

**Navigating the System:**  
**A Guide to Accessing Mental Health Services in Virginia**  
A “how-to” for individuals or family members seeking mental health services

Developed by the Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services and NAMI Virginia  
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## **Navigating the System**

Mental health conditions like depression, anxiety, schizophrenia, or bipolar disorder can come at any age and can happen to anyone. If you think you may have problems that affect your mental health, you can get help. The search for mental health services can be confusing if you don't know where to start or what you need. The purpose of this navigation guide is to show you where to start based on your personal situation.

It is important to communicate exactly what you need help with when you contact service providers. One recommendation is to write down your top three needs in order to prioritize exactly what you are looking for. Be specific and be concise. A second recommendation is to consider what exactly you want to come away with at the end of the phone call (i.e. an agency to call, a service/provider lined up, etc.). Once you have decided what your need is, the following questions will be able to guide your search for mental health services. Please note that the following guide is specifically geared toward individuals over 18 years old. Also note that this resource is meant as a guide and is not

### **Questions to Ask About Getting Mental Health Services**

Some mental health services have specific requirements. The more information you are able to provide about your situation, the better the agency/organization will be able to assist you. Be prepared to answer questions about your age, income, and assets. Be prepared to provide information about your situation. Be prepared to ask questions about the services. It is best to be concise. Here are some examples of questions to ask:

- What are the services available at your agency?
- How can I receive these services?
- Do I have to meet an eligibility requirement?
- How soon can I receive the services?
- Will I have to pay for the services? If so, how much?
- If I get turned down for the service, who else should I contact for similar services?
- Who should I talk to first?
- Where is your office? Can you give me specific directions?
- Is there a waiting list to receive services?
- What information will I need to bring with me on my first visit?

## **Common Terms**

Community services board (CSB): Local provider of publicly funded mental health, addiction, and intellectual disability services. CSBs are the single entry-point to the Commonwealth's publicly-funded mental health system. Virginia has 40 community services boards that cover all localities of Virginia.

Emergency Custody Order (ECO): a legal order by the court authorizing the primary law enforcement agency to take a person into custody for a mental health evaluation performed by a qualified mental health clinician through the local CSB.

Intake: an initial screening interview which takes place on entry to an organization or facility which helps identify the individual needs or service requirements of the interviewee

Involuntary commitment: is a legal process through which an individual with symptoms of severe mental illness is court-ordered into treatment in a hospital (inpatient) or in the community (outpatient).

Temporary Detention Order (TDO): legal document requiring individuals to receive immediate hospitalization to obtain further evaluation, as well as for stabilization, on an involuntary basis until a commitment hearing can be arranged to determine future treatment needs. The TDO period cannot last longer than 48 hours, unless the TDO is issued on a weekend or holiday.

Voluntary commitment: is the act or practice of a person being admitted to a psychiatric hospital or other mental health facility on their own free will.

## **Types of Mental Health Professionals**

Mental health services are provided by several different professions, each of which has its own training and areas of expertise. Finding the right professional(s) for you or a loved one can be a critical ingredient in the process of diagnosis, treatment, and recovery when faced with serious mental illness.

- Psychiatrist - a psychiatrist is a physician with a doctor of medicine (M.D.) degree or osteopathic (D.O.) degree, with at least four more years of specialized study and training in psychiatry. Psychiatrists are licensed as physicians to practice medicine by individual states. "Board certified" psychiatrists have passed the national examination administered

by the American Board of Psychiatry and Neurology. Psychiatrists provide medical and psychiatric evaluations, treat psychiatric disorders, provide psychotherapy, and prescribe and monitor medications.

- **Psychologist** - some psychologists have a master's degree (M.A. or M.S.) in psychology while others have a doctoral degree (Ph.D., Psy.D., or Ed.D.) in clinical, educational, counseling, or research psychology. Most states license psychologists to practice psychology. They can provide psychological testing, evaluations, treat emotional and behavioral problems and mental disorders, and provide psychotherapy.
- **Social Worker**- Social workers have either a bachelor's degree (B.A., B.S., or B.S.W.), a master's degree (M.A., M.S., M.S.W., or M.S.S.W), or doctoral degree (D.S.W. or Ph.D.). In most states, social workers take an examination to be licensed to practice social work (L.C.S.W. or L.I.C.S.W.), and the type of license depends on their level of education and practice experience. Social workers provide various services including assessment and treatment of psychiatric illnesses, case management, hospital discharge planning, and psychotherapy.
- **Psychiatric/Mental Health Nurse** - Psychiatric/mental health nurses may have various degrees ranging from associate's to bachelor's (B.S.N.) to master's (M.S.N. or A.P.R.N) to doctoral (D.N.Sc., Ph.D.). Depending on their level of education and licensing, they provide a broad range of psychiatric and medical services, including the assessment and treatment of psychiatric illnesses, case management, and psychotherapy. In some states, some psychiatric nurses may prescribe and monitor medication.
- **Licensed Professional Counselors** – Licensed Professional Counselors have a master's degree (M.A.) in psychology, counseling or a similar discipline and typically have two years of post-graduate experience. They may provide services that include diagnosis and counseling (individual, family/group or both). They have a license issued in their state and may be certified by the National Academy of Certified Clinical Mental Health Counselors.

