



**UNITED STATES
OLYMPIC & PARALYMPIC
COMMITTEE**

SELECTING A MENTAL HEALTH PROVIDER



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Mental health providers are professionals who have received education, training, and supervision in order to diagnose, evaluate, treat, prevent and study mental health conditions. Independently licensed mental health providers have a minimum of a master's degree and often with additional training in specific modalities such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT), Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) and/or areas of mental health such as Depressive Disorders, Anxiety Disorders, Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Addictions, Eating Disorders, providing parent support, body image disturbance, Suicidality, Child Abuse and Domestic Violence, etc.

When selecting a mental health provider, it is essential to ensure the provider is independently licensed in the state where they are providing care. In addition, you may want to consider a provider who is familiar with the dynamics of being an athlete. Below you'll find the most common mental health providers.

PSYCHIATRIST

A psychiatrist is an independently licensed physician – Doctor of Medicine (M.D.) or Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine (D.O.) – who specializes in the diagnosis, prevention, study, and treatment of mental health disorders. This type of physician may have a subspecialty in areas such as child and adolescent, geriatric, or addiction psychiatry. A psychiatrist can:

- Diagnose and treat mental health disorders
- Provide psychotherapy for the treatment of the mental health disorder
- Prescribe medication for the treatment of the mental health disorder

PSYCHOLOGIST

A psychologist is an independently licensed mental health provider – a PhD, PsyD or in some cases an EdD - who specializes in the diagnosis, prevention, study, and treatment of mental health disorders. A psychologist may have specialized training in child, adolescent, geriatric and/or addictions. A psychologist can:



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PSYCHOLOGIST (CONT.)

- Diagnose, evaluate, and treat mental health disorders individual, family, couples and/or group settings
- Some states allow psychologists to prescribe after completing an intensive training program in addition to their doctoral psychology training. Please check the state law regarding prescribing privileges for psychologists.
- If unable to prescribe medication a psychologist may work with another provider who can prescribe medication if indicated

SPORT PSYCHOLOGIST

Sport and exercise psychology is a field with historical ties to physical education. A sport psychology- trained provider is trained in a multidisciplinary field spanning psychology, exercise science, motor development and kinesiology. Proficiency encompasses training in psychological skills of athletes, in the well-being of athletes, in the systemic issues associated with sports organizations and in developmental and social aspects of sports participation. Practitioners in the field of sport psychology have met specific course requirements and have completed an extensive, mentored applied experience making them eligible for nationally recognized certification as a mental performance consultant (CMPC) or similar/related certifications in the field of sport performance. A sport psychologist:

- Cannot diagnose, treat, evaluate, prescribe medication, or provide mental health treatment.

PSYCHIATRIC MENTAL HEALTH NURSE

A psychiatric-mental health nurse (P.M.H.N.) is a registered nurse with training in mental health issues. A psychiatric-mental health advanced practice nurse (P.M.H.-A.P.R.N.) has at least a master's degree in psychiatric-mental health nursing. Other types of advanced practice nurse who provide mental health services include a clinical nurse specialist (C.N.S.), a certified nurse practitioner (C.N.P.) or a Doctor of Nursing practice (D.N.P.). Psychiatric mental health nurses can:

- Provide various services, depending on their education, level of training, experience, and state law
- Can assess, diagnose, and treat mental illnesses, depending on their education, training, and experience.
- Can – if state law allows – prescribe medication if they're an advanced practice nurse



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PHYSICIAN ASSISTANT

A certified physician assistant (P.A.-C.) practices medicine as a primary care provider or in collaboration with a physician. Physician assistants can specialize in psychiatry. These physician assistants can:

- Diagnose and treat mental health disorders
- Counsel on diagnoses, treatments, and prognosis, and provide education
- Prescribe medication

LICENSED CLINICAL SOCIAL WORKER

If you prefer a social worker, look for a licensed clinical social worker (L.C.S.W.) or a licensed independent clinical social worker (L.I.C.S.W.) with training and experience specifically in mental health. A licensed clinical social worker must have a master's degree in social work, and some have a doctorate in social work (D.S.W. or Ph.D.). These social workers:

- Provide assessment, diagnosis, counseling, and a range of other services, depending on their licensing and training in one-on-one or group settings
- Unable to prescribe medication therefore may work with another provider who can prescribe medication if indicated

LICENSED MARRIAGE AND FAMILY THERAPIST (LMFT)

Marriage and family therapists are mental health professionals trained in psychotherapy and family systems, with the ability to diagnose and treat mental and emotional disorders within the context of marriage, couples, and family systems. A LMFT can:

