

Vermont Guide to Finding a Mental Health Professional

MENTAL
HEALTH

Introduction



The most important step in treating a mental health condition sometimes feels like a challenging one: finding a mental health professional.

A trustworthy and knowledgeable mental health professional will be a valuable ally. It may take a little time and persistence to locate this ally or assemble a team of allies.

Below are many options to getting started. There is no one order that is the best to follow.

Whom are you seeking?



People have many different reasons to consult a mental health professional. Are you looking for someone who is licensed to prescribe medication? Or are you looking primarily for someone licensed to provide clinical therapy?

Many people treating their mental health condition have two separate professionals, one focusing on medication (this could be a primary care provider or a psychiatric practitioner) and the other focusing on emotional or behavioral therapies (a clinical mental health therapist). Here are some things to think about:

- If you haven't talked to a physician/medical practitioner yet, seeing one for a physical exam may feel important. Many medical illnesses can cause symptoms similar to mental illness. Even if you don't think your condition will require medical treatment, it is important to tell a medical practitioner about your symptoms.
- If your symptoms are determined to be caused by a mental health condition, your primary care practitioner is often able to prescribe medication to treat this.
- The medical practitioner/your primary care practitioner is often aware of specialists, psychiatrists or psychiatric nurse practitioners to whom they can refer you if a medical condition is ruled out to be the cause of your symptoms.

- This site is helpful in learning about various mental health professionals and their skill sets: mental health specialist (<https://www.nami.org/about-mental-illness/treatments/types-of-mental-health-professionals/>).
- If you're seeking help with emotions, behaviors, and thinking patterns, you should locate a therapist or counselor. Like medical practitioners, therapists and counselors have specialties, so you can find one who knows about your specific condition. Consider checking with your employer because you may have access to free, short-term counseling through Employee Assistance Program (EAP) services.
- If you are experiencing suicidal thoughts, it will be important to seek a therapist/counselor with experience treating suicidality: Suicide Specific Treatment Providers (<https://www.vpqhc.org/suicide-specific-treatment-provider-directory>).
- If you have to wait for an appointment, your local Designated Mental Health Agency will likely have other resources that they can refer you to: Map of Vermont Mental Health Agencies (<https://vermontcarepartners.org/agencies/>).
- Additional resources, if you have to wait for an appointment, can often be found through peer support: NAMI VT Peer Support Groups (<https://namivt.org/support-groups/peer-support/>).
- The Vermont Language Justice project works to make public health information accessible to everyone (<https://www.vtlanguagejustice.org/>).
- If you need assistance with housing and employment or have multiple health challenges or difficulties affording treatment, you may benefit from a Care Coordinator on your team. Many Primary Care offices have care coordinators as part of your care team. Be sure to ask about that if you visit with a primary care practitioner. You can also call Vermont 211, a free, confidential information and referral program through United Ways of Vermont.

Gathering Referrals



If you have health insurance (<https://www.nami.org/your-journey/individuals-with-mental-illness/understanding-health-insurance/>), start by calling your insurer's information number. Ask for phone numbers of professionals in your area who accept your insurance plan. Try to get at least three names and numbers, just in case. Sometimes a provider may be incorrectly listed under a certain insurer because the listing is outdated. This is also a good time to ask for clarification of your insurance benefits. Here are some questions you might ask:

- Can you make a direct appointment with a psychiatrist or psychiatric nurse practitioner, or do you need to see a primary care practitioner first for a referral?
- How does your plan cover visits to therapists? Therapy coverage can vary greatly between insurance plans (copays, co-insurance, etc).
- If you need help with a specific condition such as addiction, an eating disorder or suicidality, ask for practitioners with the subspecialty you need.
- If you are experiencing suicidal thoughts it will be important to seek a therapist/counselor with experience treating suicidality.

Providers trained in Suicide Specific Treatment

(<https://www.vpqhc.org/trained-providers>)

Some people find an additional benefit from trying an evidence-based treatment that is specific to their diagnosis or experiences, or from finding a mental health provider that understands their culture and values.

For example, individuals with thoughts of suicide can benefit from seeking out suicide-specific treatments such as Cognitive Behavior Therapy (CBT) for Suicide Prevention, Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT) for suicidality, or the Collaborative Assessment and Management of Suicidality (CAMS) (<https://afsp.org/therapies/>).

Individuals with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder could benefit from seeking out one of these treatments (<https://www.apa.org/ptsd-guideline/treatments>) recommended by the American Psychological Association.

You can search for clinicians who use evidence-based treatments or share your culture by contacting your local designated mental health agency using the Map of Vermont Mental Health Agencies (<https://vermontcarepartners.org/agencies/>).

