



Understanding the role of Mental Health Clinicians

Understanding the roles of different mental health clinicians who treat eating disorders is important for making informed decisions about your healthcare.

There are a range of mental health professionals able to treat eating disorders who have different types of qualifications and training. This factsheet provides an overview of these clinicians and some further tips and considerations.

GP (General Practitioner)

At the center of a treatment team will usually be a General Practitioner (GP). Your GP will be crucial in providing medical monitoring and may regularly communicate with others in your treatment team about your progress. A GP may also be involved in your initial diagnosis, write treatment plans under Medicare (such as an Eating Disorder Plan or a Mental Health Care Plan) and provide referrals to other practitioners.

Depending on the individual GP, costs may be fully or partially claimed through Medicare.

Psychologists

You are likely to come across registered and clinical psychologists. A registered psychologist has completed a minimum of four years university study and a further two years of supervised practical experience. A clinical psychologist has completed a minimum of six years university study, including specialist training/study (often a Masters or PhD).

All psychologists must be registered with the Psychology Board of Australia, meeting high standards in education, training, supervised practice, ethical and professional standards, and ongoing professional development. In a practical sense, both registered and clinical psychologists can deliver the same therapeutic treatments with clients.

Psychologists use a range of treatment methods depending on what they have received training in and the issues the client is experiencing. Contrary to what some people believe, psychologists do much more than just have you talk. The practice of psychology is a science, and qualified clinicians will use evidence-based approaches to drive changes in thoughts, feelings and behaviours. Psychologists cannot prescribe medication.

It will generally be more expensive to see a clinical psychologist than a general psychologist, but the Medicare rebate is higher (\$128.40 vs \$87.45) and the potential 'gap' payment may be similar. You can read more about Medicare rebates and the cost of treatment on the EDV website, and always check for the current costs when making plans to see a psychologist.

Psychiatrists

Psychiatrists are medical doctors. They have studied to become medical doctors before continuing to specialise in psychiatry – in Australia this takes a minimum of ten years. A major difference to other clinicians is that psychiatrists are able to prescribe medication.

If you are on an Eating Disorder Plan, you will be required to see a psychiatrist for a review if you would like to access more than 20 Eating Disorder Psychological Treatment (EDPT) sessions. Due to limited availability, it is important to book appointments with psychiatrists as far in advance as possible.

Private practice psychiatrist fees tend to be much higher than other mental health clinicians. If you are eligible for Medicare rebates, the 'gap' payment is likely to be in the range of \$50-\$200.

Mental Health Social Worker

Accredited Mental Health Social Workers must have tertiary qualifications in social work and an additional two years practice experience. They tend to take a holistic approach to treatment with appreciation of social, environmental and cultural factors.

Appointments with Mental Health Social Workers qualify for Medicare subsidies if you are accessing a treatment plan through Medicare. The rebate is \$77.10 on a 45-minute appointment.

Mental Health OT

Mental Health Occupational Therapists have tertiary qualifications in occupational therapy (minimum 4-year degree) and additional specialist training in mental health. They will focus on developing skills, habits, goal setting and establishing routines for people undertaking treatment for an eating disorder.

Appointments with Mental Health Occupational Therapists qualify for Medicare subsidies if you are accessing a treatment plan through Medicare. The rebate is \$75.95 on a 45-minute appointment.

Family based therapist

A family based therapist is a trained clinician who will guide a family through Family Based Treatment (FBT), also known as the Maudsley method. The therapist may come from a social work, counselling or psychology background and has undertaken specific training in FBT. Medicare rebates may be available depending on the clinician's qualifications.

Mental Health Peer Workers

A Mental Health Peer Worker is someone who has a personal lived experience of mental illness and recovery or experience supporting family or friends with mental

illness (carer). They are able to draw on their own experiences to provide support for people undertaking treatment for an eating disorder. The peer workforce is becoming increasingly valued and professionalised in the mental health care system. Peer workers are able to obtain Certificate IV in Mental Health Peer Work, however there is no regulating body for peer work. At EDV, we have robust training, supervision and professional development in place for peer workers.

Mental Health Nurse

A mental health nurse is a specialist nurse who focuses on patient's psychological wellbeing and emotional health. They must have first completed training to become a registered nurse and then undergo further postgraduate training and clinical experience in mental health. You may see a mental health nurse for an eating disorder in a hospital setting or they can also help provide support and advice in one-on-one appointments.

Counsellors and Psychotherapists

Counselling can be defined as safe and confidential collaboration to promote mental health and wellbeing, enhance self-understanding, and resolve identified concerns. Counselling does not have the same regulatory requirements as psychology and is not eligible for rebates through Medicare.

Psychotherapists may offer longer-term treatment of mental illnesses and delve deeper into an individual's psychological history. Like counselling, psychotherapy is not highly regulated in Australia and is not eligible for Medicare rebates.

Other considerations

Choosing a clinician

When selecting a clinician, it is a good idea to check that they have appropriate training, are registered with a regulatory body if

applicable, and are experienced in treating eating disorders. If eligible, practitioners must be able to use specific psychological treatments to claim the Medicare rebate for their services. We have a number of accredited mental health clinicians and dietitians at EDV who are experienced in supporting people with eating disorders, and will match you with someone who best suits your needs.

Waitlists

Depending on your location and referral, you may find there are waiting lists for some clinicians (especially for new clients). It is still worth making an appointment. It is best to check with the clinic when setting up the first appointment what they suggest for interim support options, or how to ensure you receive ongoing regular appointments.

Cost of treatment

It is possible to access low cost/free treatment with some mental health clinicians in the public health system. If accessing these clinicians privately in the community, Medicare subsidies may be available as mentioned. Some clinicians may also offer discounts for valid concession card holders. You can find more information on the cost of treatment on the EDV website.

How many sessions will I need to get better?

The complex nature of eating disorders means that everyone's treatment journey will be different. For those who are eligible for an Eating Disorder Plan, you will receive up to 40 subsidised psychological sessions in a calendar year, which can allow for a session every 1–2 weeks. The frequency of sessions is highly dependent on each individual and their circumstances. In general, we encourage you to view your treatment with a mental health clinician as an ongoing commitment. There is no set

time for recovery, but we do know that the earlier you receive treatment, the better the chance for full recovery.

Other tips

It can take time to build a relationship with your clinician. Try to be patient and consistent and attend appointments regularly. A clinician is not there to be your 'friend', but you should be able to establish a comfortable and understanding relationship.

It is common for people to feel unsure, intimidated or even ashamed about seeing a mental health clinician. We can assure you that getting professional help for an eating disorder will be beneficial. Seeing a professional is not the same as speaking to a family member or friend – they are duty-bound to be confidential and can employ proven therapies to help you get better.

Be honest with your clinicians – they are not there to judge you! The more honest and open you are the better they can help you. You may feel more comfortable bringing a loved one or friend with you at the start of the appointment to help support you or explain things.

Eating disorders are individualised and come in many different forms; quite possibly, you may even know more 'facts' about your eating disorder than your clinician. This does not make them any less able to help treat you. Try to see them as part of your 'team' - you can communicate your knowledge and personal experiences and they can provide the expertise to help you make steps towards recovery.

Finally, if you find that even despite hanging in there and trying to make the relationship work, if you are still not gelling with your mental health clinician, we suggest finding someone else. It is important you find a practitioner with whom you are comfortable. If you need help finding someone in your area you can contact the EDV Hub - 1300 550 236 or edv@eatingdisorders.org.au.