

GP MENTAL HEALTH TREATMENT PLAN

FACT SHEET

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This fact sheet was produced by Breast Cancer Network Australia

There's only so much you can talk about with friends and family – you don't want to overburden them. It was a relief to see a psychologist – I really appreciated her honesty. Friends and family can't be honest in a way that a stranger can be. – Jenny

Sometimes a diagnosis of breast cancer can lead to ongoing emotional issues that can interfere with your quality of life and your ability to live well and interact with family and friends. This might include anxiety, ongoing sadness, a feeling of hopelessness, stress or depression.

If you are experiencing emotional concerns and you think that you would benefit from some professional ongoing support, you can speak to your GP about whether a GP Mental Health Treatment Plan might be appropriate for you.

The benefit of such a plan is that it allows you to receive up to 20 individual **and** 10 group allied mental health services per calendar year that are Medicare-subsidised. This includes counselling and other services such as meditation or mindfulness therapy, which aims to help you to 'live in the moment' and deal with day-to-day difficulties. These services can be provided by psychologists, social workers, psychiatrists and occupational therapists.

It is important to know that it is okay to ask for help if you are struggling emotionally. Many people feel relieved that they sought professional support to help them work through some of the fear and worries that they may be experiencing.

For me, the depression was more terrifying than the breast cancer or treatment. It's rarely spoken about and I struggled on in the mire. – Beth

How can I arrange for a GP Mental Health Treatment Plan?

Your GP can assess your individual circumstances and mental health needs and discuss with you whether a GP Mental Health Treatment Plan is appropriate for you.



It is important that you meet with your regular GP when you develop a GP Mental Health Care Plan. Your 'regular' GP is the GP who has provided the most care to you over the past 12 months and who will provide the most care to you in the next 12 months.

You will need to advise the staff that you need to make a longer appointment than a standard consultation so that you can discuss with your GP the feelings and worries you may be experiencing.

If your GP recommends a GP Mental Health Treatment Plan, she or he can then refer you to an allied health worker who specialises in mental health care.

You will be eligible for six Medicare- subsidised sessions under your plan. If your treating specialist feels that you could benefit from additional sessions, you can return to your GP and obtain a new referral to receive the additional sessions. This would then make up the maximum of 20 that you can claim through Medicare in any one year.

It is the clinical discretion of your referring doctor as to the number of mental health sessions that you will be eligible for under this plan.



That decision will take into account the written report that your GP receives from the allied mental health professional at the completion of a course of care. You will be able to talk with you GP at this time about a review of your GP Mental Health Treatment Plan and whether it is meeting your goals and working for you.

If you are receiving individual mental health sessions, remember that you can also receive Medicare rebates for 10 group therapy services per calendar year on top of these individual sessions.

Will there be any cost to me to see a mental health care professional under a GP Mental Health Treatment Plan?

If the mental health service provider accepts the Medicare benefit as full payment for their service, there will be no out-of-pocket costs incurred and you will be bulk billed for their service. If not, you will need to pay the difference between the Medicare rebate and the fee charged. You should speak with the service provider first to check what the out-of-pocket costs will be.

How often should I review my GP Mental Health Care Plan?

You should review your plan regularly (every four to six months) with your GP to assess whether it is working for you. You can visit your GP anytime in between your regular review if you have concerns with your plan or with the service provided by the health professional you were referred to. You can also talk with the practice nurses at your GP in between visits if you have any queries or concerns. The practice nurses may also be able to assist you to book your appointments with a mental health care provider in your local area.

Who will know that I have a GP Mental Health Care Plan?

Your plan will be kept on file with your GP and you will also receive a copy. If you give permission, a copy can also be given to other people involved in your care. You should tell your GP if there is any information that you don't want other people to know about.

When you visit your GP to arrange a GP Mental Health Care Plan, it will attract a different Medicare item number to a regular GP visit.

This will mean that Medicare will have a record that you have visited a doctor for a mental health concern. Medicare is **not** permitted to release this information to anyone without your permission, although there are some cases where very strict exemptions apply.

If you are concerned about any ways that this may affect you, you can talk to your GP or you can call the Cancer Council information and support service on 13 11 20 and ask to speak to someone from the pro bono legal program. This is a free service available in most states.

Here to help

Breast Cancer Network Australia (BCNA) works to support, inform, represent and connect Australians affected by breast cancer.

We have a wide range of free information available including booklets, fact sheets, videos and podcasts. This information can be viewed or ordered at bcna.org.au or by calling our Helpline on 1800 500 258.

Feeling overwhelmed or have further questions?

My Journey online tool

Our new My Journey online tool is available to provide quality, evidence-based information and support tailored to your individual needs and circumstances at all stages of your breast cancer journey. My Journey can be found at bcna.org.au/myjourney

Online Network

BCNA's online network exists to connect you with others going through a similar situation at any time during the night and day. The online network can be found at onlinenetwork.bcna.org.au

BCNA Helpline

Our Helpline cancer nurses are available to help you with any questions you may have. Call 1800 500 258.