- Provide assessment, diagnostic impressions, and counseling for a range of concerns related to interpersonal systems
- Unable to prescribe medication therefore may work with another provider who can prescribe medication if indicated



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LICENSED PROFESSIONAL COUNSELOR

Training required for a licensed professional counselor (L.P.C.), licensed clinical professional counselor (L.C.P.C.) or similar titles may vary by state, but all must have at minimum a master's degree with clinical experience and some have a doctorate in counselor education (Ed.D). These licensed counselors:

- Provide assessment, diagnostic impressions, and counseling for a range of concerns on the spectrum of wellness to illness in one-on-one and group settings
- Unable to prescribe medication therefore may work with another provider who can prescribe medication if indicated

CONSIDERATIONS FOR SELECTION

Consider these factors when choosing among the various types of mental health providers:

- **Treatment approaches and philosophy** – *Make sure they are aligned with your goals for care.*
- **Appointment logistics** – *Office hours, fees, length of sessions and whether the provider meets in person or virtually.*
- **Preferred demographics of provider (e.g. gender, ethnicity, etc.)** – *Don't hesitate to ask a lot of questions. Finding the right match is crucial to establishing a good relationship and getting the most out of your services.*
- **Your concern or condition** – *Most mental health providers treat a range of conditions, but one with a specialized focus may be more suited to your needs. For example, if you have an eating disorder or marital problems, you may need to see a provider who specializes in those areas.*
- **Whether you need medication, counseling, psychotherapy or all three** – *Some mental health providers are not licensed to prescribe medications. You may need to see more than one mental health provider. For example, you may need to see a psychiatrist or psychiatric nurse practitioner to manage your medications and a psychologist or another mental health provider for therapy.*



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CONSIDERATIONS FOR SELECTION (CONT.)

- **Your health insurance coverage** – *Your insurance policy may have a list of specific mental health providers who are covered or may only cover certain types of mental health providers. Check ahead of time with your insurance company, Medicare, or Medicaid to find out what types of mental health services are covered and what your benefits limits are.*
- **Your location** – *Providers must be licensed in the states they are practicing. Many providers are licensed in several states and can provide both virtual an/or in-person services. If you travel regularly across state lines or internationally, confirm they will be able to continue to provide care where you will be located.*

WHERE TO FIND A PROVIDER

- Access the [USOPC Mental Health Registry](#)
- Ask your health insurance company for a list of in-network providers. Many insurance companies have a list of providers within your network available on their website.
- Seek a referral or recommendation from your primary care provider.
- If you are enrolled in a university, you may be able to access services through the university's health center.
- Contact a local or national mental health organization by phone or on the internet, such as the [National Alliance on Mental Health Illness \(NAMI\)](#).
- Search the internet for professional associations that have directories of mental health providers, such as the [American Psychiatric Association](#), American Psychological Association, [American Association for Marriage and Family Therapy](#) or the [Association for Behavioral and Cognitive Therapies](#)
- Search online publication [Psychology Today](#), which allows you to search by location and specialty
- Reach out to state psychology, counseling, social work and/or psychiatry associations
- Ask a friend or someone you trust for a referral to a provider



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REFERENCES

- Types of Mental Health Providers (National Alliance on Mental Illness): <http://www.nami.org/Learn-More/Treatment/Types-of-Mental-Health-Professionals>
- Finding a Mental Health Professional (National Alliance on Mental Illness): <http://www.nami.org/Find-Support/Living-with-a-Mental-Health-Condition/Finding-a-Mental-Health-Professional>
- Finding a Mental Health Professional (Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance): http://www.dbsalliance.org/site/PageServer?pagename=education_brochures_finding_MHP
- Occupational Outlook Handbook (Mental Health Counselors and Marriage and Family Therapists): <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/community-and-social-service/mental-health-counselors-and-marriage-and-family-therapist.htm#tab-2>
- Psychiatric-Mental Health Nurses (American Psychiatric Nurses Association): <https://www.apna.org/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageID=3292#7>
- What is Psychiatry? (American Psychiatric Association): <https://www.psychiatry.org/patients-families/what-is-psychiatry>
- How to Choose a Psychologist (American Psychological Association): <http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/choose-therapist.aspx>
- Finding a Therapist for PTSD (National Center for PTSD): <https://www.ptsd.va.gov/public/treatment/therapy-med/finding-a-therapist.asp>
- Finding a Social Worker (National Association of Social Workers): <http://www.naswdc.org/credentials/list.asp>
- Understanding National Certification and State Licensure (National Board for Certified Counselors): <http://www.nbcc.org/Certification/CertificationorLicensure>

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