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## Referrals and access to mental health services

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### Summary

- If you feel that something is not quite right with your thoughts, feelings or behaviour, the first step is to talk to your local doctor about these concerns.
  - Your local doctor can diagnose and treat some mental health problems or can refer you to other healthcare practitioners to get the help you need.
  - If you need immediate assistance, call 000.
  - For people who need immediate help in a mental health crisis, the police, ambulance staff or a doctor might call the Acute Community Intervention Service (ACIS) to help.
  - If you are a Medicare card holder there are a number of government programs that can help you pay for mental healthcare.
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For people experiencing unusual or disturbing thoughts, feelings or behaviour, there are mental health services in place for people who seek out help ('voluntary treatment') and for those who are compelled to undergo treatment ('compulsory treatment') because their mental health problem could make them a danger to themselves or others.

If you or someone you know is at risk of suicide, call **Lifeline** on 13 11 44.

### Voluntary treatment for mental illness

If you feel like something is not quite right with your thoughts, feelings or behaviour – and you believe it could be the result of a developing mental health problem – the first step is to visit your local doctor or call a specialist mental health helpline such as the one offered by beyondblue. Talking about your situation with a mental healthcare professional will help you decide on your next step. In less severe cases, this might mean making some small lifestyle changes such as taking more time out for yourself. In more severe cases it might mean referral to a psychiatrist for treatment that includes medication.

### Visiting a local doctor

Your local doctor is well-positioned to make an initial diagnosis. To do this, they are likely to assess your mental health and do a brief interview, physical examination and possibly some laboratory tests. The doctor will ask about your symptoms, your family history of mental illness and anything in your life that might be causing anxiety or stress.

Depending on your needs, the local doctor might refer you to a counsellor, psychologist or psychiatrist.

### Speaking to a counsellor

As a therapeutic treatment for mental illness, counselling is offered by various healthcare professionals including psychologists, general practitioners, consultant physicians, psychiatrists and social workers.

Counsellors help people to recognise and define their emotional, mental and lifestyle problems and to understand themselves and their behaviour better. They help people by:

- explaining options
- setting goals
- providing therapy
- supporting them to take action.

Your local doctor might be able to provide some counselling for a mental health issue. Beyondblue, a national depression initiative, can also help with over-the-phone, online and in-person counselling for anxiety and depression. If your needs require a different approach, these counsellors can refer you to another service.

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## Immediate mental health referrals

For people who need immediate help with a serious mental health crisis, call triple zero (**000**).

For crisis counselling, call:

- Lifeline **131 114** (Australia-wide)
- Kids Helpline **1800 55 1800** (Australia-wide)
- SuicideLine **1300 651 251** (Victoria only)
- Suicide Call Back Service **1300 659 467** (Australia-wide)
- NURSE-ON-CALL **1300 60 60 24** (Victoria only).

## Paying for mental health services

If your local doctor works with you to develop a mental health care plan, you may be eligible for further Medicare-subsidised care sessions from psychiatrists, psychologists, clinical psychologists, social workers and occupational therapists. Conditions eligible for the 'Better Access to Psychiatrists, Psychologists and General Practitioners through the Medicare Benefits Schedule (Better Access) initiative' include:

- **depression**
- **bipolar disorder**
- **anxiety-related conditions** such as panic disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, generalised anxiety disorder and phobias.

Subsidised mental health treatment is also available through the Australian Government's Access to Allied Psychological Services (ATAPS) program. ATAPS provides access to low-cost treatment for people with common mental health conditions of mild to moderate severity. Eligible people can access up to 12 individual sessions per calendar year or, in exceptional circumstances, up to 18 individual sessions with mental healthcare professionals. Generally, there is little or no out-of-pocket expense for eligible people.

There are no out-of-pocket expenses in relation to compulsory treatment for mental illness. Visit the **Department of Health** or **Medicare** for more information.

## Where to get help

- Your doctor
- Mental healthcare professional
- beyondblue, call **1300 22 4636**

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