

What are the different types of mental health care providers? There is both significant overlap and important differences between mental health care providers. Each category has its own scope - although they all aim to help individuals, couples and families achieve their various treatment goals.

Family Physicians (MD) can prescribe medication and generally refer their patient to a Psychiatrist or Psychologist. It is important to note that a referral from a Family Physician is not required to engage in therapy with a Psychologist, Registered Social Worker or Registered Psychotherapist.

Psychiatrists (MD) are medical doctors specializing in the diagnosis and treatment of mental illness. Psychiatrists often focus on more complex issues and may hold expertise in a specific area of mental health.

Registered Social Workers (MSW, RSW) may take on a variety of roles including: case management, research/policy and clinical assessment/treatment. These individuals are trained to conduct assessments of an individual's functioning; including their biological, psychological, social, emotional and cultural needs. Their approach often takes into consideration the context of an individual's system (family, workplace, school) or environment (country, climate).

Psychologists (C. Psych) are trained to assess and diagnose challenges in thinking, feeling and behaviour and to help individuals overcome or manage such challenges. Psychologists have completed a doctoral level degree in psychology (Ph.D., Psy.D., Ed.D., D.Psy.) which typically includes a one-year internship.

Registered Psychotherapists (RP or RP(Q)) are individuals who are trained and licensed to provide psychotherapy. These practitioners specialize in providing counselling on interpersonal, social and psychological obstacles that are a result of mental health challenges. Each psychotherapist will have their own approach and areas of specialization as a result of their individual experience and training. Coverage under employer benefits programs is less common given that the regulatory body is relatively new. We strongly urge employers to include coverage for Psychotherapy as fees are typically lower and wait lists are generally shorter than for Psychologists.

Practitioner	Regulatory Body	Diagnose	Prescribe Meds	Coverage
Family physician	Yes	Yes	Yes	Provincial plan
Psychiatrist	Yes	Yes	Yes	Provincial plan
Registered Social Worker	Yes	No	No	Most plans*
Psychologist	Yes	Yes	No	Most plans*
Registered Psychotherapist	Yes	No	No	Some plans*

** To be considered eligible under employer benefits programs, practitioners must be licensed and registered with the regulatory body in the province/territory in which services are rendered.*

** This is not a legal document, and is intended solely for informational purposes.*