

# Looking for Mental Health Services?

## What You Need to Know

### Medication

#### Will I have to take medication?

It is up to you to decide whether medication is right for you.

Medication can help many mental health problems. Many people find that medication decreases their suffering and improves their quality of life.

Some people have unpleasant side-effects from medication. Some believe their need to take medication is a sign of weakness. Others are concerned about becoming addicted to medication. For some people, the drug is not as effective as they had hoped.

Get the best information you can about medication. Then, in consultation with your mental health care provider, make the decision that is best for you.

#### How long will I have to be on medication?

Some people recover after a short period of treatment. However, some problems are longer term and treatment may continue for many years.

### What about natural healing?

Natural healing therapies are often used along with other more conventional approaches.

These therapies can be less intrusive than medical treatments. They focus more on preventing illness. They promote self-healing and healthy living. They work to improve your overall well-being—mind, body and spirit.

There are many practices you could learn to do on your own at home. These usually cost little or no money. They include:

- having a healthy diet
- creative therapies such as drawing, writing and music
- spiritual healing such as prayer, meditation, Hindu-based yoga and breathing exercises.

You will be charged a fee for other natural healing therapies, such as services provided by a naturopathic doctor, Swedish massage and Eastern-based acupuncture, reflexology and shiatsu. Fees for these services are not covered by public health insurance. Some fees may be partly covered if you have extended health care benefits.

### Going into hospital

#### When does a person need to be hospitalized?

With the support of your doctor, you can decide if hospitalization is best for you.

Hospitalization is usually only recommended when outpatient services cannot meet the challenges you are facing. If you are in crisis, a hospital can be a good place to be. You will have a support system right there and will be away from your day-to-day responsibilities. The law says that sometimes people can be made to stay in hospital for a period of time (for example, when they are a danger to themselves or others).

However, being in hospital can disrupt your life. You may have a strong support network in the community and may be managing fairly well. If so, that may be a better option than being in hospital.

#### How long would I be in hospital?

Generally people are hospitalized only for serious problems and for a short time. Most hospital stays are for two weeks or less.

### When a family member or friend has a mental health problem

#### What can I do to help them?

Someone who is a little depressed or anxious is more likely to agree to get help. But a person with a serious, ongoing mental health problem may refuse treatment.

Here are some things you can do to help your family member or friend get the right help.

*Write a journal* with details of your family member's or friend's problem. This can identify patterns or changes over time. It can also help you explain the situation to others.

*Make a list of questions* to ask the people who are helping.

*Make a crisis plan* in case of an emergency. This could include listing people and phone numbers to call for help.

*Read the Mental Health Act* so you know the parts of this law that could affect your friend or family member.

#### What can I do to help myself?

It is natural for you to feel worried and stressed about your loved one. At times like this it is important to take care of yourself. Find what your own limits are. Make time for yourself. Create a support system of friends and family you can rely on.

Learn as much as you can about your friend's or family member's mental health problem. And join a support program for family members.



## Mental health problems are common

One in five people in Canada has a mental health problem at some point in life.

But only about 30 per cent seek help. Some people may not know they have a problem. Or they may not know that help is available. Some may not be able to use the help because of barriers like cost, language and transportation.

Others don't seek help because of the stigma (prejudice and discrimination) attached to mental health problems. They feel embarrassed or ashamed. They worry that they will be judged and misunderstood. They worry about being discriminated against.

However, it is important to know that there *are* services that can help. And the earlier someone gets help, the less chance that the problem will come back or get worse.

## Looking for help

### Should I try to work out my problems on my own?

Would you try to deal with a heart condition on your own? Mental health problems can be just as serious as physical problems, and getting medical attention or other help is just as important. Without support or treatment, mental health problems can get worse. Getting help is a sign of strength, not weakness.

### When should I look for professional help?

You should seek professional help if your problem starts to affect your life. For example, a mental health problem may cause difficulties with family, friends, work or school. If left untreated, it can affect your ability to enjoy life.

