Navigating Systems of Care for Adults with Serious Mental Illness

The mental healthcare system can feel difficult to navigate. Barriers such as systemic racial disparities, a lack of diversity among healthcare providers, cultural stigma, and high costs make it hard to access care. Accessing and finding help when you need it can be difficult. Understanding the different settings that can provide mental health care and what mental health services are available may help. A strong support team to help along the journey is important, as these may be the people you turn to first when looking for help. A support team can include friends and family; community members, like faith leaders; peer-support specialists; or other treatment team members, like pharmacists.

When to seek care

1. Active suicidal thoughts or actions
2. Active attempts to hurt yourself or others
3. A medical emergency, like a medication overdose, with an imminent threat to life that needs immediate medical attention
4. A breakthrough of symptoms that signals a serious mental health crisis
5. Thoughts of suicide, harming self or harming others, but not actions
6. A need for immediate evaluation for hospitalization or risk of self-harm or harm to others
7. A need for mental healthcare services to prevent hospitalization or as a transition after hospitalization
8. A need for mental health treatment or community support while maintaining levels of independence

Where to go

Levels of care

IMMEDIATE SAFETY AND CRISIS MEDICAL RESPONSE
- 911
- 988
- Crisis diversion program
- Law enforcement with crisis intervention teams

HOSPITALIZATION
- Crisis intervention response
- Psychiatric emergency room
- Hospitalization

HOUSTON SUICIDE PREVENTION HOTLINE: 713-228-1555
NATIONAL SUICIDE PREVENTION HOTLINE: 1-800-273-8255

ACUTE CARE SERVICES
Intensive, structured programs focused on treatment that provide care 24 hours/day, 7 days/week for those who need greater assistance. Treatment period and length of stay may range up to a few weeks.

SUBACUTE CARE SERVICES
Stabilization services focused more on rehabilitation and recovery outcomes to help transition back into society. Treatment period can range up to 6 months.

TRANSITION SERVICES
- Intensive outpatient program
- Partial hospitalization program
- Substance abuse stabilization
- Residential treatment facilities

STABILIZATION AND SUPPORTIVE CARE
- Therapy (individual, family, group)
- Medication management
- Social work
- Self-help groups (peer-support services, community-run mental health groups)
- Advocacy (National Alliance on Mental Illness, Mental Health America)
- Faith-based organizations (eg, churches)

OUTPATIENT SERVICES
Structured services focused on effective symptom management and long-term stabilization while maintaining a normal living situation.

What services to engage

People and places that may help

Crisis intervention
- 911
- 988
- Crisis diversion program
- Law enforcement with crisis intervention teams

EMERGENCY SERVICES

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Acute care services

ACUTE CARE SERVICES
- Intensive, structured programs focused on treatment that provide care 24 hours/day, 7 days/week for those who need greater assistance. Treatment period and length of stay may range up to a few weeks.

Subacute care services

SUBACUTE CARE SERVICES
- Stabilization services focused more on rehabilitation and recovery outcomes to help transition back into society. Treatment period can range up to 6 months.

Transition services

TRANSITION SERVICES
- Intensive outpatient program
- Partial hospitalization program
- Substance abuse stabilization
- Residential treatment facilities

Stabilization and supportive care

STABILIZATION AND SUPPORTIVE CARE
- Therapy (individual, family, group)
- Medication management
- Social work
- Self-help groups (peer-support services, community-run mental health groups)
- Advocacy (National Alliance on Mental Illness, Mental Health America)
- Faith-based organizations (eg, churches)

Outpatient services

OUTPATIENT SERVICES
- Structured services focused on effective symptom management and long-term stabilization while maintaining a normal living situation.

Community Health Equity Alliance