## Resource Navigation Flow Chart

*Are you or a loved one in immediate danger or harming yourself or others?*

**YES:** Call 911: You will want to say that you are experiencing a mental health crisis, or having thoughts of harming yourself or others.

*or*

Contact your local Community Service Board Emergency Services. To determine which CSB is in your area, contact the Virginia Association of Community Service Boards  
<http://www.vacsb.org/directory.html> / 804-330-3141

*or*

Call the National Suicide LifeLine at 1-800-273-TALK **24/7/365** to talk to a trained counselor near you.

**NO:** Continue on to find mental health services in your area.

*Are you looking for services for yourself or a loved one?*

**SELF:** Continue on.

**LOVED ONE:** Please go to page 7.

## Accessing Services for Yourself

*Have you ever used mental health services before?*

**YES:** Are you able to contact your previous physician/provider to make an appointment or obtain a referral? Can another physician/provider at that agency see you? If not, are they able to refer you elsewhere?

**NO:** Continue on to find mental health services in your area.

*Do you have health insurance?*

**YES:** See types of insurance below.

**NO:** Contact your local CSB.

What to say:

“I am in need of mental health services and I do not have insurance.”

The CSB may or may not be able to offer you services. If the CSB is unable to provide services, inquire about other mental health services that you may be eligible for in your area. Other types of service providers that may be able to help you include:

- Free Clinics
- Community Health Centers
- Local Colleges and Universities

- Private providers and non-profits that offer sliding scale fees: ex: Daily Planet, Catholic Charities, Jewish Family Services.
- Virginia 2-1-1: Dial 211 for free information on community services
- SAMHSA Provider Search: A locator to find mental health services available at:
  - 1-800-662-HELP
  - Or
  - <http://findtreatment.samhsa.gov>
- Mental Health America Virginia Chapter (MHA V)
- National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Virginia
  - Connection Support Groups
  - Peer-to-Peer
- VOCAL: Vocal is a peer-run organization that aims to provide support to individuals with mental illness.

*What type of insurance do you have?*

**Private:**

Contact your insurance company to receive contact information for mental health service providers in your plan's network. You will be able to find a phone number on the back of your insurance card. Some insurance companies also have websites where you can access this information. Be prepared to say what you are experiencing, where you live, and what you need.

Your employer may also offer an Employee Assistance Program that will be able to assist you. Contact your human resources office to find out more information.

You can also contact your CSB. Depending on what type of services they determine you need, your CSB may be able to provide services, or will refer you to a private service provider.

**Medicaid:**

Contact your local Community Service Board

What to say:

"I am in need of mental health services and I have Medicaid."

They may schedule you for an "intake" appointment to determine what your specific needs are.

If you are unable to get an appointment: "Where else can I go to receive mental health services?"

**Medicare:**

Medicare Part A helps cover mental health care if you need inpatient services at a hospital.

Medicare Part B helps cover outpatient mental health visits.

Medicare Part D helps cover any drugs you may need for a mental health condition.

*Are you a veteran or have you served in the military/Are you a family member of someone who has?*

Contact the Virginia Wounded Warrior Program (VWWP). They will evaluate your eligibility for services and provide you with information on where to go.

<http://www.wearevirginiaveterans.org>

1-877-285-1299

*Or*

Contact the Veterans Health Administration to locate the nearest clinic that provides mental health services for veterans

<http://www2.va.gov/directory/guide/state.asp?State=VA&dnum=ALL>

## **Accessing Services for a Loved One**

If you are concerned for a loved one who is exhibiting mental health problems, it is important to remember that the best option is to **encourage your loved one to seek help** on their own. It is important to engage in open and honest communication with your loved one, and to be patient and supportive as they explain what they are experiencing. Encourage your loved one to seek professional help and to stick with it when times get tough. Another way to show your support of a loved one is to learn more about mental illness. One way to do this is through family education programs. NAMI's Family-to-Family Program gives information about various disorders, medications, effective treatments, problem solving and communication techniques, empathy, how to handle crises and relapse, how to take care of yourself as the caregiver, information about supports within the community, and more.

If your loved one is **resistant to seeking treatment**, this can be a scary, upsetting, and frustrating experience for you as the family member, friend, or loved one. Page 10 of this document features a section on hospitalization that you may want to read through, in case you feel that is a necessary option based on crisis or a rapidly deteriorating situation.

However, if you are seeking information on behalf of a loved one who is interested in obtaining treatment, or if you are doing research for your loved one, the following questions can be used to guide your search.

*Has your loved one ever used mental health services before?*

**YES:** Is he/she able to contact a previous physician/provider? Is he/she able to go where he/she previously received services? Can another physician/provider see him/her? If not, are they able to refer elsewhere?

