



GP Psychiatry Support Line

In 2021, for the sixth consecutive year, more people saw their GP for mental health care than any other condition. This trend has significantly increased with the rolling natural disasters and COVID-19 pandemic in recent years. Between 2020 and 2021, 10.9 per cent of people living in NSW received MBS-supported mental health care. This is on par with the Australia-wide number, which has more than doubled in the decade to 2021. Last year, thirty per cent of these services were provided by a GP.

With the cost of specialist services and a psychiatry workforce shortage, many consumers struggle to access consistent, timely, and preventative care. The GP Psychiatry Support Line is reducing that barrier and providing much needed assistance to a growing number of NSW doctors.

Jointly funded by COORDINARE – South Eastern NSW PHN and seven other NSW PHNs, the GP Psychiatry Support Line is a free service for GPs, delivered on the phone or via secure messaging.



70% of GPs Australia-wide say mental health is their no.1 patient presentation



10.9% of people living in NSW received MBS-supported mental health care in 2020-2021.

94%



of practices in South Eastern NSW have doctors registered with the service

519



GP consults have been conducted by on-call psychiatrists since the service began in 2018

Dr Mitchell Purser, GP at Junction St Medical Practice in Nowra, has been using the support line for almost four years now.

"I feel very fortunate to have had this invaluable service since starting out as a GP - particularly with the pandemic, which has seen patients who had existing mental health concerns require extra support and some who had no previous diagnosis needing treatment," said Dr Purser.

Dr Purser has called the advice line for a variety of patient scenarios, including help with diagnosis and treatment plans, prescribing medications or checking contraindications.

In some urgent cases where complex presentations were involved, the support line was essential for Dr Purser to manage the care of his patients.

"It has made a huge difference in being able to keep patients - whose conditions are in fact able to be treated within primary health - under my care and out of the emergency department.

"In many cases, there are several barriers to accessing services including financial difficulty, so providing ongoing and accessible mental health care to your patients is essential. The support line empowers us as GPs and maximises the benefit of on-the-spot psychiatric advice."

Dr Purser said he frequently urges his colleagues and other GPs to register for the service and access the support line as well as the [webinar series](#) delivered by the psychiatry team.

"It's all there, freely available and it can really enhance what we can provide as GPs. The webinars are also easy to digest and cover highly relevant topics with tangible examples and best practice".

He said while GPs have solid training in mental health treatment, it is a complex area that requires doctors to undertake ongoing professional development.

"Mental health is a large bulk of what we do in general practice, so we are well-versed in common illnesses, diagnostic measures and medications.

"But given this is a highly complex area of medicine, continual learning and PD are essential to our understanding of how medications work in different scenarios, getting the diagnosis right and managing the psychosocial issues."

Participation in each webinar takes a maximum of 60 minutes and earns 2 CPD points (Category 2). Topics to date: domestic abuse and family violence; eating disorders; suicidal ideation and prevention; addiction and substance use disorder; schizophrenia and psychosis; anxiety disorders; mental health and depression in older people; adult ADHD, bipolar disorder, gender dysphoria.

To access this service, GPs must register at [REGISTER | GPsupport 1800161718](#)

GPs can then receive instant access to a psychiatrist between 9am and 5pm, Monday to Friday, on 1800 16 17 18.

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- Dr Mitchell Purser