

Mental Health

This article was written by Kristie McDonald (Master of Clinical Psychology) and the Molecular Cardiology Program Team.

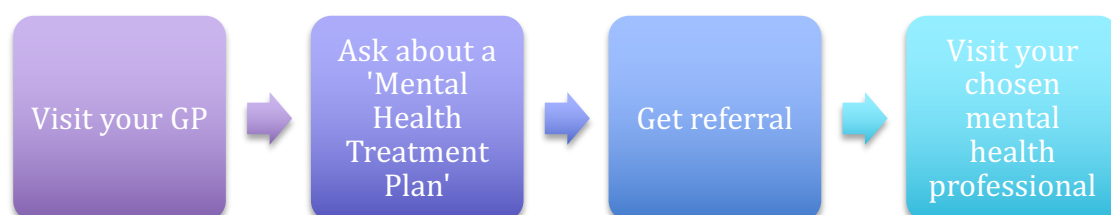
Mental health is about being cognitively, socially and emotionally healthy. Around one in two of us will experience a mental illness at some point in our life, meaning that not being 100% okay, all of the time, is really common. You are not alone. If you or someone you know is experiencing mental health difficulties, it is important to get help. It is also really important to know that seeking help is not a sign of weakness or even an admission that you are unwell. A lot of people see a mental health professional to improve their mental health, to have someone to talk to or learn skills from when they are adjusting to the challenges of life. If you think you, or someone you know, might benefit from getting some help with your mental health, below is some information to help you navigate the Australian Mental Health scene.

How to access support?

In Australia (and under the 'Better Access' initiative) your general practitioner (GP) can help prepare a Mental Health Treatment Plan and a referral. Such a plan allows you to see a mental health professional, and ensures that your mental health professional and GP are working together to support you. Through the mental health plan you can gain access to up to ten individual sessions with a mental health professional. You can also gain access to 10 group sessions per calendar year. It is important to know that health professionals can determine their own fees, meaning that even with a Mental Health Treatment Plan you can still be charged in excess of the Medicare rebate – so make sure that you ask your GP or the mental health professional about fees before you have your first session.

If you don't want to have a Mental Health Treatment Plan, you do not have to. You can contact and make an appointment with most mental health professionals independently. This way, you will either need to pay the full fee yourself, or if you have private health insurance, you may be able to use it to cover some of the cost of seeking psychological services.

As of November 2017, some patients are able to claim rebates through video consultations, so if it is hard for you to physically seek help, make sure you ask your GP about this option.



Mental Health Professionals – the difference?

General Practitioner: Your GP is a great starting point because they can check you for both physical and psychological problems. They can help provide you support through supportive counselling and can refer you on to another mental health professional if need be.

Psychiatrist: A psychiatrist is a medically trained doctor who has been trained in how to diagnose, treat and help prevent mental illness. They can assess and treat both mental and physical aspects of mental health. When treating a patient, psychiatrists can use a variety of methods including psychological interventions (like psychologists) and they can also prescribe medication.

Psychologist: When people think of psychologists, thoughts of mind reading and patients lying on leather couches talking about their feelings and their childhood spring to mind. Whilst some psychologists may use a leather couch, a psychologist can assist with much more than this. Psychologists study the way that people think, feel and learn; they study the mind, emotion and human behaviour. They use evidence-based practice (evidence from research) to help people to overcome challenges. Psychologists can help with a range of difficulties, including anxiety, low mood, grief, relationship problems, parenting issues, and substance abuse, just to name a few. In Australia, psychologists cannot prescribe medication.

*So what's the difference between a **psychologist** and a **clinical psychologist**?* In Australia, psychologists are required to complete a minimum of four years at University before undergoing clinical supervision. Clinical psychologists complete the same four years, and then additionally complete a two-year Master degree plus two years of clinical supervision. This extra study and training allows clinical psychologists to diagnose and treat complex mental health problems. Before booking an appointment with either a psychologist or clinical psychologist, make sure to look into their strengths and find out what their specialities are, either by asking your GP, asking them before booking an appointment or looking at their professional profile online.

Counsellor: Counsellors focus on understanding thoughts, behaviours and feelings, and how these can become problematic in people's lives. Because counselling is not yet regulated in Australia, training can range from a university approved Masters course or diploma, to a short, 3 day-course. It is important to look into the experience and training of a counsellor, to make sure that you are seeing someone with the right experience for you. At the present time, counsellors are not included under the Better Access initiative, so make sure you ask your GP about how to best access them.

If you are not sure who you should see, be sure to talk with your doctor and they can help you find the right profession and the right person for you.