Navigating Systems of Care for Adults with Serious Mental Illness

The mental healthcare system can feel difficult to navigate. Barriers such as systemic racial disparities, a lack of diversity among healthcare providers, cultural stigma, and high costs make it hard to access care.1-4 Accessing and finding help when you need it can be difficult. Understanding the different settings that can provide mental health care and what mental health services are available may help.

A strong support team to help along the journey is important, as these may be the people you turn to first when looking for help. A support team can include friends and family; community members, like faith leaders; peer-support specialists; or other treatment team members, like pharmacists.

When to seek care5-8
Feelings and situations you may experience

Active suicidal thoughts or actions
Active attempts to hurt yourself or others
A medical emergency, like a medication overdose, with an imminent threat to life that needs immediate medical attention

Where to go
Levels of care

IMMEDIATE SAFETY AND CRISIS MEDICAL RESPONSE

- 911
- 988
- Crisis diversion program
- Law enforcement with crisis intervention teams

HOUSTON SUICIDE PREVENTION HOTLINE: 713-228-1555
NATIONAL SUICIDE PREVENTION HOTLINE: 1-800-273-8255

A breakthrough of symptoms that signals a serious mental health crisis
Thoughts of suicide, harming self or harming others, but not actions
A need for immediate evaluation for hospitalization or risk of self-harm or harm to others

HOSPITALIZATION

- Crisis intervention response
- Psychiatric emergency room
- Hospitalization

HOUSTON SUICIDE PREVENTION HOTLINE: 713-228-1555
NATIONAL SUICIDE PREVENTION HOTLINE: 1-800-273-8255

A need for mental healthcare services to prevent hospitalization or as a transition after hospitalization

TRANSITION SERVICES

- Intensive outpatient program
- Partial hospitalization program
- Substance abuse stabilization
- Residential treatment facilities

A need for mental health treatment or community support while maintaining levels of independence

STABILIZATION AND SUPPORTIVE CARE

- Therapy (individual, family, group)
- Medication management
- Social work
- Self-help groups (peer-support services, community-run mental health groups)
- Advocacy (National Alliance on Mental Illness, Mental Health America)
- Faith-based organizations (eg, churches)

OUTPATIENT SERVICES

Structured services focused on effective symptom management and long-term stabilization while maintaining a normal living situation.10

What services to engage
People and places that may help

EMERGENCY SERVICES

Intensive, structured programs focused on treatment that provide care 24 hours/day, 7 days/week for those who need greater assistance. Treatment period and length of stay may range up to a few weeks.9

ACUTE CARE SERVICES

Stabilization services focused more on rehabilitation and recovery outcomes to help transition back into society. Treatment period can range up to 6 months.9

SUBACUTE CARE SERVICES

Level of care utilization systems for psychiatric and addiction services.