

How to seek mental health care for a child in out of home care (foster or kinship)

Steps to seeking mental health care for children in out of home care (foster/kinship)

Seeking mental health care for a child in foster or kinship care can be less straightforward than getting assistance for a biological child. Below we have summarized the steps that carers are generally* required to take to get treatment for children in out of home care.



Seek approval to treat the child's mental health from the Department or Agency through caseworker



Department/Agency assesses the child's needs or may request a GP assessment of the child



In some cases, the Department/Agency must then seek approval from child's biological parents



If approval to treat is provided, the Department will often refer carer to government funded community mental health care services. The carer may also request consent to source their own help through the public or private system. A mental health care plan can be sought from the GP to access Medicare rebates for private treatment.



The carer can request funding from the Department/Agency for out of pocket costs (Medicare Gap) associated with private treatment.

How we can help carers in Victoria

Contact us for:

- Assistance with requesting permission to treat from the Department or agency
- Assistance with requesting funding for mental health care treatment from the Department or agency

* This is intended as a general resource only. You should also seek information from your agency, the Department or NDIA for your specific situation.





Information on mental health care types and costs

If children receive a Mental Health Plan through their GP, they are entitled to a Medicare rebate on up to 20 individual sessions with a psychologist, social worker or occupational therapist in a calendar year (January to December). There are many different types of professionals who provide mental health support and treatment.

A summary information about fees and services on each of these professionals is provided below.¹

Psychiatrists

Qualifications

Psychiatrists have between 11-13 years of training. They first train as medical doctors, and then undertake an additional specialty in psychiatry. Some have a special area of interest in child and adolescent psychiatry.

What can they help with?

Psychiatrists can treat clients using psychological therapies, by prescribing medication, and if needed, by admission to hospital or other mental health care facilities. They can also order medical tests (e.g. blood tests) to make sure there is nothing physical causing a mental disorder or illness. They specialize in the diagnosis, treatment and prevention of mental and psychological disorders and mental illness.

How are they accessed?

You will require a referral from a GP to see a psychiatrist, as they are a specialist.

¹ Please note: information about mental health professionals is provided as helpful general information only and is not applicable to specific cases. Costs provided are indicative only. Carers are responsible for undertaking their own research and seeking advice to ensure the best match of service with their child. Treatment advice should only be taken from a qualified health professional.





What is the cost?

Without a Medicare rebate, the cost of a session with a psychiatrist can be between \$200-\$400. A Mental Health Care Plan will provide a rebate of between \$116 and \$396 for 20 sessions per calendar year.

Paediatricians

Qualifications

Paediatricians are medical doctors, specializing in the treatment of children. They must hold a medical degree and an additional six years of training. Some further specialize in specific paediatric illnesses. Developmental paediatricians specialize in working with developmental delays or behavioural issues.

What can they help with?

Your GP may refer your child to see a Paediatrician if they want to seek a specialist opinion to assess for and treat a medical or developmental concern. These might include Autism, ADHD, brain conditions, behavioural or developmental issues, physical concerns, sleep issues, disabilities, and growth delays. Paediatricians may also provide a referral to a psychologist.

How are they accessed?

In order to access Medicare rebates, your GP must provide a referral.

What is the cost?

If you have the child's Medicare card, and you are seeing a paediatrician as an outpatient at a hospital or community health centre, you will be bulk billed. To see a paediatrician privately, the gap may be between \$40 to \$222.



Psychologists

Qualifications

General psychologists have at minimum 6-years of education and training in psychology and psychological therapies. A Clinical Psychologist will have at minimum 8 years of training.

What can they help with?

Psychologists can help process traumatic events, deal with difficult emotions and stressful situations, work on behaviours that may cause issues in client's lives, provide management and treatment of mental ill health, provide strategies for coping and to counter negative self-beliefs, and help clients work on relationships.

