

Understanding and Finding Mental Health Providers

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Anxiety. Depression. Mood disorders. These health conditions are more common than you may think. But to make improvements to your mental health, where do you go? Which type of health providers should you consult?

JUST LIKE THERE IS ALWAYS ROOM FOR SOME

improvements to your physical or nutritional health, improving your mental health is something that everyone can and should do. While exercising more or eating more fruits and vegetables are relatively simple health changes, figuring out who to see and what to do to improve your mental health can be more tricky. This can be particularly challenging since mental health professionals have different approaches and different training.

What types of mental health providers are there? What are the differences between them, and what are their qualifications? If there aren't any mental health providers in your area, what other resources are available?

This MontGuide will explain the different types of mental health providers to help you make an informed decision about which professionals may best help you achieve mental health goals. It will offer strategies to access mental health services and overcome barriers. Lastly, it provides a questionnaire to help identify if you should seek out a mental health provider.

There are a variety of mental health providers who can provide high-quality assistance. The providers below

all have master's or doctoral degrees, supervised clinical experience, and state licensure. Counselors, social workers, and psychologists are all able to diagnose and treat mental, behavioral, and emotional concerns. These mental health providers can provide standard talk therapy and may have specialized training in other types of therapy. They are also able to bill insurance or Medicaid for services.

Counselors

Professional counselors are Licensed Clinical Professional Counselors (LCPCs) or Licensed Marriage and Family Therapists (LMFTs). Counselors serve a wide variety of clients including individuals and groups. These mental health professionals are able to serve clients with all levels of severity of mental health concerns from normal life short-term stress to mental health crises.

Social Workers

Licensed Clinical Social Workers (LCSW) help people cope with and solve problems in their everyday lives. Social workers tend to emphasize the importance of social systems of support to enhance social functioning.

RESOURCES AT THE READY

211: Montana 24-hour helpline, health and human services information and referral. Visit www.montana211.org for information on appropriate resources.

Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 1-800-273-8255 (TALK) 24-hour crisis intervention if you or someone you know are having suicidal thoughts.

Crisis Text Line: Text 'MT' to 741741. Text-based crisis counseling available 24/7.

Montana Chapter of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI): <http://www.namimt.org/>
Support, resources, and advocacy for Montanans with mental health concerns and their friends and family.

Montana Department of Public Health and Human Services (DPHHS): <https://dphhs.mt.gov/amdd/mentalhealthservices> Comprehensive Medicaid and public mental health resources across the state.

MSU Extension Health and Wellness: <http://www.msuextension.org/wellness/>

Psychologists

Clinical psychologists provide mental health services and can administer psychological assessments used to diagnose cognitive, developmental, behavioral, and mental disorders.

Psychiatrists

A psychiatrist is a medical doctor (M.D. or D.O.) who specializes in the medical treatment of psychological disorders. They can prescribe medications and can perform a full range of medical tests to provide a picture of the patient's physical and mental state. They also spend a large amount of time with their patients on medication management as part of their treatment. Psychiatrists typically do not engage in talk therapy with their patients.

Overcoming Barriers to Services

The process of seeking mental health services in Montana is unique and sometimes challenging. The typical issues include that a limited number of providers exist across rural Montana, which often means that individuals need to travel long distances to access services. Even if transportation is available, however, many mental health providers have long waitlists for their patients. Additionally, there is also the barrier that some providers may not take insurance or Medicaid.

Few providers in rural areas

The biggest challenge to getting mental health services in Montana is the limited number of providers in rural areas. There may be only one or two mental health providers in your area. Counselors, clinical social workers, and psychologists are all capable of providing talk therapy and a variety of mental health services. We recommend to call your health insurance or Medicaid to request a list of approved providers. Beyond looking for private practice mental health providers, look for community health agencies that may offer mental health services. Access information about services offered and communities served by Montana Mental Health Centers at <https://tinyurl.com/MTMentalHealthCenters>. Some federally qualified health centers employ mental health providers and can offer services. Access their online search at <https://findahealthcenter.hrsa.gov>.

If there are no licensed providers in your area, consider seeking services from a clergy member, a respected leader in the community, or a life coach; however, it is important to consider that person's qualifications and training.

Travel/transportation

Another barrier to getting mental health services in Montana is that you may need to travel to another town to find a provider. If you have Medicaid, you can call the Medicaid Transportation Center at 1-800-292-7114 to see if you qualify for travel assistance benefits to help get to mental health appointments. It may be likely that an available licensed provider is located a far distance from your area. In such cases, look for mental health services from a licensed provider offering distance counseling services, which is the process of providing health care from a distance via technology, often using video conferencing. Typically such professionals must limit their services to people living in the state in which they are licensed. To locate a provider offering distance counseling, call your health insurance company.

Long waitlists

Often times, there are long waitlists for mental health care providers. This can be frustrating. If you call to make an appointment and there is a long wait for services, we recommend to make and keep the first available appointment, and also seek other community-based services in the meantime. Peer support groups like those offered by the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) can be very helpful for people working to manage their mental health concerns before their first appointment with a provider. The Recovery Line offers peer support services by phone at 1-877-688-3377 (for more information, including hours available, go to www.montanawarmline.org). County MSU Extension agents also know your area very well and many are trained to be able to identify, understand, and respond to mental health concerns. Your Extension agents are a part of your community, are passionate about serving community needs, and can help with referrals for care.

Mental Health Crises

If you or someone you care for is in a crisis or feeling suicidal, please call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1(800) 273-8255 or text 'MT' to the Crisis Text Line at 741741. These trained crisis counselors can help manage a crisis or can connect you with referrals or emergency services. Also, you can call 911 and ask for a Crisis Intervention Trained (CIT) officer. CIT officers are knowledgeable about mental health crises and trained to handle mental health concerns with care. Some Montana Mental Health Centers have crisis response and stabilization services that can provide emergency mental health services (see <https://tinyurl.com/MTMentalHealthCenters> for specific information).

Is counseling right for you?

Please take a few minutes to fill out the form below. If you answer “Sometimes” or “Often” to any questions, you may benefit from talking to a mental health provider about getting services. Bring this sheet to an appointment with a mental health provider to start a discussion about your mental health, and what you can do to make improvements.

	Never	Sometimes	Often
I feel sad.			
I feel lonely.			
My relationships are strained.			
I feel overwhelmed.			
I have trouble concentrating.			
I feel nervous or tense.			
My work performance is poor.			
I have difficulty completing tasks.			
I can't keep my mind off certain thoughts.			
I don't find joy in things that used to bring me joy.			
I have trouble making decisions.			
I feel angry.			
I feel restless.			
I have thoughts of harming myself.			
I have thoughts of harming others.			
I am struggling with a major loss.			
I use substances to cope with stress.			

**Taking care of your mental health is a sign of courage, not weakness.
There are people in your community to turn to when you need support.**



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