

Behavioral Health Help – How to get started

Making the decision to reach out for help can be intimidating. This guide is intended to provide important information about the types of care available and how to access them.

Dispelling myths:

- ***I would feel weak:*** Getting help is not a sign of weakness. Your health, happiness, and readiness are important both personally and for your career. Knowing yourself and taking the initiative to improve your health and functioning is a sign of strength and personal responsibility.
- ***I will lose my security clearance/be ineligible to gain security clearance:*** There are no automatically disqualifying behavioral health conditions or treatments. A study of adjudicative actions for security clearance (grant, deny, revoke) from 2012-2018 of found that **only 12 out of over 2.3 million** denial/revocation decisions were for mental health issues alone, and **none** of these were denied or revoked just for seeking care. In short, it is **extremely** unlikely that seeking behavioral health treatment will result in a loss of security clearance.
- ***I will be sent to the med board:*** Readiness and temporary profile decisions are made on the basis of symptom severity and impact on day to day and Soldier functioning. Simply seeking care does not lead to a profile, and being proactive can ensure that issues don't progress to the point of impacting your career. Even if you are placed on a temporary behavioral health profile, Soldiers generally have a year to seek care and recover before a determination has to be made regarding fitness for duty/entry to the med board process.

Once you're ready to get started, you need to decide what services you are interested in:

- Generally, behavioral health services fall into two main categories: medications and therapy.
- It is important to consider whether one or the other of these services, or a combination of both, best fits your goals for treatment and recovery.
- **Medications:**
 - Behavioral health medications can be prescribed by any physician. You can reach out to your primary care provider or to a psychiatrist/psychiatric nurse practitioner, who are medical providers who have specialized training in treating behavioral health conditions.
 - Medications can help to address chemical imbalances in the brain that contribute to and sustain mental health conditions.
 - Medications cannot address issues like coming to terms with past trauma, our thinking/behavioral/relationship factors that contribute to distress, or developing new coping skills.
 - There is no "magic pill", but medications can be a key part of recovery.
- **Therapy:**
 - Therapy or counseling can be conducted by a number of trained behavioral health professionals, including psychologists, licensed clinical social workers, licensed professional counselors, and licensed marriage and family therapists. These providers have slightly different training and licensure requirements, but all will have expertise in providing counseling services to help individuals experiencing behavioral health symptoms.
 - Therapy can help you to understand yourself, your symptoms, your thoughts, and your behaviors better. It can also help you learn new skills to cope with and overcome behavioral health symptoms. Therapists can take more time to listen and develop a treatment plan that addresses the goals that are most important to you.
 - Therapy is often provided one on one, but can involve group therapy as well. Many providers offer a combination of in person and virtual (video/telephone) services depending on your needs and preferences.
 - Therapy cannot effect direct biochemical change within the brain, although there is good evidence that therapy can result in long-term changes in biochemistry through thinking and behavioral change.

Once you've decided what type of care you want, your next steps will depend on your service history and/or insurance coverage.

Military One Source:

- Military One Source offers up to 12 sessions of **free** non-medical counseling to Service Members. Sessions can be in person, by phone, or by secure video connection. They do not offer services related to behavioral health medication.
- Non-medical counseling can help address issues like relationship problems, stress management, adjustment difficulties, parenting or grief and loss. It cannot address active suicidal or homicidal thoughts, sexual assault, child abuse, domestic violence, alcohol or other substance abuse, or serious mental health conditions (clinical depression, post-traumatic stress disorder, etc.)
- Call 800-342-9647 to learn more and get started

Vet Centers:

- Vet Centers provide **free, confidential** individual, group, and couples/family therapy services to Service Members and Veterans who have either served in combat or who have experienced military sexual trauma. They can also provide brief services to Soldiers and Veterans who don't meet those criteria and help you get connected to a longer-term provider if needed.
- Their services are always easy to access (just call or walk in), they have evening and weekend hours for those who can't attend appointments during business hours, and the majority of Vet Center providers are Veterans themselves. They also offer virtual services, so even if you don't live near a Vet Center, you can still get help.
 - St. Louis Vet Center: 287 N. Lindbergh Blvd, Creve Coeur 314-894-5739
 - Kansas City Vet Center: 4800 Main Street, Suite 107 816-753-1866
 - Springfield Vet Center: 319 E. Battlefield Road, Suite B 417-891-4988
 - Columbia Vet Center: 4040 Rangeline Street, Suite 105 573-814-6206

VA Healthcare:

- VA hospitals and community-based clinics offer comprehensive health and behavioral health services to qualifying Veterans.
- In general terms, these are the broad eligibility considerations for VA healthcare:
 - You served 24 continuous months of federal active duty service **OR**
 - You were called up on Title 10 orders and served the full period to which you were called to active duty **OR**
 - You have been awarded a service-connected disability by VA **OR**
 - You experienced military sexual trauma (Note: eligibility for care is limited to behavioral health services related to military sexual trauma, and if you do not fall into other eligibility categories, you are not eligible for full health care benefits)
- VA also considers financial factors into eligibility. Those with higher incomes who are not service-connected may have copays or be ineligible for services.
- You should never assume that you are not eligible. It is good practice to communicate with VA and get a formal determination from their eligibility and enrollment department.
- VA hospitals have designated geographical coverage areas. To find out about enrolling, contact the one that is closest to you, and if your county falls under a different VA, they can let you know.

