

Navigating Systems of Care for Adults with Serious Mental Illness



The mental healthcare system can feel difficult to navigate. Barriers such as systemic racial disparities, a lack of diversity among healthcare providers, cultural stigma, and high costs make it hard to access care.

Accessing and finding help when you need it can be difficult. Understanding the different settings that can provide mental health care and what mental health services are available may help.



A strong support team to help along the journey is important, as these may be the people you turn to first when looking for help. A support team can include friends and family; community members, like faith leaders; peer-support specialists; or other treatment team members, like pharmacists.

When to seek care

Feelings and situations you may experience

Where to go

Levels of care

What services to engage

People and places that may help

Active suicidal thoughts or actions

Active attempts to hurt yourself or others

A medical emergency, like a medication overdose, with an imminent threat to life that needs immediate medical attention

IMMEDIATE SAFETY AND CRISIS MEDICAL RESPONSE

- » 911
- » 988
- » Crisis diversion program
- » Law enforcement with crisis intervention teams

NATIONAL SUICIDE PREVENTION HOTLINE: 1-800-273-8255



EMERGENCY SERVICES



A breakthrough of symptoms that signals a serious mental health crisis

Thoughts of suicide, harming self or harming others, but not actions

A need for immediate evaluation for hospitalization or risk of self-harm or harm to others

HOSPITALIZATION

- » Crisis intervention response
- » Psychiatric emergency room
- » Hospitalization



ACUTE CARE SERVICES

Intensive, structured programs focused on treatments that provide care 24 hours/day, 7 days/week for those who need greater assistance. Treatment period and length of stay may range up to a few weeks.



A need for mental healthcare services to prevent hospitalization or as a transition after hospitalization

TRANSITION SERVICES

- » Intensive outpatient program
- » Partial hospitalization program
- » Substance abuse stabilization
- » Residential treatment facilities



SUBACUTE CARE SERVICES

Stabilization services focused more on rehabilitation and recovery outcomes to help transition back into society. Treatment period can range up to 6 months.



A need for mental health treatment or community support while maintaining levels of independence

STABILIZATION AND SUPPORTIVE CARE

- » Therapy (individual, family, group)
- » Medication management
- » Social work
- » Self-help groups (peer-support services, community-run mental health groups)
- » Advocacy (eg, National Alliance on Mental Illness, Mental Health America)
- » Faith-based organizations (eg, churches)



OUTPATIENT SERVICES

Structured services focused on effective symptom management and long-term stabilization while maintaining a normal living situation.



Community Health Equity Alliance



1. Office of the Surgeon General [US]; Center for Mental Health Services [US]; National Institute of Mental Health [US]. Mental health: culture, race, and ethnicity: a supplement to mental health: a report of the Surgeon General. Rockville [MD]: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [US]; August 2001. Accessed February 1, 2022. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK44243/> 2. Center for Disease Control. Social determinants of health: know what affects health. Accessed February 1, 2022. <https://www.cdc.gov/socialdeterminants/about.html> 3. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Racial/Ethnic Differences in Mental Health Service Use among Adults. 2015. 4. Alang, Siry M. Mental healthcare among blacks in America: Confronting racism and constructing solutions. Health Serv Res. 2019;54:346-355. 5. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [US]. National guidelines for behavioral health crisis care best practice toolkit. Published 2020. Accessed February 1, 2022. <https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/national-guidelines-for-behavioral-health-crisis-care-02242020.pdf> 6. American Association of Community Psychiatrists. Level of care utilization systems for psychiatric and addiction services. Community Psychiatry. 2010. 7. National Alliance on Mental Illness. Getting treatment during a crisis. Accessed February 1, 2022. <https://www.nami.org/Learn-More/Treatment/Getting-Treatment-During-a-Crisis> 8. National Alliance on Mental Illness. Treatment settings. Accessed February 1, 2022. <https://www.nami.org/About-Mental-Illness/Treatments/Treatment-Settings> 9. Thomas K, Rickwood D. Clinical and cost-effectiveness of acute and subacute residential mental health services: a systemic review. Psych Serv. 2013;64:11. 10. National Alliance on Mental Illness. The value of structured outpatient treatment. Accessed April 1, 2022. <https://www.nami.org/Bw2020/The-Value-of-Structured-Outpatient-Treatment>