

Your 101 Guide to **VISTING A PSYCHOLOGIST**

A PUBLICATION OF CBT PROFESSIONALS

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1. How to select a “good” psychologist

Once you have made a decision that you want to see a psychologist, how do you find a “good” one?

You can find a selection of psychologists working in your local area by either

- 1) Talking to your GP for a recommendation and/or
- 2) Using online search engines such as Google
- 3) Using the Australian Psychological Society Find a Psychologist service
<https://www.psychology.org.au/FindaPsychologist/>

You will want to check the credentials of the psychologist you intend on visiting. A reputable psychologist will have the following registrations, memberships, and training:

- Registration with the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency. You can look up how long they have been registered and check their registration status and if there are any conditions restricting their practice here:
<https://www.ahpra.gov.au/Registration/Registers-of-Practitioners.aspx>
- Member of the Australian Psychological Society [APS]. APS psychologists are highly educated and experienced, are committed to the highest professional standards and abide by a strict code of ethics.
- Completion of a 5th and 6th year of psychology is not compulsory for becoming a psychology practitioner, however, you may wish to see a psychologist who has completed a Masters degree in Clinical psychology to ensure they have the additional benefit of postgraduate clinical training by university experts.

2. Types of referrals

How to get “Low” or “No-Cost” services

Private Referral

A referral is not required to see a psychologist and you can call and book an appointment to see a psychologist at anytime. This is called a private referral. No communications are made to a third party [such as a GP] and your service is completely confidential. However, these services are non-rebateable under Medicare and attract a full fee charged by your psychologist.

Better Access to Mental Health Care Plan Referral

If you are experiencing a mental health disorder, you may be eligible for a Mental Health Care Plan referral, prepared by your GP, psychiatrist or paediatrician. Under this government initiative, you can access Medicare rebates for up to 10 individual and 10 group sessions per calendar year. This can significantly reduce the costs of your visits to a psychologist to a modest out-of-pocket fee. See more information about Better Access in Section 3 of this eBook.

Primary Health Network Psychology Services Package [PHN PSP]

If you have a **health care card** and a diagnosable mental health condition, then you may be eligible for a PSP referral. This is another government initiative that your GP may refer you under and the cost of your treatment is completely covered by this program. Learn more about this scheme in Section 4.

3. Mental Health Care Plans

Medicare rebates for psychology

Medicare rebates are available for psychological treatment by registered psychologists when referred by their GP, psychiatrist or pediatrician under the Australian Governments' Better Access to Mental health Care initiative.

What are the eligibility requirements?

The Better Access initiative is available to patients with an assessed mental disorder that is significantly impacting upon a person's emotions, thoughts, social skills, and decision making. Example mental disorders include:

- Alcohol use disorder
- Anxiety disorders [phobia, panic, OCD, PTSD]
- Adjustment disorder
- Attention deficit disorder
- Bereavement disorder
- Bipolar disorder
- Conduct disorder
- Depression
- Eating disorders
- Psychotic disorders
- Sexual disorders
- Sleep problems

How many sessions can I have?

This scheme provides considerable assistance for people living with mental health problems including Medicare rebates for up to

- 10 individual psychology sessions and
- 10 group sessions in a calendar [Jan to Dec] year.

3. Mental Health Care Plans

Continued.....

What will it cost me?

The cost to you will depend on the fee being charged by the psychologist.. The cost for a therapy session is usually greater than the Medicare rebate, and you will be responsible to pay the co-payment or difference between the set psychologist's fee and the Medicare rebate.

The current rebates for psychology session under Better Access are:

Clinical Psychologist (50 min session)	\$124.50
Registered Psychologist (50 min session)	\$84.80
Clinical Psychologist Group session	\$31.65
Registered Psychologist Group session	\$21.65

Can I request a referral to a specific psychologist?

The doctor must first assess that you require the service of a psychologist. Your doctor may allow you to request a specific psychologist or may also refer you to a psychologist that he/she recommends. The psychologist must be registered and have a Medicare Provider Number for you to be able to claim a Medicare rebate.

How do I get a Mental Health Care Plan?

If you believe you may be eligible, then you need to book a long consultation with your GP and request to be assessed for a Mental Health Care Plan referral to a psychologist. Read more about what to expect at this appointment in Section 5.

3. GCPHN PSP Referral

No cost for Health Care Card Holders

The Commonwealth Government have provided your local Primary Health Network [PHN] with funding for mental health needs in your local area. As of 1st July, 2017, the Gold Coast PHN have designed a Psychology Services Package [PSP] for people who are experiencing mental disorders of mild to moderate severity and identify with one of the following seven Hard to Reach Groups:

1. Children aged 0 to 12 years
2. Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
3. Aboriginal and Torres Straight Islanders
4. Perinatal Depression
5. LGBTI
6. People who self-harm or are at risk of suicide
7. People at risk of or are homeless

Who is eligible?

- Adults and children with mild to moderate mental health issues who identify with one of the seven groups above
- Patients who are financially disadvantaged and can't afford mainstream services
- Patients who have not received services under Better Access in the same calendar year
- Patients with a Health Care Card or Pension card

How many sessions can I have?

