The cost of getting treatment for depression, anxiety or a related condition from a health professional varies. However, in the same way that people can get a Medicare rebate when they see a doctor, they can also get part or all of the consultation fee subsidised when they see a mental health professional for treatment of depression or anxiety.

People who provide psychological treatment for mental health problems include psychologists, social workers and occupational therapists in mental health, mental health nurses, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health workers.

It is important to recognise that psychological treatment doesn’t have to cost very much and can have lifelong benefits.

Where do I start?

In many cases, the first step in accessing services for treatment of depression, anxiety or a related condition will be a consultation with a General Practitioner (GP). If you think you may have depression or anxiety, before consulting a GP, it’s important to ask the receptionist to book a longer or double appointment, so there is plenty of time to discuss the situation without feeling rushed. It is also best to raise your concerns about your mental health problems early in the consultation.

Your GP can:

- listen to your concerns and make a diagnosis
- check for any physical health problem or medication that may be contributing to a mental health condition such as depression or anxiety
- discuss available treatment options
- work with you to write a Mental Health Treatment Plan
- provide brief counselling or in some cases, psychological therapy
- prescribe medication as required
- refer you to a mental health specialist, such as an allied health professional (psychologist, social worker or occupational therapist) or psychiatrist.

A Mental Health Treatment Plan is a treatment strategy prepared by a GP in consultation with a person and looks at a person’s mental health needs and goals, and outlines treatment options and support services to reach those goals.

Often, a Mental Health Treatment Plan is needed for a person to qualify for subsidised treatment, i.e. to get a Medicare rebate or receive treatment through the government program Access to Allied Psychological Services (ATAPS).

Who can assist?

While GPs may manage the treatment of an individual, under a Mental Health Treatment Plan, they may also decide to refer a person for treatment with one of the following mental health practitioners:

Psychologists are health professionals who provide psychological therapies, such as cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT) and interpersonal therapy (IPT). Clinical psychologists specialise in the assessment, diagnosis and treatment of mental health conditions. Psychologists and clinical psychologists are not doctors and cannot prescribe medication in Australia.
Psychiatrists are doctors who have undergone additional study and training to specialise in mental health. They can make medical and psychiatric assessments, conduct medical tests, provide therapy and prescribe medication.

Psychiatrists often use psychological treatments such as cognitive behaviour therapy (CBT), interpersonal therapy (IPT) and/or medication. If the depression or anxiety is severe and hospital admission is required, a psychiatrist will be in charge of the person’s treatment. A Mental Health Treatment Plan is not required to see a psychiatrist, but a referral from a GP is needed.

Mental health nurses are specially trained to care for people with mental health conditions. They work with psychiatrists and GPs to review a person’s mental health, monitor medication and provide information about mental health conditions and treatment. Some have training in psychological therapies. If you would like a referral to a mental health nurse who works in a general practice, ask your GP.

Social workers in mental health are specially trained to work with people who are experiencing difficulties in life. Social workers can support people with anxiety by helping them find ways to manage more effectively some of the situations that trigger these conditions such as family issues, financial problems, work stress and living arrangements.

Mental health social workers can also provide focused psychological self-help strategies.

Occupational therapists in mental health help people who have difficulties functioning because of a mental health condition to participate in normal, everyday activities. Mental health occupational therapists also provide focused psychological self-help strategies.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health workers are health workers who understand the mental health issues of Indigenous people and what is needed to provide culturally-safe and accessible services. Some workers may have undertaken training in mental health and psychological therapies. Support provided by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health workers might include, but not be limited to, case management, screening, assessment, referrals, transport to and attendance at specialist appointments, education, improving access to mainstream services, advocacy, counselling, support for family and acute distress response.

What will it cost?

There are government rebates available to help pay part of the cost of psychological treatments undertaken with the mental health practitioners listed. Qualifying for these rebates is usually as simple as having had a Mental Health Treatment Plan drawn up by a GP, or in some instances via a referral from a psychiatrist or paediatrician (in the case of a young person). If you are unsure if you are eligible for subsidised treatment, check with your GP.

Medicare rebates under the Australian Government’s Better Access program

Medicare rebates are available for individual or group sessions with psychiatrists, psychologists, clinical psychologists, social workers and occupational therapists in mental health under a government program called the Better Access to Psychiatrists, Psychologists and General Practitioners through the Medicare Benefits Schedule (Better Access) initiative.

People who are diagnosed with a mental condition and who would benefit from a structured treatment approach are eligible for these rebates.

‘Mental disorder’ is a term used to describe a range of clinically diagnosable conditions that significantly interfere with an individual’s cognitive, emotional or social abilities.

These include:

- depression
- anxiety – panic disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder, post-traumatic stress disorder, generalised anxiety disorder and phobias
- bipolar disorder
- drug and alcohol-use problems.
The Medicare rebates under Better Access generally range from 75 per cent to, in some cases, 100 per cent of the treatment cost – so out-of-pocket expenses can be minimal.

For example:

- A 50+ minute individual session with a clinical psychologist might cost $143.70 – with an 85 per cent rebate returning $122.15 to the person.
- A group session lasting one hour with a clinical psychologist might cost the person $25, with a rebate of $21.25.

