

03: Finding the Right Provider

Introduction

Finding mental health service providers can be daunting, especially if the person you care for lives in a rural area, comes from a diverse culture, or has specialized needs. Yet, despite challenges, it is worth the effort because appropriate mental health care can save lives and restore hope.

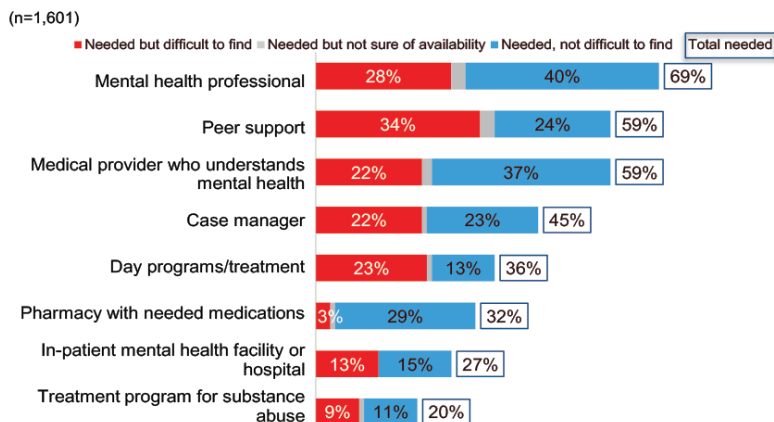
As a caregiver, you can help your care recipient get high quality care by becoming informed about effective mental health care and the range of service providers who

can play a role. This fact sheet describes the types of mental health providers qualified to deliver various services, what to ask when searching for a provider, and what you can do to help a care recipient gain the best value from care.

Background

If you are having trouble finding qualified mental health service providers, you are not alone. The mental health workforce shortage in the U.S. has reached a critical point. More than half of all counties across the U.S. have no mental health providers, and 75% are designated as critical shortage areas.¹² A national study¹³ found that almost seven in ten caregivers felt the care recipient needed a mental health professional (69%), but one in four (28%) had difficulty finding a provider within a reasonable distance from the care recipient's home. Six in ten felt the care recipient would benefit from a medical professional who understood mental health conditions, yet more than a third (37%) had trouble finding such a clinician. Four in ten (40%) were not satisfied with the number (51%) or quality (46%) of mental health service providers in their community.

Service Needs and Availability





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Service Needs and Availability

There is hope. Policymakers and insurers are working to expand and improve the mental health workforce and increase the capacity of existing providers through:

- educational grants for aspiring mental health professionals in return for service in underserved communities;
- mental health cross-training for primary care clinicians;
- expert psychiatric consultation to guide primary care clinicians in treating serious mental illness;
- clinics with integrated primary and mental health care;
- tele-health services to deliver mental health specialty care to remote areas; and,
- effective use of allied professionals and peer counselors on mental health care teams.

If you or the person you care for cannot find a mental health specialist, ask your family doctor or local health clinic for help.¹⁴ Primary care providers can effectively treat mild to moderate mental health conditions.¹⁵ Even for more severe symptoms, your primary care provider may be able to link your care recipient with a mental health specialist for the first phase of treatment. When the person you care for is stabilized and a treatment regimen established, the primary care clinician can continue to provide care with guidance, as needed, from a specialist.¹⁶

Mental Health Care Providers

Mental health treatment involves a range of services including assessment, diagnosis, counseling, medication, support services, crisis response, and inpatient care. The following are common types of mental health providers qualified to deliver components of mental health care:

Psychiatrist (MD): A licensed physician with specialized training in diagnosis, treatment with psychiatric medications, and psychotherapy. Specialists may have additional training in children and youth, addiction, or geriatric care.

Advanced Practice Psychiatric Nurse

Practitioner (APRN): A licensed master's or doctoral level clinician qualified to assess, diagnose, plan care, prescribe and manage medications, and provide psychotherapy. APRNs may practice independently or under the supervision of a psychiatrist.

Psychiatric registered nurse (RN, BSN or MSN):

A bachelor's or master's level professional with specialized mental health training, qualified to assess mental health needs, plan care, administer medication, and provide routine primary medical treatment. Nurses generally focus on wellness and healthy lifestyle choices.

Clinical psychologist (PhD or PsyD):

A licensed doctoral level professional trained to evaluate mental health status using clinical interviews, psychological evaluation, and testing. Psychologists are qualified to diagnose mental health conditions and provide psychotherapy.

¹⁴ <http://naapimha.org/wordpress/media/Primary-Care-Providers%E2%80%99-Role-in-Mental-Health.pdf>

¹⁵ Wang PS, Aguilar-Gaxiola S, Alonso J, Angermeyer MC, Borges G, Bromet EJ, et al. *Use of mental health services for anxiety, mood, and substance disorders in 17 countries in the WHO world mental health surveys.* *Lancet.* 2007;370(9590):841-50

¹⁶ Goodrich DE, Kilbourne AM, Nord KM, Bauer MS. *Mental Health Collaborative Care and Its Role in Primary Care Settings.* *Curr Psychiatry Rep.* 2013 Aug; 15(8):383. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC375986/>



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Licensed clinical social worker (LCSW):

A licensed master's level clinician trained to evaluate mental health status, provide psychotherapy, case management, and advocacy. Social workers focus on the person within their social environment, including among family, peers, and community.

