

Understanding the Difference Between Mental Health Professionals

Relief has built a database of thousands of mental health professionals available to support and treat those individuals suffering from a mental health challenge. And because there are a variety of mental health diagnoses, each person benefits from a different type of professional. Here, we differentiate between the many professionals available so that you, together with the Relief referral specialist, can connect with the best fit. Remember, it may take some time to find the professional best suited to support you and that does not mean the professional – or type of therapy – is faulty. Patience is critical when managing a mental health challenge.

please note that the below terms are relevant for the US. In other countries, terms and licensing may differ. For questions, please reach out to your local Relief office.

Definitions

Psychiatrist- A psychiatrist is a medical doctor with special training in the diagnosis and treatment of mental and emotional disorders. As medical doctors, they are qualified to prescribe medication. Most psychiatrists ONLY prescribe medications and do not provide psychotherapy. Patients often benefit from the combination of psychotherapy and medication. It is therefore common to have both a therapist and a psychiatrist. A child and adolescent psychiatrist specializes in the treatment of children and adolescents.

Psychologist- Clinical psychologists are trained in the practice of psychological assessments, diagnosis of mental illness and individual or group psychotherapy. Psychologists have a doctoral degree in psychology from an accredited doctoral program. To receive a license, a psychologist must have extended supervised professional experience, including a clinical internship.

Licensed Clinical Social Worker (LCSW)- An LCSW provides individual or group psychotherapy and mental health diagnoses, working with clients and their families on the road to mental and emotional well-being. A social worker is also trained in crisis intervention and can connect people with the resources they need to improve their health. An LCSW must have a master's degree in social work from an accredited graduate program. In order to receive a license, an LCSW must have 2000 to 3000 hours of supervised work experience. Different states have different names for an equivalent license. For example, Certified Master Social Work (CMSW), Licensed Social Worker (LSW), Licensed Independent Clinical Social Worker (LICSW), Licensed Certified Social Worker – Clinical (LCSW-C) are all social workers with a license.

Licensed Professional Counselor (LPC)- An LPC provides individual or group psychotherapy and mental health diagnoses and works with clients and their families to help deal with issues

involving their mental and emotional health. A LPC's training is solely focused on counseling (unlike a social worker). An LPC must have a master's degree in psychology, counseling or a related field such as marriage and family therapy. Like a LCSW, a licensed LPC must have 2000-3000 hours of supervised work experience. In some states, a professional counselor is called a Licensed Mental Health Counselor (LMHC) or a Licensed Clinical Professional Counselor (LCPC).

Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist (LMFT)– An LMFT is similar to an LPC in that the training is focused solely on counseling, except that an LMFT is specifically trained to treat behaviors in its social and relational context.

Certified Alcohol and Drug Abuse Counselor (CADC) – A CADC is a counselor with specific clinical training in alcohol and drug abuse, trained to diagnose and provide individual and group counseling.

Psychiatric Nurse – A Psychiatric Nurse is a Registered Nurse (RN) who seeks additional education in the field of mental health disorders. They provide the full range of psychiatric care services to individuals and groups, function as psychotherapists, and in most states they have the authority to prescribe medications. A Psychiatric Nurse is a type of Advanced Practice Registered Nurse (APRN) and therefore requires post-graduate education with a focus on psychiatric disorders.