



# WHAT TO EXPECT WHEN ACCESSING MENTAL HEALTH SUPPORT IN HONG KONG

Not sure where to start when seeking mental health support in Hong Kong? This guide will help you to get started and describe what you can expect when you visit your chosen mental health professional.

## TYPES OF PSYCHOLOGICAL SUPPORT

There are different types of psychological support and styles of therapy available in Hong Kong. The information in this resource can help you to decide what type of mental health professional will be right for you.

We recommend that, for any professional you choose to work with, you check their qualifications and experience before making an appointment. You'll want to ensure that whoever you work with has professional qualifications and membership with a regulating body. Please refer to the list in the [Hong Kong Professional Psychological Accrediting Bodies](#) section below.

If you'd like to know about their preferred therapeutic approach, you can ask them for this information before the session. Counsellors and Psychologists will often specialise in different types of therapy, for example, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) or Psychodynamic psychotherapy, to mention a few. They may also blend different approaches depending on your needs. Therapeutic approaches are typically supported by empirical evidence and have been proven to be effective. If you are curious about the type of therapy best suited to you, you can do some research on this beforehand.

## WHAT DOES A COUNSELLOR DO? WHAT TO EXPECT WHEN YOU VISIT A COUNSELLOR?

Counsellors apply a therapeutic approach to help clients with a variety of problems including depression, stress, anxiety, and general life issues. Counsellors adopt a positive, strength-based and integrated approach, which focuses on the client's assets, strengths and the role of their environment. The practice of Counselling comprises various therapeutic activities to assist clients to resolve life events and emotional problems; anticipate and prevent difficulties that may arise in the future, as well as help clients to discover and develop their potential. Counselling services include a broad range of culturally sensitive practices that help clients alleviate psychological maladjustments and ultimately improve their daily functioning. They work with individuals, couples and groups. An appointment with a Counsellor can be conducted online or in-person and typically lasts for 50 minutes.

\*Source: <https://www.dcop.hkps.org.hk/>

## WHAT DOES A PSYCHOLOGIST DO? WHAT TO EXPECT WHEN YOU VISIT A PSYCHOLOGIST?

A Psychologist will work with you in a similar way to a Counsellor, but the difference is that they can diagnose clients and have more

advanced training to support clients with a spectrum of mental health disorders; from anxiety through to schizophrenia. They work with individuals or groups and are trained in a range of therapeutic models to treat mental health difficulties, but they cannot prescribe medication. An appointment with a Psychologist can be conducted online or in-person and typically lasts for 50 minutes.

### **WHAT DOES A PSYCHIATRIST DO? WHAT TO EXPECT WHEN YOU VISIT A PSYCHIATRIST?**

A Psychiatrist is a medically qualified doctor specialising in the diagnosis, treatment and management of mental health conditions. An initial appointment with a Psychiatrist will last for 60-90 minutes with follow up appointments typically lasting around 30 minutes. Psychiatrists may recommend a range of treatments including a combination of medication and therapy with a Counsellor or Psychologist.

### **WHAT DOES AN EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (EAP) DO?**

EAP is typically a free service provided to you by your employer. When you call an EAP hotline you will speak to an operator with mental health training who will ask you a series of questions to understand the urgency and nature of your situation. Depending on the information you share with them, they will triage you to the appropriate level of care. If your situation is not urgent, they will put you in touch with a consultant who will contact you to schedule an appointment with either a Counsellor or Clinical Psychologist. This can be conducted online or in-person.

The time between the initial contact and the appointment may vary. The initial call is not a therapy session, so if you feel you need help immediately we recommend you contact the Samaritans on Samaritans Hong Kong 24/7 hotline: 28960000 or email [jo@samaritans.org.hk](mailto:jo@samaritans.org.hk)

All information shared with an EAP is confidential. The EAP provider might share aggregated data with

your employer, but your personal details and/or specific details of your sessions will never be shared unless the provider is seriously worried about you harming yourself or someone else.

Remember to ask for the profile and credentials of the professional assigned to your case so you can learn more about who you will be meeting.



## **FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

### **How do I know which type of mental health professional to visit?**

If you are unsure where to start but feel that you would benefit from talking to a health care professional about your mental health, you could start by visiting your GP or by contacting your EAP provider, who can direct you to the appropriate support service.

