

Accessing professional help

Source: [Getting Help](#)

There are many different clinicians who can provide mental health support. These are not the only people who can help you; friends, family, faith leaders, community elders, mentors, and teachers can be excellent sources of support as well. Not everybody will feel like the Western medical system can meet their needs, especially if they have identities or lived experiences that have been stigmatized by the health system or by wider society.

Once you have decided who to contact for help, you will need to [prepare](#) for your visit.

Who can provide professional help?

Your family doctor (general practitioner)—can rule out any physical causes for your symptoms, prescribe medications, listen to your concerns, and refer you to specialized services. Family doctors can be a main source of support for managing a mental illness. They are a good resource for information and a great place to start getting help. However, they don't have the same extensive training in diagnosing and treating mental illness that a psychiatrist might have.

- You can see a doctor through a walk-in clinic or by appointment through a family practice. You can find a family doctor through the BC College of Physicians and Surgeons for a list of doctors accepting patients at www.cpsbc.ca or 1-800-461-3008 (toll-free in BC) or 604-733-7758 (in Greater Vancouver). Available in English only.
- You can access reviews of local GPs [here](#).
- If you are looking for a trans-friendly general practitioner, contact [TransCareBC](#) at 1-866-999-1514 or email transcareteam@phsa.ca
- To talk to a clinician immediately, call HealthLink BC at 811 for free and confidential health information and advice, 24/7. You can also speak to a pharmacist from 5 pm to 9 am. A CareCard is not required but can be helpful. Services in other languages are available.
- To access other help and crisis lines, check out this [list of contacts](#),

Psychiatrists—are doctors trained in diagnosing and treating mental illnesses. They are covered under BC's Medical Services Plan (MSP) if you have a referral from your family doctor. They can prescribe medications and may provide counselling.

Counsellors—include psychologists, clinical counselors, and social workers. These professionals can help diagnose mental illnesses and provide counselling. Counsellors cannot prescribe medication. You may also be able to access low- or no-cost counselling programs in your community, but counselling is usually not covered by MSP.

- Vancouver services specific to trauma counselling can be found [here](#).

Other sources of counselling:

Schools and campuses often provide counselling services to students. Student health insurance may provide a limited stipend that can be applied towards mental health services.

Many workplaces also offer counselling services through benefit programs like an **Employee Assistance Program** (EAP) and through extended health coverage. EAP counsellors provide short-term counselling to deal with specific issues. Most EAP programs are for both the employee and the employee's family.

Veterans Affairs Canada provides counselling for military veterans. Local Bands, Friendship Centres, the Aboriginal Mental Health program, and Health Canada provide services for Indigenous people. Places of worship often offer access to a helpline or counsellor for their members.

Mental health teams

BC healthcare funds adult and youth mental health clinics which provide free, tiered mental health services depending on your situation. These mental health centres employ social workers, nurses, mental health workers, peer support workers, occupational therapists, and physicians. Depending on your needs, you may be set up with a whole team, or meet with select clinicians. While short-term crisis support can also be provided, mental health teams are more often a source of ongoing connection for people with chronic mental illnesses. They can also provide coping skills, family and community support, and referral to other community services such as income and housing assistance. Most centres have walk-in hours where you can refer yourself, but you may be able to expedite the process through a referral from a family doctor. They are covered by MSP.

Clinicians and Qualifications: What do they mean?

M.D. - Doctor of Medicine: A person who has obtained a doctorate degree after studying a medical school. "Physician" usually indicates that a person has obtained at least an M.D., and they may have other specialized titles. All physicians are "doctors", but not all doctors are physicians; the "Dr." title can also indicate that the person has received a Doctorate in another area besides medicine.

P.hD - Doctorate of Philosophy: A person who has obtained a doctorate degree in any given specialty at a university. A person can choose to specialize in a certain field to obtain a specific status; for example, psychologists often receive a P.hD in Clinical Psychology, which trains them to treat people with mental health conditions. However, a P.hD on its own does not license someone to work with people. For example, an experimental psychologist who receives a P.hD in Social Psychology may perform research in a lab but does not treat people.

Psy.D - Doctorate of Psychology: A person who has obtained a doctorate degree in Psychology, meaning they studied mental health or behaviour in university.

G.P. - General Practitioners

General practitioners are people who have obtained a Doctor of Medicine (M.D.) and are trained to help patients with a broad variety of health concerns. They can diagnose conditions,

prescribe medications, or refer you to other services, such as a specialist doctor or a treatment program. They are a great first contact point for addressing mental health concerns and can help you understand the different resources available to you. In BC, GPs should be registered with the College of Family Physicians or the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada.

Pediatrician

Pediatricians are people who have obtained an M.D. and have received specialized training in working with children and adolescents who have health concerns. Pediatricians may also hold other specialties; for example, a pediatric psychiatrist would focus on managing and treating psychiatric conditions in young people. Pediatricians should be registered with the College of Family Physicians or the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada.

Psychologist

Psychologists obtain a Doctorate of Philosophy (P.hD) in Psychology and then go on to receive specialized training in managing and treating psychological and behavioural conditions like anxiety, OCD, or ADHD.

Psychiatrist

Psychiatrists obtain a Doctor of Medicine (M.D.) and then go on to receive specialized training in managing and treating psychiatric conditions like anxiety, depression, and schizophrenia. Like GPs, they can diagnose, prescribe, and make referrals. Psychiatry services are covered by BC MSP, meaning anyone with a BC Care Card can see a psychiatrist at no cost. However, to receive ongoing services from a psychiatrist, you must be referred by another clinician such as a general practitioner, an intake clinician at a public health service, a psychologist, or a social worker. Psychiatrists are registered with the Royal College of Physicians and Surgeons of Canada. A psychiatrist's name may look like this: Dr. John Smith, MD.