

# Assisting patients in general practice with mental health concerns

General practitioners (GPs) are the health professionals accessed most often by people experiencing mental health issues and/or engaging in suicidal behaviour.<sup>1</sup> This fact sheet has been developed to help general practice teams consider how their practice's access to care, systems, policies, procedures, training and education can assist patients with mental health concerns.

<b>Patient access to care</b>	
<b>What is in place to reduce barriers to accessing care and create a safe environment?</b>	
<b>Signage, waiting room and patient information</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Can the practice's signage, waiting room and patient information documents be used to communicate information about how patients can access care for their mental health?</li></ul>	
<b>Patient communications and booking</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Can information about patient self-help resources and local services (for example, <u>Medicare Mental Health</u> and <u>support lines</u>) be added to the phone system on-hold message, website and booking sites?</li><li>Are there culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) considerations required for your location?</li></ul>	
<b>Privacy and dignity of the patient</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>How can the practice maintain the privacy of a patient in distress?</li><li>Are there alternative ways for patients in distress to check-in, provide a separate waiting room or use trained team members to provide patient support?</li></ul>	
<b>Resources</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li><u>Embrace Multicultural Mental Health</u> culturally appropriate multilingual information and resources.</li><li><u>Lifeline</u> posters, leaflets and information cards.</li><li><u>Think Mental Health WA</u> campaign and promotion material, including <u>Your GP Can Help</u> posters.</li><li><u>Mindframe</u> offers advice about <u>providing help-seeking information</u> in content and communications.</li><li><u>Healthdirect</u> patient information about talking to your GP.</li><li>RACGP Standards for general practices (5th edition) – <u>GP5.1 Practice facilities</u> and <u>GP1.3 Care outside of normal opening hours</u></li></ul>	
<b>Systems, policies and procedures</b>	
<b>What is in place to identify/respond to your patients' needs and provide appropriate care?</b>	
<b>Triage for mental health patients and emergencies</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>Does the practice's triage system outline how to respond to suicidal crisis, including how to raise help within the practice?</li></ul>	
<b>Appointment book management for mental health concerns</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>What is in place to allocate appointments to meet the needs and urgency of patients with mental health concerns? For example, the use of telehealth for on-the-day-only appointments.</li></ul>	
<b>Resources</b>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>RACGP Standards for general practices (5th edition) – <u>GP1.1 Responsive system for patient care</u></li><li>General practice <u>triage system</u></li></ul>	

## Staff training and education

### What can build the mental health support capacity and capability of your practice team?

#### Suicide prevention training and mental health first aid skills

- Consider evidence-based skills training in mental health and suicide prevention for your team.

#### Language and communication training

- Avoid stigmatising language in your practice by utilising best practice language guidelines.

#### Resources

- Suicide prevention coordinators can provide a variety of mental health and suicide prevention training.
- Mindframe language and communication resources, including Our Words Matter for service providers.
- RACGP Standards for general practices (5th edition) – Core Standard 1
- Clinical Yarning eLearning by WA Centre for Rural Health for clinicians working with Aboriginal patients.

## Staff wellbeing and self-care

### What does your practice have in place relating to staff wellbeing and self-care?

#### Looking after your team

- Consider what activities or services your practice can provide for staff following a traumatic event, such as debriefing, an employee assistance program (EAP) and a wellbeing toolkit.

#### Health professional support

- How can your practice support the wellbeing of the clinical team? For example, peer-to-peer debriefing time and helpline posters.

#### Resources

- RACGP Standards for general practices (5th edition) – Criterion C3.5 Work health and safety/ Supporting staff in emergencies or after traumatic events
- Black Dog Institute – Helping colleagues in times of difficulty and Workplace mental health toolkit
- DHASWA advice line (Doctors' Health Advisory Service WA) – independent, confidential support for doctors by doctors and a free 24/7 advice line.
- The Black Dog Institute – The Essential Network (TEN) for Health Professionals helps health care professionals find resources and support to navigate burnout and maintain good mental health.
- RACGP GP support program – free service offered via telephone counselling or through wellbeing resources and self-help tools.

## Referral pathways and clinical guidance

- Medicare Mental Health – website and statewide phone service (1800 595 212) to help navigate mental health services and identify suitable treatment options to support patients.
- Initial Assessment and Referral Decision Support Tool (IAR-DST) – assists GPs and clinicians with recommending the most appropriate level of care for a patient seeking mental health support.
- Clinician Assist WA – secure, online portal with a suite of comprehensive pathways that provide GPs with information on patient assessment, management and referral pathways.
- GP Psychiatry Support Line – national phone service for GPs to connect with psychiatrists who can provide advice regarding the mental health needs of their patients.

## Fact Sheet

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### Free helplines for patients with mental health concerns

Medicare Mental Health	1800 595 212	Statewide phone line offering mental health advice and guidance.
Lifeline	13 11 14	24/7 crisis support line.
Rural Link	1800 552 002	After-hours phone service for people in rural and regional WA experiencing a mental health crisis.
Beyond Blue	1300 224 636	24/7 support service for people experiencing mental health concerns, and their partners, family members or friends.
13 YARN	13 92 76	24/7 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander crisis support line.
Kids Helpline	1800 55 1800	24/7 phone service for young people aged 5 to 25 years old.
QLife	1800 184 527	LGBTIQ+ peer support line.

For a comprehensive list of helplines, visit Think Mental Health WA's list of [mental health support services](#)

### Additional services and resources

- [Embrace Multicultural Mental Health](#) – multilingual mental health information and resources.
- [MindOut](#) – mental health and suicide prevention for the LGBTIQ+ community.
- [WellMob](#) – mental health and wellbeing resources for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- [Practice Assist Medicare Benefits Schedule \(MBS\) Toolkit](#) – information and updates about the MBS for general practice teams.

### Further information

For further information about how your practice team can assist patients with mental health concerns, call Practice Assist on 1800 2 ASSIST (1800 2 277 478 or 08 6278 7900) or email [practiceassist@wapha.org.au](mailto:practiceassist@wapha.org.au)



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1. Stene-Larsen K, Reneflot A. Contact with primary and mental health care prior to suicide: A systematic review of the literature from 2000 to 2017. *Scand J Public Health*. 2019 Feb;47(1):9-17.