

# How to Find Mental Health Care in Your Community

Cancer has more than a physical impact on people. Taking care of your mental and emotional health is an important part of your overall health. Mental health care may include talk therapy, medication, or both, and may last only a few sessions or may continue for longer. It is common to have a wide range of emotions and concerns when you or a loved one faces cancer.

## How do I find a community mental health provider?

1. **Call the customer service number on your insurance card or check their website** to learn about your mental health benefits. Mental health services (also called behavioral health services) can range from \$90 to \$250 a visit, so most people use insurance to help pay. Find out:

- what mental health services are covered
- if you have a co-pay
- how many sessions are covered under your plan
- if there is a current list of allowed providers in your plan's network
- the cost of services from a provider outside of your plan's network (sometimes less than paying without using insurance)
- if you will be reimbursed for services from a provider outside of your plan's network
- if you can use your flexible spending account (FSA) to pay for mental health services.

Some providers do not accept all insurance plans or bill to any insurance, so they may ask that you pay them directly. Sometimes a sliding scale (fee based on your ability to pay) is available.

2. **Talk with your Dana-Farber care team or primary care provider (PCP).** PCPs can address many mental health concerns as part of your care, including prescribing medications, and may know mental health professionals in your area. If your insurer offers a list of providers, ask if your PCP recommends any of them.
3. **Contact your employer or school.** Many employers offer confidential employee assistance programs that can provide short-term counseling and help to find a mental health professional. Schools often offer counseling services and can also help locate providers in your community.
4. **Ask your community.** You may get recommendations from trusted sources in your community. Friends, family, clergy, and local hospitals or community centers may be able to recommend a mental health provider.
5. **Use referral services.** Several online free services can help identify mental health providers with specific areas of expertise:
- **Psychology Today** magazine sponsors an online searchable directory of mental health providers across the U.S. and in other countries. You may filter by insurance, patient age, and provider specialty. Visit [www.psychologytoday.com](http://www.psychologytoday.com) and click on "Find a Therapist."
  - **Therapy Matcher** connects patients with licensed clinical social workers in Massachusetts. Visit [www.therapymatcher.org](http://www.therapymatcher.org), call 1-800-242-9794, or email [info@therapymatcher.org](mailto:info@therapymatcher.org).
  - **William James INTERFACE** is a telephone referral service for certain cities and towns in Massachusetts. It operates weekdays, 9 to 5. Its website lists additional mental health resources. Visit <https://interface.williamjames.edu/guide/help> or call 888-244-6843.

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6. **Contact potential providers** by telephone, email, or visit their website. It may take some time to hear back. Be patient and consider a second message if you don't hear back after 3-4 business days.

When you reach them, describe your concerns, and ask about their services and experience helping people with similar issues. Ask about their availability, fees, insurance, and if they are licensed. Providers may have a waitlist and an initial set of questions to answer. You may want to contact several providers to find the best fit.

7. **Consider virtual mental health services.** You can get emotional support without a traditional in-person mental health visit:
- Your mental health provider may offer sessions by telephone or videoconference, making it possible to work with a therapist licensed in your state but not residing in your local area.
  - Online therapy platforms offer convenient, remote access to licensed mental health professionals. Some services take insurance, but many bill on a subscription schedule.
  - Guided meditation and mindfulness smartphone apps are other options, designed to help people reduce stress, relax, and sleep better.

## What can I expect during a mental health session?

Most talk therapists see patients for 45–50 minutes at regular intervals. Most medication providers meet more briefly. During your first visit, plan to describe why you are seeking help. You may want to focus on your cancer experience or discuss other stressful aspects of your life.

The provider may ask you detailed questions about your personal and medical history. Ask the provider what kind of treatment they recommend, the expected benefits, potential risks, and what other kinds of treatment might be available. It's also good to ask about the expected length of your treatment and, if medication is prescribed, about possible side effects.

It may take a few visits to feel like you are making progress and that you have a good “fit” with the provider. If you don't feel comfortable, let them know. Be honest—it is your treatment, and the therapist's job is to help you. They may be able to discuss other approaches to better fit your needs.