It is natural to feel "off balance" at times: for example, sad, worried, scared or suspicious. But if these kinds of feelings get in the way of your daily life over a long period of time, they may become a problem.

You may decide first to talk to a family member, friend, co-worker or spiritual adviser. This may be all the help you need. With their support you can decide if you need professional help.

### How do I know what help is best for me?

If you decide to use mental health services, the first step is usually to get an assessment. This will help identify, or diagnose, the problem you are having and identify the services that could be helpful.

General practitioners (GPs or family doctors), psychiatrists and psychologists can give an official diagnosis. Nurses and social workers can assess your situation and give suggestions and counselling, but cannot make a diagnosis.

### Where do I go for an assessment?

Family doctors are often the first professionals that people talk to. Community agencies can offer assessments by a doctor, psychiatrist, social worker or nurse. In smaller cities and rural areas, you are more likely to be seen by a community mental health worker.

If you are in crisis or cannot wait for an appointment, go to the emergency department of a nearby hospital.

## Talking about my problems

### How can talking to a mental health care provider help?

Talking to someone about your difficulties is one way to get help with a mental health problem. Sometimes it is enough to talk to a family member or friend who will listen and be supportive. But if your problem continues, it may help to speak to someone who is not connected to your life—a mental health care provider with a neutral point of view, and with whom you feel safe.

### How much will treatment cost?

Treatment from a psychiatrist or GP is covered by public health insurance (such as OHIP in Ontario), and will not cost you anything. Other mental health care providers, such as psychologists and social workers, may also be free if they work in government-funded hospitals, clinics or agencies or an employee assistance program. If psychotherapists work in a private practice, their services will not be covered by public health insurance, and you will be charged a fee.

### How will I know if treatment is working?

As part of your therapy, you will set goals for what you would like to change. If you meet these goals over time, the therapy is probably working.

It is important for your recovery that there is a good relationship between you and the therapist. You may

need to try more than one therapist to find one you are comfortable with.

Results do not necessarily happen overnight. In fact, you may feel worse at the start as issues are brought to the surface.

## Are there community supports to help me?

Here are some examples of programs that can support you, depending on where you live and what you need.

**MENTAL HEALTH AGENCIES** can help you find services and resources in your community.

**SELF-HELP OR MUTUAL AID GROUPS** are made up of people who share the same issue or mental health problem, either in themselves or in a family member.

**COMMUNITY INFORMATION CENTRES** can give you information about services in your area, such as day care, health care, immigration, housing, sexual assault, and mental health agencies.

**CONSUMER/SURVIVOR INITIATIVES** are run by and for people who use or have used the mental health system. They offer education, information and support.

**ALCOHOL AND OTHER DRUG TREATMENT SERVICES** may offer programs for people who have both an addiction and a mental health problem.

**DISTRESS LINES**, such as 911, put you in touch with people who can help you in an emergency. You can find other local numbers in the front of the telephone book.

You may want to ask about specialized services that are sensitive to your age (for example, for youth or older adults), gender, sexual orientation, race or culture. If you live in a small community, however, these options may not be available.

## Also available from CAMH: *Challenges & Choices: Finding Mental Health Services in Ontario*

Written in easy-to-understand language, *Challenges & Choices* provides practical information about mental health services available in Ontario. This guide includes a description of the most common types of mental health problems, tips that will help you find the services you need, and contact information to research a specific problem or treatment in more detail. 137 pages. \$9.95

### *Mental Health Information Guides*

These information guides are short, concise booklets for people with mental health and wellness concerns, their families and friends, and anyone else who might be interested in a general introduction to mental health. Titles include: *Bipolar Disorder*, *Couple Therapy*, *Depressive Illness*, *First Episode Psychosis*, *Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder*, *Schizophrenia*, *Women and Psychosis*, *Women, Abuse and Trauma Therapy* and *The Forensic Mental Health System in Ontario*. \$4.95 each.

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