

5 Levels of Treatment for Mental Health and Substance Abuse



Approximately 1 in 5 American adults (nearly 44 million people) and 13-20% of children living in the United States will experience a diagnosable mental health disorder in any given year. Even though it's common, the decision to enter treatment can be difficult. Knowing where to turn is half the battle. There are 5 standard levels of care for substance abuse and other mental health services. It's difficult to know which is right for you or your loved one. Use this guide as a starting point. Once you contact a provider, they will provide an evaluation and will recommend the level of treatment needed.

| | Inpatient Acute | Residential | Partial Hospitalization | Intensive Outpatient | Outpatient |
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| Who | For patients with urgent, life-threatening, crisis situations, who need 24-hour care and daily doctor visits to stabilize psychiatric issues or detox from drugs or alcohol. | For those whose health is at risk while living in their own community. | For those at risk of hospitalization due to acute distress or as a step-down for those who have been hospitalized. | For those at risk of hospitalization, or as a step-down for those who have been hospitalized. | For anyone with a substance abuse problem, mental health condition, or as a step-down for those in a higher level of care. |
| Goal of Treatment | Goal is to stabilize a crisis or assist (medically or other) in the process of detoxification from substance abuse. | Goal is to separate from the patient's every day routine, family, and friends, to completely focus on healing and recovery. | Goal is to prevent or reduce inpatient hospitalization and provide treatment services a level of intensity similar to an inpatient or residential program. | Goal is to allow patients to continue their therapies in an intensive environment yet continue to accommodate work and family schedules. | The goal is to provide additional support for the progress made in higher levels of care or provide support for everyday issues related to mental health or substance abuse. |
| Setting | Mental health hospital or mental health ward of a regular hospital. | Supervised, home-like facility. | Hospital, clinic, office, or other facility (non-residential). | Hospital, clinic, office, or other facility. | Hospital, clinic, office, or other facility. |
| Expected Frequency and Duration | Duration is usually a few days to a week. | Duration is 1-6 months in a home-like setting to stabilize the person until they can return to the community. In cases of substance abuse, many patients move into a sober living home after residential treatment which is a less restrictive group home where residents can learn to re-enter society with support. | Typically consists of 5-7 days per week for 4 hours each day. Treatment duration varies but usually lasts from 6 weeks to 6 months. | Consists of frequent visits (usually 3 days per week) and an average of 3-4 hours of treatment per day for a set period of time (often 4-6 weeks, depending on the program or illness). | Visits are generally once per week but can vary per patient. Duration can be a few weeks to several years. |
| Treatment Type | Patient meets with a team of professionals, including a psychiatrist, who may prescribe or adjust medication. May include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Group therapy Individual therapy Detox | Therapy is provided in a supervised, live-in health care facility by a multidisciplinary staff. May include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Group therapy Individual therapy Family therapy | Structured program similar to IOP, includes group, individual, and family therapy when appropriate. Often includes an evaluation by a psychiatrist, who may prescribe or adjust medications. | Structured treatment that teaches how to manage the disease and better cope with emotional and behavioral issues. May include group, individual, and family therapy when appropriate. | 3 types of outpatient treatment: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Individual counseling — includes counseling sessions with a therapist in person, via text, or video conferencing. Medication evaluation and management — includes visits with a psychiatrist, doctor, or nurse practitioner to determine if medication would be helpful. Group therapy — includes weekly group sessions with other people with the same or similar mental health issues. In group therapy, people often learn from one another's experiences. These may include community-based, free 12-Step programs. |