

How to Navigate the Mental Healthcare System

Understanding Mental Health

Mental health conditions are common in the United States and can affect a person's mood, behavior, feeling, or thinking.¹ A mental health condition that impacts a person's life and ability to function is called a serious mental illness.¹

Mental health conditions are medical conditions, like heart disease or diabetes. People diagnosed with these conditions can live full, rewarding lives, especially if they have access to and follow treatment.

Treatment is based on a plan developed with a healthcare provider in your treatment team, like a psychiatrist or psychologist. Your treatment team can also include pharmacists, social workers, therapists, and peer-support specialists.

There are other services and approaches that can help address mental, emotional, physical and spiritual needs. These can include activities that help connect one's mind and body, such as exercise, yoga, medication, and maintaining a healthy diet to help promote overall health and wellness. A strong support team is also important and can include friends and family and community members.

56.5%

of adults who are living with a mental illness in North Carolina do not receive treatment.²

Understanding Barriers

While rates of mental illness are similar among Black, Hispanic, and white adults, **only 1 in 3 Black adults who needs mental health care receives it.**¹

The mental healthcare system can feel difficult to navigate. In addition, there are many barriers, including lack of diversity in health care, stigma, distrust of the healthcare system and providers, and high costs.^{3,4} These factors make it harder for Black adults to access care.⁵

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Seeking Help

Different conditions, like depression, bipolar disorder, and schizophrenia, have different signs or symptoms.

Mental health stigma and historic bias can often prevent Black adults struggling with mental health from seeking treatment. If you believe that you or a loved one has a serious mental health condition, consider the following steps:

- 1 Identify and acknowledge the symptoms. Each condition has its own symptoms and may include feeling excessively sad or low, having difficulty perceiving reality, and being unable to carry out daily activities.⁶
- 2 Reach out to family, friends, or others within your faith community for support.
- 3 Ask a trusted healthcare provider to recommend a mental health specialist who will incorporate your beliefs and practices into your treatment.
- 4 Get connected with mental health service providers, like a clinical social worker, psychologist, psychiatrist, nurse practitioner, or peer-support specialist.



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I had to learn it's okay to say
'I can't do this alone.'
It's okay to seek professional help.

— From NC adult with lived experience

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Finding Personalized Mental Health Care

A mental health provider plays an important role throughout treatment. While approximately 13% of the American population is Black, only 2% of psychiatrists identify as Black.^{7,8}

Outcomes can be improved when mental health professionals understand and incorporate cultural needs and differences into a person's care.⁹

Consider asking the following questions when seeking a mental health provider:¹⁰

- Have you treated other Black adults with mental health conditions like mine?
- How do you see our cultural backgrounds shaping our communication and my treatment?
- Do you use a different approach in your treatment when working with patients from different backgrounds?
- How do you plan on including my beliefs in my treatment plan?

Leaning on caregivers, friends, family, and faith-based leaders, can help you find personalized mental health care. There are other services and self-care approaches that can help, like yoga, meditation, and leading a healthy lifestyle.

Accessing Resources

Seek emergency help as soon as possible if you or a loved one is in crisis. If you or a loved one needs someone to talk to about mental health, there is confidential support available 24/7 for everyone in America. Call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 1-800-273-8255.

There are resources available to help identify healthcare providers, including:

State and County Organizations:

- Mobile Crisis teams can provide immediate help at your location. To find a mobile crisis team in your area and for more information on Crisis Centers, visit <http://crisissolutionsnc.org>
- If you have a mental health provider, you can also reach out to them for support during your crisis

National Agencies, Advocacy and Professional Organizations:

- Mental Health America (MHA): Text MHA to 741741 from anywhere in the United States. More info: <https://screening.mhanational.org/content/crisis-text-someone/>
- National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI): Call 1-919-788-0906 or visit <https://naminc.org/find-your-local-nami-2/> to find your local NAMI chapter
- NCCARE360: For resources across North Carolina, visit <https://nccare360.org/resources>

Federal Agencies:

- Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA)
- Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS)

Insurance Companies:

- Health plans will specify the mental healthcare providers, associated costs, and limitations on their websites.
- If insurance is not obtainable, look for a Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) Health Center Program or seek help through a local advocacy organization

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