If eligible, this scheme provides

- 6 individual psychology sessions and
- Attendance to a group program - check with your psychologist what options are available in your Primary Health Network

3.PHN PSP referrals

Continued...

What will it cost me?

This program is at no cost to you and the cost of sessions is covered by the PHN, so long as you have a health care card or pension card, or are experiencing genuine financial hardship that is preventing you from accessing mainstream mental health services.

Can I choose which psychologist I see?

Not all psychologists are providers of the GCPHN PSP program. You will need to check with your selected psychologist if they are a PSP provider or alternatively your GP may recommend a psychologist. The PSP program may run differently depending on where you live.

Gold Coast Residents

The Gold Coast Primary Health Network [GCPHN] are responsible for managing referrals under the PSP program. GCPHN contract qualified and experienced psychologists to provide services to patients under the Hard to Reach groups scheme.

Your GP will prepare a Mental Health Care Plan AND a PSP referral and send it to the Gold Coast Primary Health Network. Once the referral is accepted, a PSP provider will contact you to make an appointment.

Check the provider list and download a fact sheet to take to your GP here:

<http://healthygc.com.au/GCPHN/media/Site-Pages-Content/ATAPS/ATAPS%20rebranded/ATAPS-Consumer-Fact-Sheet.pdf>

5. Visiting your GP for a referral

Book a long consultation

After reading the information available in this eBook and you have decided you may be eligible for a referral under a government funded mental health initiative such as Better Access or PSP, the next step is to book a long consultation with your GP.

You will need to express your interest in seeing a psychologist to your GP and your GP in turn will need to assess if you meet criteria for a diagnosable mental health disorder.

What the GP may ask as part of their assessment:

- Questions to determine what symptoms you may be experiencing
- E.g., How is your mood? Motivation? Sleeping? Eating?
- Questions about current and past stresses in your life
- Questions about your current supports
- If you indicate symptoms of depression, your GP will ask if you have had thoughts about ending your life as part of a risk assessment
- You will fill in a questionnaire called the K10 which measures symptoms of psychological stress. You can take this test here:
- <http://cbtprofessionals.com.au/test/depression-anxiety-test>

Treatment Options:

Your GP will discuss the available treatment options for you, and this may depend on the severity of your presentation. In addition to seeing a psychologist your GP may discuss:

- Medication options
- Referral to a psychiatrist or paediatrician
- Referral to other allied health providers such as dietician, physiotherapist, social workers etc.

5. What to expect at your first appointment

Visiting a psychologist for the first time can be a daunting process, if you don't know what to expect. Here is a general guide to what to expect at your first therapy session.

- Upon arrival, the clinic receptionist will collect your GP referral and your personal details from you to set up a patient record on the clinic system.
- A psychologist is required to gain your informed consent for treatment and will outline a confidentiality agreement explaining the bounds and limits of confidentiality.
- You may be asked to complete an outcome measure to assess for the initial severity of your depression, anxiety, and stress symptoms. Outcome measures are then used to track your progress in therapy and are a compulsory component of government initiative such as Better Access or PSP.
- Once the administration process is completed, your psychologist will come to greet you and take you through to a private and confidential consulting room
- The psychologist will ask you a similar set of questions that your GP asked in order to develop a shared understanding between you and your psychologist of
 - The reason or problem you are seeking help for
 - The contributing factors to the problem
 - Possible treatment goals for your therapy

At the end of your first therapy session you can expect:

- You should have an understanding of what the therapy goals will be and what therapy your psychologist will practice
- A general indication of how many sessions your treatment will take
- Feel comfortable with your psychologist and are happy to continue working with your psychologist.

5. What to expect at your first appointment cont...

At the end of your therapy session you should not expect to:

- Have all your problems solved – therapy takes time and the initial visit is an assessment of where things are at and does not involve active treatment
- Feel more confused than before your session – a skilled therapist should be able to help you order your thoughts and break down your problems in to smaller and more manageable goals
- Not know what your future treatment is going to involve or look like – an experienced psychologist will discuss your treatment and expectations with you at your first visit.

Changing Psychologists

Occasionally, patients may feel that the therapist is not a good match for them. Either they felt that they didn't connect with their therapist or that the therapist may not have the right professional experience to help them. Psychologists know and understand this and would much rather that you speak up and ask to see someone else rather than to drop out of treatment all together.

If you would like to transfer to another psychologist your options are:

- 1) Speak to the psychologist you visited about your concerns and they will happily assist with a transfer to someone more suited to your needs
- 2) Speak to the clinic receptionist and they can easily arrange a transfer to another clinician
- 3) Return to your GP and ask to be referred somewhere else.

The APS has produced a Charter of Rights for patients. You can download it here:

<https://www.psychology.org.au/Assets/Files/APS-Charter-for-clients.pdf>



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Never lose hope...

You may not see the answer, but we can!

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Book an Appointment Today

Ring and speak to one of our friendly team members and book an appointment to see a psychologist best suited to your needs.

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