



Factsheet for patients: involving Family or Carers in Mental Health Treatment under Better Access

Medicare benefits are available if you would like to involve a family member or carer in your mental health treatment under the *Better Access to Psychiatrists, Psychologists and General Practitioners through the Medicare Benefit Schedule (MBS) initiative (Better Access)*.

Should I involve a family member or carer in my treatment?

Involving a family member or carer can help them support and care for you. The people closest to you often have information which can help your practitioner understand your treatment needs and contribute to your wellbeing and recovery.

However, it is your decision whether to involve someone else in your treatment. You can discuss this with your General Practitioner (GP) or treating practitioner, such as your psychologist, whether these services may be appropriate based on your circumstances.

Any sessions a family member or carer receives to help support and care for you **will count towards your Better Access allocation of 10 individual sessions per year**.

How do I involve a family member or carer in my treatment?

If you are considering involving a family member or carer in your treatment you should speak with either your GP or treating practitioner, such as your psychologist, eligible, occupational therapist or social worker.

Before delivering any services to a family member or carer you will need to provide your consent. Your GP or treating practitioner must also agree that delivering the service to that person would be clinically appropriate and help with your treatment.

To help decide this, your GP or treating practitioner may ask you questions about your relationship with the person you would like involve, including their level of involvement in your treatment.

Do I need a mental health treatment plan?

Before you can involve someone in your mental health treatment, you must have a referral from:

- a medical practitioner as part of a mental health treatment plan or psychiatrist assessment and management plan, or
- a psychiatrist, or
- a paediatrician.

See also 'How do I involve a family member or carer in my treatment?' above.

How do I consent to a family member or carer being involved in my treatment?

Before you consent to a family member or carer being involved in your treatment, your GP or treating practitioner must explain the service that will be delivered to your family member or carer. If you would still like the person to be involved, they will record your consent in writing.

You can withdraw your consent at any time by letting your GP or treating practitioner know.

How many sessions can a family member or carer participate in?

A family member or carer can receive up to **two** sessions per calendar year.

Sessions accessed by family or carer will count towards:

- the patient's maximum six session limit for each course of treatment under Better Access, and
- the patient's calendar year allocation of up to a maximum of 10 individual services under Better Access.

For example, where a patient has a referral for six sessions in a course of treatment, and two of these sessions are provided to a family member or carer, the patient can only receive four individual sessions before being reviewed by their referring practitioner for any additional individual sessions.

If a family member or carer receives sessions, do I get less sessions?

Yes. If you consent to a family member or carer being involved in your treatment, any sessions they receive **will count towards your Better Access allocation of up to 10 individual sessions per calendar year.**

A family member or carer can receive up to two sessions per calendar year. If they use both sessions, you can only access up to eight individual sessions in total in that calendar year.

Can I be there when my family member or carer has a session?

No. These sessions are only available to family members or carers if you are not in attendance.

If you are not comfortable with this, you should speak with your GP or treating practitioner. It may be appropriate in some cases for them to come to one or more of your sessions with you instead.

Can I have more than one person involved in my treatment?

Yes. You can have more than one family member or carer involved in your treatment, however, only two sessions per calendar year in total can be provided to a person other than the patient.

You should speak with your GP or treating practitioner if you would like multiple people involved in your treatment.

What happens if I no longer want my family member or carer involved?

You can withdraw your consent to a family member or carer being involved in your treatment at any time.

You will need to tell your GP or treating practitioner if you no longer want the person involved.

Do I have to pay for sessions my family member or carer receive?

For Medicare benefit purposes, charges relating to services covered by these MBS items should be raised against the patient rather than against the family member or carer but the benefit can be paid to the family or carer who paid for the service. For further information related to billing please contact Services Australia on 132 150.

You should speak with your treating practitioner **before** your appointment to find out if the session will cost more than the Medicare benefits, as there may be a gap between the practitioner's fee and the Medicare benefits.

The purpose of these sessions is to help your family member or carer to support you and your treatment.

Can I involve someone who is not a family member or carer in my treatment?

Yes. You can involve anyone who is important to you in your treatment, and who you feel could support and contribute to your wellbeing and recovery.

Any sessions they receive **will count towards your Better Access allocation of 10 individual sessions per calendar year**. Only up to two sessions per calendar year in total can be provided to people involved in your treatment.

I am a parent of a child receiving mental health treatment so can I be involved?

If your child has the capacity to provide consent for you to be involved in their mental health treatment, for example due to their age, then they must tell their GP or treating practitioner. The child can also withdraw their consent at any time.

If your child does not have capacity to provide consent, then the general laws relating to consent to medical treatment apply. As these may be different depending on the State or Territory you live in, you will need to speak with your child's GP or treating practitioner as to what rules apply.