If there is a need to diagnose a specific condition, a psychologist will often be part of a multidisciplinary team who does so. Many practitioners have specific training in trauma-informed practices, which are likely to be highly relevant to many children in out of home care. Some may specialize in working with children and young people. You can often find out on the psychologist's website about their credentials and specialisms, or call them to enquire.

Psychologists do not prescribe medication.

How are they accessed?

You don't have to have a referral from a GP to see a psychologist. You can find one through the Australian Psychological Society's Find a psychologist page: <https://psychology.org.au/find-a-psychologist>



What is the cost?

Without a Mental Health Care Plan from a GP, you will pay between \$150 and \$260 per hour.

With a Mental Health Care Plan, you can access Medicare rebates of \$87 (for a General Psychologist) and \$127 (for a Clinical Psychologist) for 20 sessions per calendar year. Some psychologists bulk bill.





Private Counsellors

Qualifications

Counsellors are required to hold at minimum a Diploma of Counselling through a TAFE or other vocational provider. Some may have a Bachelor of Counselling or a postgraduate qualification (Graduate Diploma or Masters degree).

What can they help with?

Counsellors assist with mental illnesses of all kinds, as well as with coping with life changes and processing grief and traumatic events. They can also help to set goals, build interpersonal skills, work on relationships and with understanding and changing behaviours that can create difficulties in the client's life. It can be done individually, or in groups.

More information is available at:

<https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/counsellors-and-counselling>

How are they accessed?

You can self-refer to most counsellors, although some may prefer you seek a referral.

To assist with finding a counsellor in your area you can visit:

- The Australian Counselling Association can help you find a registered counsellor: <https://www.theaca.net.au/find-registered-counsellor.php>
- The Psychotherapy and Counselling Federation of Australia has a 'Find a Therapist' page here: <https://pacfa.org.au/FindATherapist>
- Life Supports Counselling has a 'Find a location' service here: <https://lifesupportscounselling.com.au/our-locations/>

You can also speak to your GP about who they recommend in your area.

What is the cost?

Counselling can cost between \$100 to \$200 per hour on average, and a Medicare rebate for between \$75 and \$125 can be accessed through a Mental Health Care Plan for most registered allied health practitioners.





School Counsellors

Qualifications

A School Counsellor must have at minimum a bachelor's degree in psychology or a related field, and hold current registration with the appropriate body.

Guidance Officers do not necessarily hold the same qualifications. Ask the child's school for information on their counsellor's qualifications if you are unsure.

What can they help with?

School Counsellors can generally:

- Provide academic guidance
- Help with understanding learning needs
- Provide semi-formal assessments for learning disabilities and difficulties
- Assist with career planning
- Support with personal issues
- lead support groups.

You can generally expect sessions to focus on building rapport, learning about what the child/young person wants to get out of sessions, and setting goals and getting support with achieving them.

How are they accessed?

Many schools have school counsellors available for children and young people to talk to. Some schools assign children/young people to a counsellor at the beginning of each year, and others leave it up to the child/ their carer/parent to set an appointment. Generally, you can seek an appointment through the school's office, though a trusted teacher or via the school website.

What is the cost?

School counsellors are free to attend.

More information can be found at:

<https://psychology.org.au/psychology/about-psychology/what-does-a-psychologist-do/psychologists-in-schools/information-schools-resources/psychologists-in-schools-information-for-parents>





Play Therapist

Qualifications

Play Therapists can have different levels of qualification, depending on whether they are a Certified or Accredited Play Therapist, or a Certified Practitioner of Therapeutic Play.

A Certified Play Therapist holds a Diploma, and undertakes 200 hours of clinically supervised work with children, as well as ongoing clinical supervision each month.

An Accredited Play Therapist must have the same qualifications as a Certified Practitioner, with the addition of 450 hours of clinically supervised work with children.

A Certified Practitioner must undertake a training course at Certificate level including 100 hours of clinically supervised work with children.

