

Mental health - care plans

Mental health care plans are for people with a mental illness who have several healthcare professionals working with them. A care plan explains the support provided by each of those professionals and when treatment should be provided. Your care plan might also include what to do in a crisis or to prevent relapse.

Your doctor will use a care plan to help you work out what services you need, set goals and decide on the best treatment options for you. At other times, your doctor may contribute to a care plan that someone else has organised – for example, when you are returning home from spending time in hospital.

Care plan explained

Providing ongoing care and support for someone who is living with a mental illness can involve many different support organisations. These may include psychologists, GPs, psychiatrists, psychiatric nurses or other community care providers. They are all part of the 'healthcare team' that works together to provide you with the best level of care possible.

Everyone's treatment needs are different. A care plan puts down in writing the support you can expect from each of the people in your mental healthcare team and makes sure that everyone knows who is responsible for what and when. You are an important part of this team and should be fully involved in preparing your mental health care plan.

Preparing your care plan

Your doctor will work with you to decide:

- What your mental health needs are
- What help you require – your medical, physical, psychological and social needs are all considered
- What result you would like
- What treatment would be best for you.

Once you and your doctor have agreed on your goals and what support you need to achieve them, your doctor will write out a mental health care plan. They will then discuss this with the other members of your healthcare team. Preparing the plan might take one visit or it might take a number of visits.

Your GP will offer you a copy of the plan and will also keep a copy on your medical record. If you give permission, a copy can also be given to other people, such as psychologists or your carer. You should tell your doctor if there is any information you don't want other people in your healthcare team to know.

Benefits of a care plan

Having a care plan will help you become more involved in your healthcare. A care plan can:

- Help you to set and achieve goals
- Make sure everyone involved in your mental healthcare team is working towards the same goals
- Help you and your doctor manage your long-term care in a way that is clear and easy to understand
- Give you a way to monitor your progress and check that you continue to receive the care you need

- Lead to better treatment by focusing on improving and maintaining your health rather than just dealing with problems as they arise
- Provide life-saving information in emergencies.

Issues to consider

Most care plans are done in your doctor's office. However, you may also have a care plan prepared for you when you leave hospital. The time it takes to draw up the care plan depends on your healthcare professional and the complexity of your situation.

Some things to think about include:

- You will need to request a long consultation with your doctor to allow enough time to prepare your care plan and discuss your treatment options.
- If you would like a carer, family member or someone else to accompany you to the care plan appointments, you may wish to let your doctor know beforehand.
- Your doctor must get your consent before a care plan is developed, and you should be given a written statement of your rights and responsibilities.
- Discuss with your doctor any aspects of your assessment that you do not want discussed with the other members of your healthcare team.

Regular reviews are important

Once you have a mental health care plan, you should continue to see the same doctor for review and management. Significant changes in your health may mean you need to make a new care plan. Even if there are no big changes to your situation, your care plan should be reviewed regularly to make sure it continues to meet your needs.

How often a new plan is prepared may vary depending on which health professionals are involved. Care plans may be prepared every 12 months and should be reviewed after three or six months, or sooner if needed. A date for review should be written into your care plan.

Costs

If you have a Medicare card, Medicare will cover some or all of the cost of care planning by a doctor. It may also rebate some of the costs of certain specialists or other health professionals, which will be charged separately. Your GP should tell you what costs (if any) are involved when you agree to make a mental health care plan. If you are unsure, ask your doctor what fees will be involved.

Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Mental healthcare professional – for example, a psychologist, GP, psychiatrist, psychiatric nurse or other community care staff member
- SuicideLine Tel 1300 651 251
- Lifeline – 13 11 14
- Kids Help Line – 1800 55 1800
- Mensline Australia – 1300 789 978

Things to remember

- Anyone who has a mental health problem that lasts longer than six months and needs the care of three or more health professionals will benefit from a care plan.
- Everyone's treatment needs are different – your care plan can help you and your doctor work out what services are best for you.
- A care plan explains the support provided by each member of your healthcare team, who is responsible for what and when.
- Your care plan should be reviewed regularly to make sure it continues to meet your needs.

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