

11 Step guide to obtaining a mental health care plan

Step 1: Make an appointment to see your local GP. As it takes time for a doctor to assess your mental health, a long appointment is required. As many GPs will not have time to write a mental health care plan on the spot, it is beneficial to make a longer appointment beforehand to ensure that enough time has been allocated.

Step 2: Discuss your mental health concerns. Your doctor is not there to judge you. They need to know the facts. They are trained in screening for anxiety, depression, and other mental health conditions. Tell them you would like to seek psychological counselling.

Step 3: Fill out the questionnaire they give you honestly. It will determine your level of distress and it will also be used as a gauge of your improvement over time.

Step 4: Providing your GP finds that your scores warrant a mental health care plan, they will write one up. It is totally their decision.

Step 5: If you have chosen a psychologist that you would like to work with, you need to have their details on hand so that your GP can put the details on your mental health care plan. If you do not have a psychologist in mind, your doctor can recommend someone that they trust. Alternatively, the GP can write “to the psychologist” and you can use that mental health care plan with whomever you choose. You can use the same mental care plan if you change psychologists.

Step 6: A valid mental health treatment plan (MHTP) requires the following information:

- Date
- Patient’s name
- Patient’s date of birth
- Patient’s address
- Diagnosis
- Request for services
- Referring practitioner’s Medicare Provider Number
- Practitioner’s signature

Step 7: Your doctor will need to specify the number of sessions to be provided. The total number allowed is twenty. The initial mental health care plan is usually given for the first 6 sessions, after which the psychologist is required to write a letter to the GP recommending further sessions, normally 4. After 10 sessions have been completed, if your psychologist determines you require ongoing treatment, they will write another letter to the GP recommending an additional 10 sessions.

Step 8: To receive all twenty Medicare rebates, you will need to visit your doctor for a review before more sessions are allocated. Reviews usually take place after the 6th and 10th sessions, but it may vary depending on your GP's original specifications. Again, please note that psychologists can make recommendations to the GP, but it is the GP who decides if further sessions with a rebate will be possible.

Step 9: A new referral is only required once you have completed the number of sessions on your referral (up to a maximum of six sessions per referral [or 10 under the COVID-19 additional Medicare items]). So, if you accessed two sessions, say, towards the end of one calendar year, and the referral allowed up to six sessions, you can access four sessions in the new calendar year before a review by the GP needs to be undertaken. However, these four sessions will count towards your allocation allowable in the new calendar year. This is very confusing, and the rules sometimes change, so please feel free to ask for guidance.

Step 10: Every calendar year, you will need to repeat the process if you wish to obtain the Medicare rebates for twenty sessions.

Step 11: Bring the paperwork (mental health treatment plan and referral) the doctor gives you to your first consultation with your psychologist. Between sessions 6 and 7 and sessions 10 and 11, you will need to go back to your GP to get a review of your mental health treatment plan. Please bring the reviews to your next session (or have your GP email it to us at info@anxietysolutionscbt.com or fax it to us on 02 9328 1393 prior to the relevant sessions). If you do not bring the relevant paperwork, we will be unable to provide you with appropriate receipts that will ensure you get your Medicare rebate.

While there is a lot of paperwork which can be annoying, remember that Australia is one of the few countries in the world where psychological services are subsidised by the government. We are extremely fortunate. It is an opportunity for you to obtain the help you need.

Wishing you all the best on your journey to mental health.

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