For more on qualifications:

<http://www.playtherapy.org.au/australasiastandards.html>

What can they help with?

Play therapy is generally about providing children with ways to express and deal with their emotions in a non-threatening environment, most often through engaging children and young people with toys and games. Working with a play therapist can help children to process their experiences, develop strategies to cope with their emotions, and increase their emotional literacy and resilience. This can help children manage and reduce problematic behaviours.

For information on what kinds of emotional or behavioural problems play therapy may be helpful for, visit

<http://www.playtherapy.org.au/playdeciding.html>

How are they accessed?

Anyone can self-refer to a Play Therapist. APPTA provides a map of play therapist members here: <https://appta.org.au/member-directory/#!directory/map>





What is the cost?

On average, Play Therapists can cost around \$150 per session (around 40-50 minutes). There is generally no rebate through Medicare for Play Therapy unless it is provided by a registered psychologist.

Art Therapist

Qualifications

To practice as a registered Arts Therapist, practitioners must have a Masters degree and undertake 750 hours of supervised clinical placement.

What can they help with?

Arts Therapists use visual arts to help people express emotions and process experiences that can be difficult to talk about. It can help children and young people develop their focus, confidence, physical coordination, and provides a creative outlet for coping with difficult feelings and life events. It can help with reducing stress, developing communications and interpersonal skills, and resolving internal conflicts.

Some information on what to expect in a session can be found here: <https://arttherapyresources.com.au/happens-art-therapy-session/>

How are they accessed?

Whether or not you need a referral depends on the practitioner. The peak body for Creative Arts Therapies has a 'Find a Therapist' directory here: <https://www.anzacata.org/FIND-A-THERAPIST>

What is the cost?

Art therapy can cost between \$100 to \$180 per session. You may be able to get a rebate through a Mental Health Plan, with rebates available for up to 10 individual sessions and 10 group sessions.

More information: <https://ahpa.com.au/allied-health-professions/art-therapy/>



Animal-assisted therapy

Qualifications

There are two types of animal assisted therapy. One is with a Clinical Animal Assisted Therapist –who are trained health professionals (for example, occupational therapists or psychologists) with a Bachelor’s degree at minimum, assisted by an animal co-therapist.



There are also community animal assisted therapists, who do not hold a Bachelor’s degree in a health science, who work with a dog or other animal.

What can they help with?

While there is less evidence available on how effective this is compared with other forms of therapy, there is some evidence that indicates that socialisation with animals (generally dogs or horses) assists with general wellbeing, social and communication skills, education, motor skill development, emotional regulation and motivation.

Sessions can focus on building a bond, working on goals, creating an atmosphere of calm, giving care (for example, grooming a horse), or simply enjoying interaction or play.

Some services may use a trauma-informed approach.

Note animal-assisted therapy is not the same as an assistance or service animal, which are working animals that undergo rigorous training to assist with specific disabilities and tasks and is generally placed with one owner, for life.

How are they accessed?

You may need to attend a centre to access animal-assisted therapy, or you may be able to find a service that can visit you at your home. Therapy animals are also often used in hospitals, schools and other facilities.





You can search for animal assisted therapies/ equine therapy in your area and research their qualifications and fees. Some places to start your research are suggested below.

- Equine psychotherapy providers-
<https://www.equinepsychotherapy.net.au/find-an-equine-therapy-practitioner/>
- A list of Animal-Assisted Therapy organisations can be found at:
<https://www.petcloud.com.au/d/blog/animal-assisted-therapy/>

What is the cost?

Fees depend on the provider and their qualification level. If you are accessing a Clinical Animal Assisted Therapist (e.g. an occupational therapist or psychologist), you may be able to access a rebate through a Mental Health Care Plan.

Some animal-assisted interventions are eligible for NDIS funding if in line with goals and Plan. Further information on NDIS eligibility and a list of evidence for animal assisted therapies is available at:

<https://www.ndis.gov.au/community/research-and-evaluation/early-childhood-interventions-our-research/autism-crc-early-intervention-report/animal-assisted-interventions>

Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCHOs)

What can they help with?

