

GP Mental Health Care Plan Medicare items

What is a GP Mental Health Care Plan?

A GP Mental Health Care Plan is a plan made by your doctor (general practitioner, or GP) for treating a mental health problem over time.

How do I get a GP Mental Health Care Plan?

Your GP will work with you to assess your mental health, work out what help you need, set goals and choose the treatment that would be best for you. Your GP will also discuss options for treatment and advise you about any other services that might help you. (The plan might also include what to do in a crisis or to prevent relapse.)

Once you and your GP have agreed on your goals and what you need to do to achieve them, your GP will write out a mental health care plan. Preparing the plan might take one visit, or it might take a number of visits.

How do I benefit from a GP Mental Health Care Plan?

Having a plan is a good way for you to become more involved in your health care. It can help you to set goals, monitor progress and achieve goals. A clear, long term plan can lead to better treatment and is more effective than just dealing with problems as they arise.

Having a plan also helps everyone involved in your mental health care (psychiatrists and psychologists, for example) to work towards the same goals.

It can also save you money if your GP refers you to other mental health professionals, who can claim for the service through Medicare if you have a GP Mental Health Care Plan. Without a plan you may have to pay the full cost of these services.

Can anyone else be involved?

Yes. You can ask someone else to be involved in making and reviewing the plan. This could be a family member, carer, friend or another person who is close to you. Sometimes having someone else involved can help you follow the plan.

Using the plan

What happens after the GP Mental Health Care Plan is prepared?

Your GP will review your progress against the plan by looking at how you are going compared to the goals you have set, and updating the plan if needed. Usually this happens one to six months after the plan is made. Sometimes there will be another review three months after this first review.

You might have other visits with the GP between reviews as part of your treatment. You don't have to wait for a review to talk about any concerns you might have or changes you might want to make to your plan – you can discuss these with your GP at any time.

What treatment will be included in the plan?

Treatment will depend on your individual situation. It might include seeing a psychiatrist or psychologist, another doctor or health professional, referral to other services, or medication.

Do I have to give permission?

Yes. Your GP can only prepare a GP Mental Health Care Plan with your agreement, and will explain what is involved before making or reviewing any plan.

Your doctor cannot make the plan without your agreement.

Will I get a copy of the plan?

Your GP will offer you a copy of the plan or reviewed plan and will also keep a copy on your medical record. If you give permission, a copy can also be given to other people such as psychologists or your carer. You should tell your GP if there is any information you don't want other people to know.

How much will it cost?

Your GP should tell you what costs (if any) are involved when asking for your agreement to make a GP Mental Health Care Plan. Ask your GP what fees will be involved if you are unsure.

Who can provide these services?

Any GP can provide a GP Mental Health Care Plan. They are normally provided by your regular GP, but you can choose to have a GP Mental Health Care Plan provided by another GP if you want to. Once you have a Mental Health Care Plan, however, you should keep seeing the same GP for review and management.

Other services

What is a GP Mental Health Care Consultation?

A GP Mental Health Care Consultation is a longer appointment with your GP (more than 20 minutes) in which you and your GP focus on your mental health. These longer consultations might be used as part of a GP Mental Health Care Plan. However, you do not need to have a Mental Health Care Plan to have a Mental Health Care Consultation.

How is this different from a normal visit to my GP?

A GP Mental Health Care Consultation has a different Medicare item number to a regular GP visit. An item number shows Medicare what was involved in the consultation and how much to pay the GP if the consultation is bulk billed, or how much to reimburse you if your doctor bills you.

By using the mental health care item numbers, Medicare will have a record that you have visited a doctor for a mental health problem. Medicare staff are not permitted to give this information to anyone without your permission (except in some cases where strict exemptions apply).

More information

A number of fact sheets and information on depression, anxiety and related substance-use disorders are available from *beyondblue: the national depression initiative* at www.beyondblue.org.au (See 'Fact sheet 24 – Help for depression under Medicare' for detailed information on Medicare items available and the types of treatment you may receive.)

Talk to your GP if you have any concerns or questions about any of this information.

About The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners

The college's mission is to improve health and wellbeing for all Australians by supporting GPs, registrars and medical students by assessing doctors' skills and knowledge, supplying ongoing professional development activities, developing resources and guidelines, helping GPs with issues that affect their practice and developing standards that general practices use as part of accreditation processes.

Download an electronic (PDF) version of this information sheet at www.racgp.org.au/factsheets