- **VA Healthcare (continued):**
 - National VA Enrollment: 1-877-222-8387
 - Columbia MO VA: 573-814-6000 x53071
 - Fayetteville AR VA: 479-444-5014
 - Iowa City IA VA: 319-338-0581 x6345
 - Kansas City MO VA: 816-861-4700 x52498
 - Leavenworth KS VA: 913-682-2000 (ask for enrollment and eligibility)
 - Poplar Bluff MO VA: 573-686-4151 x52177
 - St. Louis MO VA: 314-652-4100 x54165
- Once you have successfully enrolled in VA healthcare, you will need to contact the behavioral health department at your local VA medical center/outpatient clinic and request an initial appointment to get established with a provider and begin treatment. Some VA hospitals may also require that you establish primary care services before being referred to behavioral health specialty care.

If you have Tricare:

- Tricare maintains an online directory of preferred providers that can be accessed online.
- Most of the state of Missouri falls under Tricare West
 - The web address for Tricare West is: https://www.tricare-west.com/content/hnfs/home/tw/bene/symbolic_links/nw-prov-dir-app.html0
 - Most MOARNG members who have Tricare are covered under Tricare Reserve Select.
 - Under Provider Details, in the Type drop down box, you can choose “BEHAVIORAL SPECIALIST”, which will show both psychiatrists and therapists who accept Tricare.
 - If you get limited options for care, adjust your search radius and maximum number of providers to return.
 - At this web link, if you enter your zip code and get the following search error: “The ZIP Code you entered 63110 was not found in a HNFS supported TRICARE Region”, you are covered under Tricare East.
- The St. Louis area and some other eastern parts of Missouri are covered under Tricare East
 - The web address for Tricare East is: <https://www.goperspecta.com/VPD/HumanaMilitary/public/ProviderSearch/Main>
 - From this page, click on “Advanced Search”.
 - In Advanced Search, click on “View all” under Specialty.
 - From here, you can click on those services you wish to focus on. Suggestions could be “Counselor”, “Social Worker – Clinical”, “Psychologist”, “Marriage and Family Therapist”, or “Psychiatrist”.
 - If you get limited options for care, adjust your search radius and/or add additional categories of service providers.

If you have private insurance:

- Most insurance plans maintain a website where you can find in-network preferred providers.
 - The link to this website is typically found on the back of your insurance card.
- Alternately, you can contact customer service by phone for assistance.
 - The customer service number is also typically listed on the back of your insurance card.

If you are uninsured:

- Give an Hour
 - Give an Hour is made up of private practice therapists who offer to donate their services for Military and Veterans.
 - The Give an Hour website is: <https://giveanhour.org/>
 - Click on Military and Veterans in the Find a Provider menu
 - Click on the Search for a Provider button
 - Keep in mind that Give an Hour is a directory of volunteers. Options may be limited, and not all providers may be taking new clients at any given time.
- Missouri Department of Mental Health
 - The Missouri Department of Mental Health gives funding to behavioral health providers throughout the state to support providing services to those who are uninsured or underinsured.
 - You can find the agency or agencies that provide services for your county at: <https://dmh.mo.gov/behavioral-health/treatment-services/locating-services-treatment/community-mental-health-centers>
 - Select your county from the drop down menu
 - These agencies may have restrictions on their ability to provide care based on capacity, income, geography, and/or diagnosis.
- Federally Qualified Health Centers
 - Federally Qualified Health Centers typically offer comprehensive health care, behavioral health care, and sometimes dental care to those who are low income and/or uninsured.
 - You can find the center or centers that provide services for your county at: https://npidb.org/organizations/ambulatory_health_care/federally-qualified-health-center-fqhc_261qf0400x/mo/
 - Enter your City or zip code and click Filter
 - These agencies may require you to establish primary care services before being referred to behavioral health care. They may also have restrictions on their ability to provide care based on capacity, income, and/or geography.

If you are crisis:

- The National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is available 24 hours a day/7 days a week to offer support, help, even just someone to talk to. You can contact them anonymously if you wish. Take down this number and make sure you have access to it in multiple places (on your fridge, in your wallet, in your car, etc.) **1-800-273-8255**
 - They also offer live chat via their website: <https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/>
 - You can also access crisis support via text by texting HOME to 741741

If you still need help or have more questions:

- Our Psychological Health Program staff can help you with short term support, information and education, as well as with find providers and resources. Here's our contact information:
 - Chelsea Sherley, Psychological Health Coordinator – 573-638-9500 x37275, chelsea.r.sherley.civ@army.mil
 - Kristin Baker, Director of Psychological Health – 573-638-9500 x37083, kristin.m.baker11.civ@army.mil