

Mental Health Services Glossary

This bilingual glossary explains common mental health terms used in the Victorian Mental Health System. It is designed to help people better understand the mental health system, their rights, and the roles of different professionals involved in care and support.

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This information has been drawn from a range of healthcare and government websites

1. Anonymous:

Means 'not identified by name' or 'with no name'. For instance, an anonymous letter is one that is not signed.

2. Assessment:

When a health practitioner asks you questions about your mental or physical health. They may also do tests or a physical examination. This will help identify any problems or needs and find the best ways to address them. See also 'Diagnosis'.

3. Care:

Giving support and help to another person.

4. Carer:

A family member or friend who provides unpaid care and support to someone who needs help with daily activities or health issues.

5. Care Coordination:

Ways in which help from different services are set up to meet a person's needs.

6. Care / Support Team:

The workers who give the treatment, provide care and help with the wellbeing of the person needing care.

7. Case Manager:

Someone who assesses your needs, advises you, and can represent your needs with services (with your permission). A case manager may link you with services and activities that can help you. They are the central point of contact for you so that you do not have to ask different people for help.

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8. CAT Team:

The Crisis Assessment and Treatment Team (CATT) is a team of mental health professionals. They provide assessment and intensive community treatment to people who are in crisis or experiencing serious mental illness. This is a crisis service only.

9. Clinical:

Describes the direct examination, observation and treatment of signs and symptoms in patients.

10. Clinician:

A healthcare professional that has direct contact with patients. For example, nurses, doctors, dentists or psychologists are 'clinicians'.

11. Community Mental Health Services:

Are generally for people with severe forms of mental illness. They are generally based in a clinic and free to the public. They have different types of mental health professionals, including case managers, psychiatrists, social workers, occupational therapists, psychologists and drug and alcohol workers.

12. Confidentiality:

This means that the information you give to a healthcare professional is private. The healthcare professional must get your agreement before sharing the information with anyone. They need your permission ('consent') to share your information.

13. Counselling:

Is a conversation or a series of conversations between you and a counsellor. Counselling usually focuses on a specific problem and the steps to address or solve it. It can help you deal with a problem or make decisions when you are unsure which one is best.

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14. Counsellor:

A counsellor is a trained professional who provides guidance, support, and advice to individuals or groups to help them manage personal, emotional, psychological, or social challenges.

15. Diagnosis:

The identification of an illness or other problem (see also 'assessment').

16. Disability Pension:

Provides financial support if you have a physical, intellectual or psychiatric condition that stops you from working.

17. Disability Support Worker:

Provides you with personal, physical and emotional support if you require assistance with daily living. A Disability Support Worker can help with showering, dressing and eating, and assist with outings and other social activities.

18. Eligibility Criteria:

Rules about who can use a service.

19. Episode:

A period of time in which someone is affected by a specified illness, such a psychosis. An 'episode' has a beginning and an end (as opposed to a chronic condition).

20. General Practitioner (GP):

Family doctors in Australia are also called General Practitioners (GP). Some doctors work in health centres and hospitals and some work in their own offices. All GPs have university degrees. You can make your own appointment with the GP when you are sick or feeling unwell, or if you want a health check-up to make sure you don't have any health problems.

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21. Harm / self-harm:

Means 'injury'. It can be physical, psychological, sexual or due to neglect. 'Self-harm' describes what happens when someone intentionally hurts themselves.

22. Individual Capacity Building:

Helping the person receiving care to be actively involved in decisions that affect them.

23. Initial Discussion:

The first conversation between a worker and the person needing care to decide what help is needed and how urgent it is.

24. Lived / Living Experience:

A person who has experience of trauma or mental health challenges. The person uses their experience to improve mental health services.

25. Mental Health and Wellbeing:

This is when a person feels they are coping with the normal stresses of life and can connect with others. Mental health can change over time and can depend on what happens in a person's life.

26. Mental Illness:

Mental illness is when problems with feelings or thoughts make daily life hard. Mental illness can change how a person thinks, feels, or acts. Examples of mental illness are anxiety, depression, and schizophrenia.

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27. Mental Health Care Plan:

For people with a mental illness who have several healthcare professionals working with them. A Care Plan explains the support provided by each of those professionals and when treatment is necessary. Your GP will use a Care Plan to help you work out what services you need, set goals, and decide on the best treatment for you.

28. National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS):

Provides support for Australians with disability, their families and carers. It is funded by the Federal Government.

29. Neurodiversity:

This means that the way people think, learn and behave can be very diverse. It does not mean it is wrong, just different.

30. Occupational Therapist (OT):

These workers focus on your ability to perform your daily activities. They aim to improve your independence. They have particular skills in problem solving, and breaking down activities or tasks to make them easier to manage and learn. They can also provide advice and assistance on what equipment can help.

31. Peer Worker:

A person who understands your needs based on their own experience. For instance, a Peer Worker providing support about a mental health problem will themselves have experienced problems with their mental health.

32. Psychiatrist:

A doctor who has additional qualifications in helping people with mental health problems. As well as therapy, they may prescribe medications.

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33. Psychologist:

A professional that can help you develop healthy coping and problem-solving skills. People with anxiety and depression will often be referred to a psychologist. Psychologists seek to build a relationship of trust so you will feel safe in sharing your thoughts and feelings. A psychologist cannot prescribe medications.

34. Psychosocial:

An approach that looks at you in the context of your social environment. It looks at how the combination of social environment and psychological factors affect your physical and mental health.

35. Referral:

A letter from your doctor to a specialist asking for an appointment for you. If the referral is to a specialist in a public hospital, the hospital will contact you to make an appointment. If it is to a private specialist, you will need to make the appointment yourself.

36. Rehabilitation:

The action of helping you go back to health or normal life through training and therapy, for instance after an illness or an operation.

37. Respite:

Short-term rest for carers. During respite, you will be looked after by someone else than your usual carer.

38. Self-referral:

Going straight to a service for help, without needing to go to a doctor or professional first (see also 'Referral').

39. Social and Emotional Wellbeing:

This is about a person being resilient and feeling safe within themselves and connected with people.

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40. Social Prescribing:

This is about health professionals linking people to social activities considered to be helpful for their mental health. These activities may include volunteering, gardening, cooking, healthy eating advice and sports.

41. Social Worker:

Social workers can provide practical support, counselling, information and emotional support. Families, children, students, hospital patients or the elderly may all see a social worker. Social workers can help with problems such as homelessness, domestic violence, alcohol and drug addiction, sexual assault and child abuse. Social workers need a university degree to be able to practice.

42. Symptoms:

A sign or indication of something, for instance an illness or other problem with your health.

43. Treatment:

Medical care given for an illness or injury.

44. Trauma-Informed Practice:

This is about creating safe, supportive environments where people feel that they are listened to and respected. It includes professionals delivering care that does not make people re-live their trauma.

45. Triage:

The action of deciding the order in which patients will be treated, based on the urgency of their injuries or illness. Typically, the Emergency Department in a hospital has a 'triage nurse' who makes the decision of who needs to see a doctor most urgently.