Licensed professional counselor (LPC):

A licensed master's level clinician trained to diagnose, counsel, and facilitate prevention training. LPCs often work with individuals, families, and groups in community mental health centers and addiction treatment agencies.

Marriage and Family Therapist (MFT):

A master's or doctoral level counselor licensed to diagnose and provide psychotherapy for mental health and substance use conditions. MFTs treat individuals, couples, and families and focus on managing symptoms within interactions and relationships.

Case manager or care coordinator: A provider trained in person-centered assessment and planning, service brokering, and obtaining benefits such as income support or health coverage.

- Case managers help your relative make the best use of mental health services, ensure that services respond quickly and efficiently, and obtain needed benefits and entitlements.
- Care coordinators coordinate mental health, substance use, and primary care.

Peer support specialist: A trained, certified, provider with personal experience in recovery who serves as a mentor to demonstrate recovery, help the person make sense of their experience, identify goals, create a recovery plan, obtain needed services, and connect with peers.

Occupational therapist (OT): A bachelor's or master's level specialist who helps the person live as independently as possible while engaging in meaningful life roles. The OT teaches living skills and provides advice on adapting environments such as home, work, and school to promote optimal functioning.

Employment specialist: A bachelor's or master's level provider who helps the person choose, obtain, and succeed at work that is aligned with their interests. Supported employment includes vocational assessment, job search and placement assistance, and workplace support.

Housing specialist: A bachelor or master's level provider who helps the person obtain decent, affordable housing. The housing specialist: assesses needs, goals, and eligibility; helps secure chosen

Mental Health Providers: Who Does What?

TREATMENT ELEMENT	PROVIDER TYPE											
	Psychiatrist	Nurse practitioner	Psychiatric nurse	Clinical psychologist	Clinical social worker	Professional counselor	Marriage & Family	Case care manager	Peer support specialist	Occupational therapist	Employment specialist	Housing specialist
Assessment, care planning		X	X	X	X	X	X	X				
Diagnosis	X	X		X	X	X						
Psychotherapy, counseling	X	X	X	X	X	X						
Medication, neurological treatment	X	X										
Service brokering, navigation					X			X	X			
Emotional support	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Life skills, socialization					X				X	X		
Housing support								X	X			X
Supported employment								X	X		X	
Crisis intervention	X	X	X		X			X	X			
Hospital, residential treatment	X	X	X	X	X	X			X	X		



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housing; obtains housing subsidies; teaches budgeting and living skills; and, mediates with landlords as needed.

Mental health providers may serve in private practice, community mental health agencies, psychosocial rehabilitation programs, crisis response services, hospitals, or residential facilities. Services may be covered by private health insurance or public programs such as Medicare, Medicaid, state or local government, or the Veterans Administration. Some psychiatrists or therapists only accept private payment.

Mental Health Care: Questions to Ask

Empathy and responsiveness are as important to good mental health care as professional expertise. Your relative will gain the best value from providers who listen, carefully explain the treatment, and respond to concerns.

Consider the following questions when searching for a mental health professional:

- How comfortable is your relative with the provider? To what extent will the provider take your relative's interests and concerns to heart?
- How comfortable are you as the caregiver? If your relative wants you involved, how willing is the provider to communicate with you? What procedures will be used and under what circumstances?
- What are the provider's credentials and experience with similar conditions or populations?
- How is the provider rated by people or organizations you respect? What about online reviews?
- What approach will the provider take? What can the provider tell you about research demonstrating effectiveness of that approach?
- What can you expect from treatment? How are goals set and results evaluated?
- What improvements can be expected? What happens if progress is too slow or unsatisfactory?
- How willing is the provider to change standard procedure to meet your relative's needs?
- How frequent are appointments? What is the procedure to schedule extra visits when needed? Between visits, can your relative (or you) communicate by phone, email, or text?
- What are the arrangements for emergencies? Who will respond if the provider is not available?
- What is expected of your relative between visits? As a caregiver, what is your supporting role?
- What will be owed out of pocket? If cost is a concern, what about a discount or sliding scale?
- Will the provider file insurance documentation or will your relative, or you, be expected to do so?
- How will the provider protect your relative's privacy?

Additionally, NAMI offers tips to find a culturally competent mental health care provider: www.nami.org/culturalcompetence



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Your Part in Promoting High Quality Mental Health Care

The best mental health care comes from a partnership between the provider, the person in care, and close supporters. As a caregiver, your informed, caring, support can make all the difference.

- Learn about the mental health condition, effective models of care, and how to support recovery. For free caregiver courses, see NAMI: www.nami.org/familytofamily
- Help the person receiving care understand mental health conditions, treatment, and recovery skills. NAMI offers free, peer-facilitated, courses and support groups: www.nami.org/peertopeer and www.nami.org/connection
- Encourage the person you care for to become as self-reliant as possible while still assisting as needed with practical help such as appointment reminders, transportation, or completing paperwork.
- Work with the person you care for and the provider to set up how you will communicate if concerns arise. Encourage them to develop a Wellness Recovery Action Plan or Psychiatric Advanced Directive.
- Build trust with the person you care for, and the provider, through open, respectful communication. As partners, set communication guidelines in advance and collaborate on changes, if needed.

Helpful Websites

Mental Health America, Types of Mental Health Professionals

www.mentalhealthamerica.net/types-mental-health-professionals

National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI), Types of Mental Health Professionals

www.nami.org/Learn-More/Treatment/Types-of-Mental-Health-Professionals

SAMHSA Treatment Services Locator

findtreatment.samhsa.gov