



Australian Government

Department of Health
and Aged Care

FACT SHEET

CAREERS IN MENTAL HEALTH



Mental health is a sought-after profession in Australia with a broad range of career paths and opportunities to explore. From roles such as social work, psychology and mental health nursing, a career in mental health could be suitable for a range of personality types, skillsets and training preferences.

There are several study pathways available including university, TAFE, paid training and volunteering.

You could find yourself working in a range of environments, for example:

- Hospitals
- Clinics
- Community health centres
- Private practices
- Schools
- Prisons
- Research institutions
- Law courts
- Businesses
- Nursing homes
- Patients' homes
- Welfare agencies
- Human services and justice organisations
- Aboriginal health clinics

Here are some key career paths you could pursue within the mental health sector:

Psychiatrist



Psychiatrists are specialised medical doctors who have done training in mental health to help people with emotional and mental health problems. Psychiatrists diagnose and treat mental health issues.

They can prescribe medication for mental health conditions and some may also use talk-based therapies such as cognitive behavioural therapy.

MAIN PLACES OF WORK: Hospitals, clinics, community mental health services, private practices.

Psychologist



Psychologists are registered health professionals who are trained in human behaviour and processes related to how people think or feel. Psychologists are often the first point of call for people, helping them to deal with a range of mental health concerns and conditions.

They help people deal with relationship problems, trauma, eating disorders, learning difficulties, substance abuse, parenting issues, loss or grief and managing the effects of a chronic illness.

Unlike psychiatrists, who usually treat more severe or chronic conditions, psychologists cannot prescribe medication.

MAIN PLACES OF WORK: Schools, hospitals, community health services, courts, prisons, businesses, private practices.

Counsellor



A counsellor is a general term for a person who talks to people to support them to overcome difficulties.

They can help people develop problem-solving skills, talk through issues like relationships, money, or the loss of a loved one and help people move on through life.

Counsellors do not diagnose issues. They help people to recognise and define their emotional health, mental and lifestyle problems and to understand themselves and their behaviour better.

MAIN PLACES OF WORK: Community health centres, clinics, schools, hospitals, universities and private practices.

Nurse

Registered nurses, enrolled nurses and nurse practitioners are registered health professionals who work with and care for people who have a mental illness like depression, postnatal depression, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder and psychosis.

Many nurses who work in mental health have additional post-graduate qualifications in mental health and work in a variety of settings across the health system.

They work with psychiatrists and other healthcare professionals to provide information, support and advocacy care to help treat people with mental health issues.

MAIN PLACES OF WORK: In the community, psychiatric hospitals, mental health units in hospitals and nursing homes, primary care practices including independent practice and residential care facilities in disability and aged care.



Mental health occupational therapist



Mental health occupational therapists can help people to be independent, develop strategies to cope with everyday tasks and overcome mental health issues.

They work with people of all ages, to help them do things that 'occupy' their time.

They might help with rehabilitation after an accident, work with children who have learning difficulties and help people have improved confidence in social situations.

MAIN PLACES OF WORK: Welfare agencies, hospitals, community health centres and justice organisations.

Community mental health workers



Community mental health workers help people with mental health issues to deal with issues they may face in the community.

They may also have other problems, such as substance abuse, poverty and social problems. Their services are generally available to the public at no cost.

MAIN PLACES OF WORK: Community care centres and patients' homes.

Lived experience (peer) workers



Lived experience (peer) workers are trained mental health professionals who have their own personal experience of mental health problems and recovery.

They have studied how to use personal experience in ways that are therapeutic.

Peer workers do not base their work on diagnoses or standard treatments of mental illness, but instead on respect, shared responsibility and mutual agreement of what will help a patient.

Peer workers are a relatively new type of mental health professional but are increasingly employed by many different types of mental health services.

MAIN PLACES OF WORK: Community mental health teams, hospitals, health clinics, patients' homes and in the community.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health workers



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health workers have a critical role in Indigenous communities.

They understand the mental health issues of First nations people, deliver mental health care in a culturally appropriate way and provide cultural education to people outside the cultural community.

They are generally not medically trained but might have undertaken training in mental health and psychological therapies.

Their role often includes counselling, case management, screening, assessment and referrals, health promotion and education, helping First nations people to access mainstream mental health services and supporting the families of First nations people with mental health problems.

MAIN PLACES OF WORK: Mental health clinics, hospitals and Aboriginal health services.

Mental health social worker



Mental health social workers train in assessment and treatment of mental health issues.

They work with people who have mental health problems in a holistic practical way to manage social factors to help them get well. Factors can include:

- housing
- employment
- relationships

MAIN PLACES OF WORK: Welfare agencies, hospitals and community health centres.

Are you ready to make a difference? Take the next step and visit health.gov.au/mental-health-careers or scan the QR code to learn more about pursuing a career in mental health today!



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