ACCHOs provide culturally appropriate primary health care and are operated by the local Aboriginal community. ACCHOs take a holistic approach to wellness, inclusive of social, emotional, cultural and physical wellness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people feel more comfortable accessing medical services provided by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander healthcare professionals.

As well as primary health care, each ACCHO offers different programs and services, depending on the needs of the local community. Examples include public health and mental health campaigns and community wellbeing and safety programs such as play groups, transport to medical services, youth work, justice, disability care, family counselling and child services.





You can locate your local ACCHO by visiting:
<https://www.naccho.org.au/map?hsLang=en-au>

How are they accessed?

No referral is required unless it is for a patient to see a specialist at an ACCHO centre. Contact your local ACCHO to book an appointment.

What is the cost?

Most non-specialist services are bulk billed.

Online Mental Health Resources

Mental Health Online Resources

Below is a non-exhaustive list of providers of mental health care and resources to assist carers to find the information they need.

National Center for Childhood Grief

Website: <https://childhoodgrief.org.au/>

The National Centre for Childhood Grief works to help bereaved children and teach them how to live with grief. They provide counselling (one on one and group) for children. Counselling for children aged 3-18 years is free and unlimited and can be delivered face to face at the centre (Sydney), over the phone or online.

Resources, including books, CDs and brochures are available for purchase on their website

Children of Parents with a Mental Illness

Website: <https://www.copmi.net.au/>

The COPMI website features a page for kids and young people with a parent with a mental illness. It provides information, videos and advice from other young people to help kids and young people learn about different types of mental illness and their causes, to reduce stigma





associated with mental illness, reduce worry about developing the same mental illness, and to cope with the mental illness of a parent.

Beyond Blue

Website: <https://www.beyondblue.org.au/who-does-it-affect/young-people/support-and-services>

Beyond Blue provides information on mental health and tips on taking care of yourself for young people. They have a support line people can call, as well as an online forum for young people to connect with others with similar experiences.

They also have a number of informational resources on anxiety, depression, suicide, pregnancy and early parenthood, grief and loss, drugs and alcohol, and natural disasters and their impact on mental health.

Black Dog Institute

Website: <https://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/emergency-help/> & <https://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/resources-support/>

The Black Dog Institute does research into mental health, and provides evidence-based information on mental illnesses and general mental wellbeing.

They list a number of digital tools and apps such as self-assessment tools to help in discussions with GPs, as well as support groups, stories of lived experience and other helpful links.

There is also a free self-guided online wellbeing and resilience program provided for young people aged 13-16 called BITE Back.

<https://www.blackdoginstitute.org.au/resources-support/digital-tools-apps/bite-back/>

Australian Psychological Society (APS)

Website: <https://psychology.org.au/>

This is a helpful website on which to search for a psychologist.





Kids Helpline

Website: <https://kidshelpline.com.au/>

Kids Helpline provides a free, confidential 24/7 phone counselling service for young people aged 5-25. They also have age-specific online resources for children and young people, as well as parents and carers. They feature stories by other young people, a quiz to help children get in touch with their feelings,

They have a social platform supported by Kids Helpline counselors where children and young people can talk to others going through similar challenges called My Circle – <https://kidshelpline.com.au/my-circle>.

They have also created an app called 'niggle' which helps children and young people to track their wellbeing and get personalised information on mental health, relationships, life issues etc.

<https://kidshelpline.com.au/niggle>

Tuning in to Kids

Website: <https://tuningintokids.org.au/parents/>

Tuning in to Kids provides evidence-based training for parents and carers in 'emotional coaching'. This runs as both a 10 module online program or an in person program delivered by trained facilitators. The online program costs \$99 to access for a year.

There are many other non-profit organisations who provide support and resources for specific disorders or mental illnesses.

