

Treatment options for eating disorders

Understanding treatment options for a person with an eating disorder can be difficult. People with eating disorders can be treated in different settings and receive different levels of care depending on the type, severity and stage of the eating disorder, the patient's age, family structure and other physical or mental health issues that may be present. It is common for a number of different health professionals to be involved in one person's care.

What treatment option will suit me?

As with all therapies and treatment for mental illness, no single approach or method suits everyone. Research indicates that particular types of treatment have proved quite successful with particular types of eating disorders or age groups (e.g. Family-Based Treatment for adolescents), but it is not possible for EDV to recommend one type of treatment over another.

Once you have chosen to access either the public or private mental health system, an appropriately qualified professional can recommend a particular type or course of treatment based on their knowledge of your background and current situation.

If you are under 18, others may be involved in deciding which form of care is right for you.

If you are considered unable to consent to the necessary treatment

you may be subject to a Compulsory Treatment Order. For more information:

<http://www.health.vic.gov.au/mentalhealth/mhact2014/treatment/>

Eating disorders are often long-term conditions, and it is advisable to try and get some idea of the length and costs of different treatments and therapies, as well as the location of services or therapists and how far you will need to travel to access treatment.

Public vs private treatment

In Victoria, treatment for eating disorders can be accessed through the public mental health system, private treatment centres (clinics) or private practitioners. You can choose which system meets your needs in terms of cost and accessibility.

Keep in mind that there may be significant waiting periods for either option. Public system treatment is provided free of charge. Costs for private treatment will vary, and you should ask to receive information from the organisation or individual health professional about any expected fees and charges. This type of treatment can often be accessed using private health insurance, or you can consult your GP to see whether any Medicare rebates are available. It is also important to note that some people may be eligible for a Centrelink benefit, either as a person who is having difficulty supporting themselves, or as a carer.

PUBLIC TREATMENT

Public treatment is accessed through your local Area Mental Health Service, which have specific intake or triage processes you need to follow. Public services are split into geographical regions or 'catchments', and patients seeking treatment need to contact the service in their local area.

Public mental health services for people aged 0-18 years are called CAMHS (Child & Adolescent Mental Health Services). Some regions have extended their eligibility for teens and young adults, and are now called CYMHS (Child & Youth Mental Health Services). There are separate services for adults (16-64 years) known as Adult Mental Health Services (AMHS) and aged persons (APMHS) (over 65 years).

Go to <http://www.health.vic.gov.au/mentalhealth/services/> and search by suburb for contact details of your local Area Mental Health Service or see the EDV Treatment List (call 1300 550 236).

PRIVATE TREATMENT CENTRES

Private treatment centres or clinics are fee-paying services that may be accessed using private health insurance, depending on your level of cover. There are several centres that offer specific eating disorder treatment on the EDV Treatment List. As each treatment centre is different, you will need to speak with them about fees, waiting lists, modes of treatment and therapy options.

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Private treatment centres/clinics are usually staffed by doctors, psychologists, psychiatrists, dieticians and other health professionals.

PRIVATE PRACTITIONERS

Referrals to private practitioners in your local area can be obtained through online searchable databases or from your local GP. The EDV Helpline also has a service listing of professionals who have experience with eating disorders, and EDV has a number of psychologists on staff who can offer therapy. To enquire about making an appointment contact EDV on 1300 550 236. See the EDV Fact Sheet 'Getting Help' for further information on choosing a practitioner that is right for you.

Treatment Settings

There are a number of treatment settings available to people with eating disorders. A person's placement in any one of these settings is a decision made by an appropriately qualified health professional or team of clinicians, in conjunction with the patient. Both public and private treatment options often have an inpatient, outpatient and day program component.

INPATIENT

Some people with eating disorders will require 24-hour inpatient care during their illness. Inpatient care is provided in hospitals (public system) and treatment centres/clinics (private system). In the public system, patients receiving this kind of care are generally acutely unwell, with treatment focusing on medical stabilisation, re-feeding and weight restoration. Ideally, once the patient is medically

stable, some psychotherapy is usually given. When the patient is considered well enough, they are moved on to an outpatient or day program, or discharged to return home.

In the public system, the location of the inpatient care varies from hospital to hospital; there may be a specialist unit with beds specifically for patients with eating disorders, or they may be accommodated in a general psychiatric or paediatric ward.

OUTPATIENT

Outpatient treatment is for people with an eating disorder who do not require 24-hour care, but need ongoing treatment and support. Outpatient treatment can be accessed via hospitals and clinics or privately by putting together your own health professional team. Therapy and support is provided to enable you to deal with the practical difficulties associated with the eating disorder, but you must 'go it alone' for much of the day. People receiving outpatient care may still be engaged with school, work or study.

DAY PROGRAM

For some, the step from inpatient to community-based care (see below) is too great; these people may benefit from the intermediate level of support provided by a day program. Day programs provide a structured day with supported meals and eating, along with ongoing therapy up to five days a week.

COMMUNITY-BASED CARE

Upon discharge from a hospital program or private treatment centre, most people with eating disorders will need ongoing psychological support and medical monitoring. Patients are



encouraged to set up a 'care team' which usually includes their GP, a psychologist and a dietician who specialise in eating disorders. This type of 'community-based care' can also be accessed as a form of private treatment for those who do not need to access a hospital program or formal treatment centre. EDV has a database of such practitioners and has psychologists who can form part of a care team. You could also ask your GP for referrals in your area.

Where can I find out more?

EDV keeps information on most public and private treatment services in Victoria as well as a database of health professionals who have registered with us as having experience with eating disorders. Call the EDV Helpline on 1300 550 236 for more information.