

MENTAL HEALTH PROFESSIONALS.

AN INDUSTRY GUIDE:

UNDERSTANDING THE DISCIPLINES.

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A COUNSELLOR, PSYCHOTHERAPIST, PSYCHOLOGIST, PSYCHIATRIST, SOCIAL WORKER AND MENTAL HEALTH NURSE?



Since the time of Freud there has been rivalry amongst theoretical orientations and practises, however, therapists can integrate supervisory groups into their practices with colleagues from other approaches (Norcross et al., 2005).

This guide is designed to help people understand what the differences are between the professions so they can better understand how their needs can be met. There is no evidence to suggest that one form of mental health care speciality is superior to another. Everyone is different and has different needs to meet their individual circumstances.

Evidence based practises and modalities are taught to trained professionals, all of whom overlap in many ways, but have distinctions in other ways.

So what's the difference between a Counsellor & Psychotherapist, Psychologist, Psychiatrist, Social Worker, and Mental Health Nurse?

A COUNSELLOR OR PSYCHOTHERAPIST

In contrast to treatments utilising mainly chemical or physical measures, a Counsellor or Psychotherapist uses evidence based therapies to help clients develop interpersonal skills to gain insight to promote positive personality growth and development.



Counsellors are relational practitioners who assist with the resolution of specific problems or changes in life transitions, holistically tailored to the needs of clients (which can be individuals, families, couples or groups) in their family, social and cultural contexts to assist clients to resolve issues affecting their wellbeing and social functioning. Predicated on reciprocity of trust without judgement, the relationship with the client is the focal point of therapy utilised to explore the genesis of underlying problems and disordered patterns of behaviour that require resolution, within the framework of a contracted professional relationship.



Clinical psychologists provide a wide range of psychological services to individuals across the lifespan and for mental health conditions that range from mild to severe and complex (APS).

Counselling psychologists provide a wide variety of techniques and therapeutic approaches that meet the specific needs and circumstances of clients which include mediation, counselling, and mental health disorders (APS).

A PSYCHOLOGIST

A Psychologist will diagnose a problem and sometimes refer clients to a psychiatrist for medication. There are three commonly referred to which include: generalist, clinical, and counselling psychologists. All registered psychologists can diagnose, assess and treat clients within the limits of their competence (AAPI).

A large number of psychologists fulfil some type of a therapeutic role, assessing their client's concerns and life circumstances, and offering support, advice and treatment to address their client's issues (APS).

A psychologist with an area of practice endorsement usually has additional university qualifications and supervised training in that specific area.

More than 60% of Australia's psychologists are psychologists with general registration. A generalist Psychologist works in a number of settings and is often called upon to conduct psychological assessments and write reports for individuals, education and forensic settings (APS).

A PSYCHIATRIST

A Psychiatrist is a medical doctor who provides psychological treatment and prescribes drugs and medicine to patients, diagnosing and managing treatment for complex and serious mental illness. (RANZCP).

Psychiatrists are trained to recognise what will, and will not, respond to medication. In most cases where medication is used, therapy would be part of the treatment, and therapy rather than medication may be used as treatment by psychiatrists (NAPP).





A SOCIAL WORKER

A Social Worker typically works on the ground, directly responding to family crisis and provides interventions in domestic and family violence situations. Social workers operate at the interface between people and their social, cultural and physical environments, some Social Workers undertake further mental health training to become mental health certified.

Social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing (AASW).

A MENTAL HEALTH NURSE

Mental health nurses care for people who struggle with maintaining mental, social, or physical health and teaches the client how to take an active role in self-advocacy and self-care to promote behaviours that contribute to integrated functioning for individuals (ACMHN).



If you have any questions about the content within this industry guide, please contact the Australian Counselling Association via admin@theaca.net.au OR 1300 784 333.

SOURCES

Norcross, J. C., & Goldfried, M. R. (2005). Training in Psychotherapy Integration. Handbook of Psychotherapy Integration.

doi:10.1093/med:psych/9780195165791.003.0021

<https://aapi.org.au/Web/findapsychologist/About-psychologists-for-clients/Web/Accessing-Psychologists/What-is-a-psychologist.aspx?hkey=c760c394-c888-42f0-8e9e-1f2828493563>

[https://psychology.org.au/for-the-public/about-psychology/What-does-a-psychologist-do/Assessment-and-therapy-\(1\)](https://psychology.org.au/for-the-public/about-psychology/What-does-a-psychologist-do/Assessment-and-therapy-(1))

<https://psychology.org.au/for-the-public/about-psychology/types-of-psychologists/General-psychologist>

<https://psychology.org.au/for-the-public/about-psychology/types-of-psychologists/Clinical-psychologists>

<https://psychology.org.au/for-the-public/about-psychology/types-of-psychologists/Counselling-psychology>

<https://www.yourhealthinmind.org/psychiatry-explained/whats-a-psychiatrist>

<https://napp.org.au/about-napp/napp-frequently-asked-questions/>

<https://www.aasw.asn.au/document/item/1201>

<https://acmhnwebstage.imtg.com.au/become-a-mhn/>