



Australian Government

Department of Health
and Aged Care

FACT SHEET

ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS IN VARIOUS SETTINGS



The mental health workforce plays a critical role in promoting and sustaining the mental health and wellbeing of individuals and communities across Australia.

Encompassing a broad range of professions, mental health workers exist in a variety of settings including hospitals, clinics, schools, private practices and community centres among others.

Each setting requires mental health professionals to take on different roles and responsibilities.

For example, a psychiatrist working in a hospital may diagnose and treat patients who have been hospitalised for severe mental health issues with medication and psychotherapy.

A counsellor working in a school may provide support to students who are suffering from anxiety and stress.

No two days are the same working in mental health. You can read more here about the many differing roles and responsibilities mental health workers may have in various environments:



Psychiatrist

Psychiatrists are medical doctors who specialise in diagnosing and treating mental health disorders. They can prescribe medication to patients and may also use talk-based therapies such as cognitive behavioural therapy and psychotherapy.

PSYCHIATRIST ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES IN SOME EXAMPLE WORK ENVIRONMENTS:

HOSPITALS: Diagnosing and treating individuals who have been hospitalised due to mental illness, including patients with complex and severe psychiatric conditions.

CLINICS: Providing psychiatric care to outpatients including diagnosing mental illnesses and treating them through medication and talk-based therapies.

PRIVATE PRACTICES: Diagnosing and treating patients for a variety of mental health issues, including anxiety, depression, bipolar disorder and eating disorders.

COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTRES: Providing psychiatric treatment and support to individuals with mental health issues in underserved communities including refugees, the homeless and the elderly.



Psychologist

Psychologists are mental health professionals involved in the prevention, assessment, diagnosis and treatment of psychological problems.

They help people to overcome a wide spectrum of challenges including relationship problems, trauma, eating disorders, learning difficulties, substance abuse, parenting issues, grief and managing the effects of a chronic illness.

PSYCHOLOGIST ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES IN SOME EXAMPLE WORK ENVIRONMENTS:

HOSPITALS: Collaborating with a range of healthcare professionals to develop treatment plans that address the mental health needs of patients; providing counselling and support to the family members of hospitalised patients.

SCHOOLS: Providing counselling and behavioural support to students; helping teachers and parents to address the mental health needs of students.

Private practices: Providing therapy and counselling for individuals, couples and

families facing psychological and social challenges.

COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTRES:

Providing counselling to individuals and families in underserved communities.

COURTS AND PRISONS: Assessing and treating individuals with mental health issues involved in legal proceedings; providing interventions and therapy to incarcerated individuals.

BUSINESSES: Working with organisations to devise strategies to help improve mental health and wellbeing in workplaces.



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health worker

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health workers provide specialised mental health care to Indigenous communities.

They understand the mental health issues of Aboriginal people and deliver care in a culturally appropriate way.

ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER MENTAL HEALTH WORKER ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES IN SOME EXAMPLE WORK ENVIRONMENTS:

HOSPITALS: Working collaboratively with other health professionals to provide specialised care to Indigenous patients with mental health concerns, including psychiatrists and doctors.

CLINICS: Providing culturally appropriate counselling and mental health support to Indigenous people experiencing mental health issues.

ABORIGINAL HEALTH SERVICES: Providing counselling and support to Indigenous people suffering from mental health issues; providing education and training to community members on mental health and wellbeing for Indigenous people.



Mental health nurse

Mental health nurses are registered nurses who specialise in providing care for individuals with mental health disorders including depression, postnatal depression, schizophrenia, bipolar disorder or psychosis.

MENTAL HEALTH NURSE ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES IN SOME EXAMPLE WORK ENVIRONMENTS:

HOSPITALS: Working alongside psychiatrists and other healthcare professionals to treat individuals with acute mental health issues, including monitoring patients, managing their treatment plans and providing information, support and care.

PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITALS: Providing treatment and care to patients with

severe and complex mental health issues, alongside a team of health professionals.

NURSING HOMES: Providing specialised care to elderly or disabled individuals with mental health issues, including assessment, diagnosis and treatment.

IN THE COMMUNITY: Treating and supporting individuals suffering from mental health issues from underserved populations in various places including community centres and the homes of patients.



Mental health social worker

Mental health social workers train in assessment and treatment of mental health issues. They work with people who have mental ill-health in a holistic practical way to manage social factors to help them get well. Factors can include housing, employment, and relationships.

Mental health social workers often work in welfare agencies, hospitals, community health centres and other human services and justice organisations. Some social workers are also qualify as counsellors.



Community mental health worker

Community mental health workers give help and coordination in the community for people with mental ill-health. They may also give help to people struggling with other problems such as substance abuse, poverty and social problems.

They often work in a community care centre but may also visit patient's homes. Their services are generally available to the public at no cost.



Counsellor

A counsellor is a general term for a person who helps people to overcome difficulties in life and improve their mental health.

Counsellors help people who are facing a wide range of emotional and social problems including stress, financial stress, relationship issues, domestic violence or bereavement.

They can also support people with mental illnesses including drug and alcohol addiction, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder and postnatal depression.

COUNSELLOR ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES IN SOME EXAMPLE WORK ENVIRONMENTS:

HOSPITALS: Providing supportive counselling to patients and the families of patients including bereavement and crisis support.

SCHOOLS: Counselling students on a range of issues related to learning, adolescence, peer and family relationships and mental health.

CLINICS: Working with a team of health professionals to provide counselling support to individuals with mental health issues; providing individual and group counselling.

UNIVERSITIES: Addressing the mental health needs of students through counselling and crisis intervention; promoting and maintaining mental health and wellbeing on campus through outreach programs.

PRIVATE PRACTICES: Providing counselling to individuals, couples, families or groups experiencing a range of personal and emotional difficulties including relationship issues, addiction and trauma.

COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTRES: Providing mental health care and support to individuals with



Mental health occupational therapist

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

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

MENTAL HEALTH OCCUPATIONAL THERAPIST ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES IN SOME EXAMPLE WORK ENVIRONMENTS:

HOSPITALS: Working with patients with mental health issues to provide strategies that help promote recovery and improve daily functioning.

WELFARE AGENCIES: Working with patients with social disadvantage who are experiencing mental health challenges; helping patients to identify and develop skills that will help them find employment or housing,

manage finances and create sustainable life habits.

COMMUNITY HEALTH CENTRES:

Working with individuals and families to develop skills and strategies to manage mental health issues.

HUMAN SERVICES AND JUSTICE ORGANISATIONS:

Providing assessments and treatment to individuals involved in the criminal justice system or who are experiencing social and economic challenges that impact their mental health.



Lived experience (peer) workers

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

They are integral to mental health teams as they provide a unique form of support to people living with mental health issues.

LIVED EXPERIENCE (PEER) WORKER ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES IN SOME EXAMPLE WORK ENVIRONMENTS:

HOSPITAL: Working alongside health professionals to provide comprehensive care and support to patients; providing in-reach support to patients prior to discharge.

PATIENTS' HOMES: Providing support to patients who have recently been discharged from hospital and helping them through recovery for a certain mental health issue.

COMMUNITY MENTAL HEALTH TEAMS:

Providing support to people in the initial period following discharge; helping people to recover and eventually re-enter the workforce.

HEALTH CLINICS: Providing authentic engagement and support to individuals suffering from a mental illness similar to their own, such as a suicidal crisis.

IN THE COMMUNITY: Building connections with people by inspiring hope and role modelling recovery; individual and group peer support.

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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