You can also search for them on Psychology Today (<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/therapists>), VT Counseling Network (<https://www.vermontcounselingnetwork.com/>), Vermont 211 Mental Health Resources (<https://search.vermont211.org/>), or simply asking questions to providers who accept your insurance. It's important to be your own advocate and find the best treatment for you.

If you do not have health insurance, your first stop should be your community mental health center Map of Vermont Mental Health Agencies (<https://vermontcarepartners.org/agencies/>) or your local federally qualified health center (FQHC) Vermont FQHCs (<https://bistatepca.org/centers/>) who often have embedded Care Coordinators, Mental Health Providers, and Community Health Workers.

Make The Call



If you find you're reluctant to call, ask a friend or family member to call for you. Make an appointment.

If you're told that new patients have to wait many months for an appointment, it would be wise to make an appointment anyway. Then call the second and third numbers on your list. You can always cancel your first appointment if you find someone who can help you sooner.

Another way to get an appointment sooner is to join the waiting list for cancellations. If another person cancels at the last minute, you may get an appointment earlier than you expected.

If you feel you can't wait weeks or months for help, see your primary care doctor as soon as possible to get treatments and support to help until you have your team assembled. And if you're in an emergency situation, please go immediately to a hospital emergency room.

If this is a crisis situation call or text 988, the suicide and crisis lifeline.

Ask Questions



In your first visit with a medical practitioner or therapist, you're seeking advice but you're also "shopping around." It's reasonable to ask questions to find the “right fit” for you. Be honest about the fact that you're looking for someone you can work with long-term. Here are some questions you might want to think about or ask yourself:

Do you feel comfortable with this person? Even if this person has a good reputation or a high level of education, the most important thing is whether you can work well together. What "vibe" do you get? The personal questions a mental health professional asks may make you uncomfortable sometimes, but the person shouldn't make you uncomfortable. You should feel that this person is on your side.

Here are some other questions/suggestions to ask:

How much education and professional experience does this person have?

Has this person worked with people with similar symptoms as yours? For how long?

How will you work together to establish goals and evaluate your progress?

What can you expect if you work together?

How often will you meet, and how hard will it be to get an appointment?

Can you call on the phone or email between appointments?

What kind of improvements can you expect to see?

If you're concerned about your ability to meet insurance co-pays or deductibles, bring it up now rather than later.

Ask about the policies around this topic. Ask if you can pay on a sliding scale or at a discount.

Consider whether virtual sessions will meet your needs or whether you will want to be seen in person.

Doctors and therapists would like to know ahead of time if these problems might arise because it's important to continue treatment without interruption.

If having a provider who understands and respects your cultural background is important to you, NAMI offers some tips to help find the right provider for you.

Build A Relationship



Remember that you're recruiting team members who can help you with your treatment long-term. With a little persistence, you'll find people who will listen to you, take your perspective into consideration and work with you to improve your sense of well-being.

Remember building any relationship takes time. Be sure to trust your instincts if you have found the right fit for you. Your sense of your needs is valid and of utmost importance.

If this is not the right fit it is ok to let the therapist know that and move on to another option.

If this is a Mental Health Crisis



Call 988

OR

Call your local designated Mental Health Agency
(<https://vermontcarepartners.org/agencies/>)

Additional Resources



For Crisis support, call or text: 988
988lifeline.org

Facing Suicide VT is a statewide prevention effort providing access to suicide prevention, education, support, and advocacy resources:
www.facingsuicidevt.org

Vermont Interactive Wellness Map for Service Members, Veterans, and their Families (SMVF) to find mental health supports and providers:
<https://map.vtspc.org/>

Supporting Men in VT on Men's mental health resources:
www.mantherapy.org

National Alliance on Mental Illness:
<https://namivt.org/>

The Trevor Project provides 24/7 crisis support services to LGBTQ+ Youth:
www.thetrevorproject.org

The Jed Foundation is focused on suicide prevention for teens and young adults:
<https://www.jedfoundation.org>

NAMI Vermont offers peer support groups
<https://namivt.org/support-groups/peer-support/>

Pathways VT Support Line (staffed by peer support specialists):
<https://www.pathwaysvermont.org/programs/vermont-support-line>
833-888-2557

American Foundation for Suicide Prevention:
<https://www.afsp.org>

Veterans Suicide Prevention (including live chat line):
<https://www.va.gov>

Beyond Blue Mental Health Support promotes mental health and well-being:
<https://www.beyondblue.org.au/>

Speaking of Suicide is a site with resources for suicidal individuals and their loved ones, survivors, mental health professionals, & others who care:
<https://www.speakingofsuicide.com/>

Inclusive Therapists aim to make the process of finding a therapist simpler, safer, and equitable.
<https://www.inclusivetherapists.com/united-states/vermont>

Network of counselors where one can locate Vermont therapists who have current availability.
<https://www.vermontcounselingnetwork.com/>