It’s a good idea to find out the cost of the service and the available rebate before making an appointment. The receptionist should be able to provide this information.

In one calendar year, a person who is eligible can receive Medicare rebates for up to 10 individual consultations with a mental health professional.

Following the initial course of treatment (a maximum of six sessions), a person can access more sessions upon review of up to 10 per calendar year.

In addition, a person can receive Medicare rebates for 10 group therapy services per calendar year.

For more information on Better Access, talk to your doctor, treating health practitioner or visit www.health.gov.au/mentalhealth

**Access to Allied Psychological Services (ATAPS)**

Another way of accessing subsidised psychological treatment is through the Australian Government program, Access to Allied Psychological Services (ATAPS).

The ATAPS program provides access to effective, low-cost treatment for people with common mental health conditions of mild to moderate severity, including mild to moderate depression and anxiety.

Mental health services provided under ATAPS include individual or group sessions with occupational therapists and social workers in mental health, mental health nurses, psychologists, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health workers with specific mental health qualifications.

ATAPS is designed to complement the Better Access program by assisting people who cannot easily access Medicare-based programs, in particular:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- people in rural and remote areas
- children and young people
- people at high risk of suicide
- people not able to pay fees.

The number of sessions available under ATAPS is up to 12 individual sessions per calendar year – six time-limited sessions with an option for a further six sessions following a mental health review by the referring GP.

In exceptional circumstances, a person can access up to 18 individual sessions in a calendar year. It is up to the referring practitioner to determine that a person meets the requirements to access the additional six sessions.

Through ATAPS, people are also eligible for up to 12 separate group therapy services, within a calendar year, involving 6-10 patients.

These group services are separate from the individual services and do not count towards the 12 individual mental health services in a calendar year.

Generally, people who access treatment through Better Access do not receive services under ATAPS within the same calendar year.

To access ATAPS, people get a referral from a GP, paediatrician or a psychiatrist. When a GP refers a person to another health professional for help under ATAPS, a Mental Health Treatment Plan must have been prepared.

Where referral by a GP is not possible, a provisional referral may be made by an allied health professional (e.g. psychologist, social worker) who is eligible to provide services under ATAPS. Following a provisional referral, a Mental Health Treatment Plan must be prepared within two weeks of the first session, or four weeks in a rural and remote area, or as soon as practical where access to GPs is not readily available.

Generally, there is little or no out-of-pocket expense incurred. (The Australian Government funds Medicare Locals* across Australia to manage ATAPS within their regions.)

For more information on ATAPS, talk to your doctor, treating health practitioner or visit www.health.gov.au/mentalhealth
Private health insurance
There are many private health insurance companies and a range of coverage levels available. If you have private health cover, it is recommended that you contact your private health insurance company to find out if psychological services are covered and to what level.

e-therapies
E-therapies are online programs designed to provide assistance via the internet or via mobile phone applications for people experiencing depression, anxiety or related conditions.

For people with mild to moderate depression or anxiety, psychological therapies that are well-suited to online platforms (such as CBT) have been shown to be useful.

e-therapies often include some of the following:

• mental health screening tools, such as symptom checklists
• web lessons
• information about self-help strategies
• peer support through forums, professional support from a clinician, health worker or counsellor.

Some online programs are offered free-of-charge, while others charge a fee. Visit www.mindhealthconnect.org.au/library/online-program for a list of online programs.

THINGS TO REMEMBER

• Although different types of depression and anxiety require different types of treatment, most people will benefit from psychological treatment.
• Psychological treatment can help with recovery, and can also help to prevent a recurrence of depression or anxiety.
• Psychological treatment doesn’t have to cost very much and can have lifelong benefits.
• Talk to your GP or treating mental health practitioner about whether you are eligible for subsidised treatment.
• There are also many self-help internet-based programs [e-therapies] available in Australia that are aimed at helping people better manage their depression and anxiety.

Where to find more information

beyondblue
www.beyondblue.org.au
Learn more about depression and anxiety, or talk it through with our support service.

1300 22 4636
Email or chat to us online at www.beyondblue.org.au/getsupport

Lifeline
www.lifeline.org.au
13 11 14
Access to crisis support, suicide prevention and mental health support services.

mindhealthconnect
www.mindhealthconnect.org.au
Access to trusted, relevant mental health care services, online programs and resources.

Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing
Information about the Better Access and ATAPS programs and other government-related mental health initiatives.

Facebook.com/beyondblue Twitter.com/beyondblue

www.beyondblue.org.au 1300 22 4636

* Medicare Locals are being established nationwide under the Australian Government’s National Health Reforms. Medicare Locals will coordinate primary health care delivery and tackle local health care needs and service gaps. All Medicare Locals are funded to provide mental health services across the country. Medicare Locals will make it easier for people to access the services they need, by linking local GPs, nursing and other health professionals, hospitals and aged care, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health organisations, and maintaining up-to-date local service directories. To find out more about Medicare Locals visit www.yourhealth.gov.au