### **What is the process once I have made an appointment?**

Your first visit to a mental health professional is referred to as an 'intake session'. This is the first session where the Counsellor/Psychologist/ Psychiatrist will get to know you and learn how you're doing. They may want to conduct a formal assessment to collect data to deepen their understanding of your mental health status so you might be asked to answer several questions prior to your appointment, or they might run through the questions with you during the appointment.

The intake session is an important opportunity for you to decide if you feel comfortable speaking with this particular mental health professional.

Ask yourself whether you:

- like their communication style
- feel safe and comfortable with them
- see yourself developing a good rapport

If the answer is yes, then you can schedule your next session with them. The focus of subsequent sessions will vary depending on your needs and

the therapy approach used, but typically you will explore the problem that you are facing and work towards goals together.

### How long does treatment take?

Treatment time varies depending on the issue you are facing, but all mental health professionals aim to equip you with coping strategies and tools that you can use outside of the therapy room so that eventually you no longer need their support. They will end the treatment period when you both feel that you are able to apply what you have learnt through treatment. Don't worry, they will give you ample notice before the final session. If you are not comfortable with the uncertainty around the number of sessions, you can ask how long they expect your treatment to last during the intake session. They may be able to give you an estimate based on their initial assessment, but remember the process depends on your progress, so this may vary.

### How do I find out if it's covered on my insurance?

These details should be accessible via your organisation's internal HR portal or employee benefits portal. If it is unclear, you can call your insurance provider to enquire about the coverage available to you.

### What if the service I need is not covered by my insurer?

Currently most employers in Hong Kong provide coverage for Psychiatry but offer limited coverage for Psychology or Counselling services. Your organisation might have a 'wellness budget' or equivalent that you can use to cover some of your sessions with a Psychologist or Counsellor.

Otherwise, you may have to pay for these services out of pocket. If you are unable to pay for private services in Hong Kong, there are a few clinics that work on a sliding scale, such as:

- [ReSource Counselling Centre](#)
- [St. James' Settlement Counselling](#)

If you are wondering whether the public health system is an option for you, bear in mind the waiting time for appointments is very long for cases not considered to be 'severe'. Information on HK Government mental health services is available [here](#).

### Will my employer find out that I've visited a mental health professional if I use my insurance coverage?

If you are worried about confidentiality, you can discuss the limits of confidentiality with the mental health professional that you choose to visit.

### I still don't feel like visiting a professional, are there any informal resources I can use?

You could consider joining a support group to speak with others who might be going through something similar to you: [Shall We Talk Peer Support](#)

There are also various Government approved online chat tools that you can try: [Shall We Talk Online Support](#)

### SUMMARY

It takes courage to talk about your mental health but remember you are not alone. One in four people in Hong Kong experiences a mental health challenge in their lifetime.

Mental health is as varied as your physical health and so are the options to support you. Your needs may change as your mental health fluctuates so being aware of the different resources is a great start.

If you have any questions regarding any of the information provided please don't hesitate to contact City Mental Health Alliance Hong Kong on [info@cmhahk.org](mailto:info@cmhahk.org) and one of the team will get back to you.

## HONG KONG PROFESSIONAL PSYCHOLOGICAL ACCREDITING BODIES

- The Hong Kong Institute of Clinical Psychologists (\*HKICP is the only healthcare professional body accredited by the HK Department of Health responsible for administering the register of clinical psychologists)
- The Hong Kong Professional Counselling Association (HKPCA)
- The Hong Kong Association of Doctors in Clinical Psychology (HKADCP)
- The Hong Kong Psychological Society (HKPS)

### Disclaimer:

This brochure contains information collated by CMHA HK on mental health services provided by local organisations in Hong Kong and is for informational purposes only. It is not intended to be a substitute for professional mental health advice, diagnosis or treatment. Whilst the information has been collated from official sources and is current at the time of writing, we are unable to guarantee all information is free of error. Please refer to the specific organisation's website for the most up to date information. CMHA HK does not take responsibility for content from external sources, and any external links should not be taken as endorsement of these services.



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**City Mental Health  
Alliance** HK

CMHA HK is a not-for-profit membership organization. We are an alliance of businesses working together with experts and partner organisations to achieve our vision that every workplace will protect support and create positive mental health for its people.

We provide training event reports research and practical support for companies wishing to create mentally healthy workplaces.

## CONTACT

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