and thoughts of self-harm or suicide.

*Job titles and licenses can vary by state. Providers must be licensed to be covered by insurance.



Still not sure who to go to?

Your primary care doctor is a good place to start. If you're seeking help with emotions, behaviors or thinking patterns, be open and honest about what you're experiencing. Your primary care doctor can refer you to a behavioral health specialist, can often prescribe medications such as antidepressants, and will guide you to the right kind of care.

We're here for you

If you need help finding a behavioral health provider, we're here to help. Chat with us online or call us at the number on the back of your member ID card.



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