## What kinds of providers offer mental health care?

**Certified alcohol and drug abuse counselors (CDAC):** Counselors with specialized training in caring for people with substance misuse and related problems

**Clinical psychologists (PhD or PsyD):** Counselors with a doctoral degree in psychology, who are trained to make diagnoses and provide psychological testing and therapy

**Clinical social workers (MSW or PhD):** Counselors with a master's or doctoral degree in social work, who are trained to diagnose mental health conditions and provide therapy

**Licensed marriage and family therapists (LMFT):** Counselors with a master's degree in marriage and family therapy, who are licensed to provide mental health treatment in the context of the family system

**Licensed mental health counselors (LMHC):** Counselors with a master's degree (LMHC) in mental health counseling, who are trained to diagnose mental health conditions and provide therapy

**Psychiatric nurse practitioners (NP):** Nurse practitioners with a master's degree in mental health nursing who provide therapy and may prescribe medications

**Psychiatrists (MD):** Medical doctors with specialized training in mental illness and treatment, who can prescribe medications and may also provide talk therapy

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## What are some different types of mental health treatment?

**Medication** can treat emotional disorders and symptoms of distress. Some medications take several days or even weeks to work, and a provider may need to see you several times to adjust the medication. Talk with your provider about possible side effects. Medications can be prescribed by certain mental health providers, as well as your primary care provider or oncology team.

**Psychotherapy** (also called counseling or talk therapy) involves talking with a therapist to help understand and resolve problems. You may meet the therapist on your own, with people close to you, or in a small group with others facing similar concerns. Therapy sessions can take place in person or by computer or phone.

### Some common types of therapy are:

**Cognitive-Behavior Therapy (CBT)** focuses on identifying problematic thought patterns and behaviors and then working to change them. Treatment includes keeping track of one's symptoms and may involve relaxation training.

**Family or couples therapy** aims to help a couple or family resolve problems that arise in their relationships. Treatment often involves family members discussing problems together to develop better communication and interactions.

**Group therapy** brings together individuals with similar problems to work together for change. Treatment often includes group members discussing concerns and sharing feedback and support.

**Psychodynamic therapy** focuses on understanding how past experiences influence present behaviors, feelings, and motivations. Treatment focuses on developing ways of expressing feelings that support your goals.

## Urgent Mental Health Needs

### Mental Health Emergencies:

- For a mental health emergency, **call 911 or go to a hospital emergency room.**
- In Massachusetts, you may also call your local **Emergency Service Program (877-382-1609)** to find 24/7 emergency behavioral health services in the community.

**Telephone hotlines:** If you want to talk with someone, these hotlines provide free, confidential support:

- **Emotional Distress: Samaritans 24/7 Helpline: Call or text 1-877 870-4673 (HOPE)**  
Trained volunteers offer nonjudgmental support to anyone feeling lonely, hopeless, or having suicidal thoughts.
- **Substance Abuse: The Massachusetts Substance Use Helpline at 1-800-327-5050**  
Provides free anonymous support for finding treatment and recovery services for alcohol, drug use, and gambling problems. Website includes live chat option (<https://helplinema.org>).
- **Domestic Violence: SafeLink hotline at 1-877-785-2020**  
For anyone affected by domestic or dating violence. Calls are answered by a trained advocate who can provide support, information, and help with safety planning.

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## For more information

- **American Cancer Society:** [www.cancer.org](http://www.cancer.org): Search for “Mental Health”.
- **American Psychological Association:** [www.apa.org](http://www.apa.org) or 1-800-374-2721.
- **Massachusetts Psychological Association:** [www.masspsych.org](http://www.masspsych.org) or 781-263-0080.
- **National Alliance on Mental Illness:** [www.nami.org](http://www.nami.org) or Helpline at 1-800-950-6264.

**Still have questions? Please contact Dana-Farber Division of Social Work at (617) 632-3301.**

This document is for informational purposes only. The content does not take the place of professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Always ask your physician or other qualified health provider if you have questions about a medical condition.

This tip sheet was revised by Dana-Farber’s Department of Psychosocial Oncology and Palliative Care, based on content developed by the Perini Family Survivors’ Center.