

Your Employee Assistance Program is a support service that can help you take the first step toward change.

Sorting Through Support

With more than 20 per cent of North Americans expected to suffer from mental illness in their lifetime, everyone is affected by mental health challenges—whether it's you, a friend, colleague or family member. Often though, we think we can or must handle the problem on our own. Fortunately, you don't have to; supports and services are available to help you through this challenge. Good mental health is crucial to your quality of life and seeking out the right support is essential to your success in achieving and maintaining it. But with so many options out there, it can be difficult to know what kind of help is available and needed.

Making Contact

The type of professional you choose depends on your personal preference and diagnosis. Understanding the differences between each mental health support can help shape your approach to problem-solving and ensure you get the right help at the right time.

General practitioners (GP) or "family doctor". A general practitioner provides primary care but may have training or specialization in psychotherapy. They are usually the first point of contact for health services. Talk to your GP about your options for mental health care and possible referral to the list below.

Psychiatrist. A psychiatrist is a medical doctor that specializes in psychiatric disorders and can prescribe medications to help manage the negative symptoms of a mental illness.

Psychologists. A psychologist is a trained professional that specializes in counselling and mental health issues. They will work with you to combat the emotions, behaviors and thoughts that are the basis of your mental health concern. They cannot prescribe medication.

Social workers. A social worker can link you to services within your area that may be of help as you begin to cope with your diagnosis. They are also able to provide psychotherapy services and many specialize in mental health issues.

In crisis. In the event of a crisis, contact a crisis line or call 9-1-1. Larger cities may also have crisis lines to contact should you need to talk to someone about your mental health concerns and your current situation. Your general practitioner or social worker can provide you with this information.

Therapy Options

Everyone has unique needs, whether physical, spiritual or psychological and the right combination of treatment or support will take these into consideration. Read on to learn about different mental health services and their specializations:

Supportive counselling. One-on-one counselling provides a listening ear and the support and guidance to improve mental health by focusing on helping you find solutions to and meaning around your situation. It is here that you will be able to discuss your day-to-day issues, such as handling a stressful situation at work, and find the support and confidence to overcome them.

Interpersonal psychotherapy (IPT). Often used to help people manage depression, interpersonal psychotherapy recognizes the interpersonal component to mental illnesses and helps the individual find

ways to deal with relationship issues including: social isolation, trouble accepting life changes, grief over a relationship loss and conflict with others.

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Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT). Used as a shorter-term treatment for a variety of mental illnesses, this goal-oriented form of therapy helps patients understand how styles of thinking create unwanted attitudes, thoughts or beliefs. Patients learn alternatives to these thought patterns and behavior changes to help them cope.

Psychodynamic psychotherapy. Psychodynamic psychotherapy aims to review the ingrained beliefs and ideas, often going back as far as childhood, to understand a person's current problem or challenge.

Treatment programs. A common way to help those grappling with drug and alcohol addictions, treatment programs exist on both an inpatient and outpatient basis and provide a supportive environment and a combination of clinical services such as assessments or interventions. In general, you require a referral from your general practitioner or psychiatrist to be a part of these programs.

Support networks. Support networks are another, less formal way to seek mental health support. Joining a support group in your community for people with similar issues—whether it's for an addiction, depression, anxiety, OCD or another mental health concern—can help you realize you aren't alone and can give you an outlet to not only share your challenges but also celebrate your successes.

Other therapies. There are a variety of therapeutic methods such as narrative therapy, mindfulness therapy and many more that a clinician may use to help in your specific circumstances. The clinician should be able to explain to you why these techniques are best for you. Other therapies including, biofeedback, desensitization and hypnotherapy, can be of benefit to some, however, the scientific jury is still undecided on their effectiveness.

Taking charge of your own mental health can mean letting go of the idea of doing it on your own. If you need mental health support or treatment, understand the options available to you and make contact with a health professional so you can get the support you need to be on your way to a happier and healthier you.