**NO:** Continue on to find mental health services in your area.

*Does your loved one have health insurance?*

**YES:** See types of insurance below.

**NO:** Contact your local CSB.

What to say:

“My loved one is in need of mental health services and he/she does not have insurance.” If your loved one is experiencing a crisis, you will want to clearly state that to get the specific services you need. The CSB may need to speak directly with your loved one. Depending on what your specific need is, they also may not be able to offer your loved one help if the services are unavailable. If this is the case, inquire about other mental health services that he/she may be eligible for in your area. Other types of service providers that may be able to help you include:

- Free Clinics
- Community Health Centers
- Local Colleges and Universities
- Private providers and non-profits that offer sliding scale fees: ex: Daily Planet, Catholic Charities, Jewish Family Services.
- Virginia 2-1-1: Dial 211 for free information on community services
- SAMHSA Provider Search: A locator to find mental health services available at:
  - 1-800-662-HELP
- Or
- <http://findtreatment.samhsa.gov>
- Mental Health America Virginia Chapter (MHA-V)
- National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Virginia
  - Connection Support Groups
  - Peer-to-Peer
- VOCAL: Vocal is a peer-run organization that aims to provide support to individuals with mental illness.

*What type of insurance does your loved one have?*

**Private:**

Your loved one’s insurance company will be able to provide information on mental health services. However, they may want to speak directly with the individual needing services. You will be able to find a phone number on the back of the insurance card. Some insurance companies also have websites where you can access this information.



If your loved one is employed, his/her Employee Assistance Program will be able to assist the individual in finding services. Contact your human resources office to find out more information.

### **Medicaid:**

Your loved one will be able to receive services at the local CSB if they have Medicaid. Again, the CSB may only be able to provide information unless your loved one seeks services on their own.

### **Medicare:**

Medicare Part A helps cover mental health care if your loved one needs inpatient services at a hospital.

Medicare Part B helps cover outpatient mental health visits.

Medicare Part D helps cover any drugs your loved one may need for a mental health condition.

*Are you a veteran or have you served in the military/Are you a family member of someone who has?*

Contact the Virginia Wounded Warrior Program (VWWP). They will evaluate your eligibility for services and provide you with information on where to go.

<http://www.wearevirginiaveterans.org>

1-877-285-1299

*Or*

Contact the Veterans Health Administration to locate the nearest clinic that provides mental health services for veterans:

<http://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/gethelp.asp>

## **Family Supports**

As stated earlier, if you think your loved one needs mental health services, the best option is to encourage them to seek help on their own. Many services will require that the individual express some interest in participating. If you are looking for support with dealing with the daily stress and trauma of having a loved one with a mental illness, the following programs through NAMI Virginia may be helpful.

The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) Virginia provides support, education, and advocacy for individuals and families in Virginia affected by mental illness. NAMI offers programs specifically aimed to support family members and loved ones of individuals with mental illness. The following are examples of programs provided by NAMI to assist family members of individuals with severe mental illness:

Family-to-Family Education Program: The NAMI *Family-to-Family* Education Program is a free 12-week course for family caregivers of individuals with mental illnesses. The course is taught by trained family members. All instruction and course materials are free for class participants.

The *Family-to-Family* curriculum focuses on schizophrenia, bipolar disorder (manic depression), clinical depression, panic disorder and obsessive-compulsive disorder (OCD). The course discusses the clinical treatment of these illnesses and teaches the knowledge and skills that family members need to cope more effectively.

Family Support Groups: NAMI *Family Support Groups* are 90-minute weekly support groups run by the family members of persons who live with mental illness for other friends and family members of persons living with a mental illness. These groups provide a place that offers respect, understanding, encouragement, and hope.

## **When Hospitalization Is Required**

During times of psychiatric crisis, hospitalization may be required. A psychiatric crisis can include, but is not limited to: suicidal or homicidal thinking and/or behavior, acute psychotic symptoms, increased drug or alcohol use, and sudden changes in mental status.

A person experiencing crisis may decide to pursue hospitalization voluntarily.

### Voluntary Commitment

- If individual already has a therapist, case manager, or psychiatrist, contact this person immediately. They will be able to assist you in securing services. *If no such person exists, or they are unavailable...*
- Contact local CSB: Community Service Boards are mandated by the state to provide emergency mental health services and will be able to assist you in locating available services.
- As a last resort, the individual in crisis should call 911 or present at the local emergency room.

### Involuntary Commitment

If you feel that there is immediate need for services or if you believe the individual is in imminent danger of harming themselves or others and is unwilling to get help, **call 911**.

What to say:

“I am calling about an adult aged \_\_\_\_ with mental illness who is exhibiting symptoms and I believe is in danger or harming himself or others.”

Ask if there are trained CIT (Crisis Intervention Team) officers who are available to respond to the situation. Once 9-1-1 conducts an assessment of the situation, they may come out to the location, and will further assess the situation and make a determination about what to do. If the law enforcement responders determine that the person meets the required legal criteria, it is possible that the individual may be placed in custody and transported to a facility where a mental health evaluation can be conducted by a mental health professional. The criteria determining whether or not the individual requires hospitalization is as follows:

- 1) The person has a mental illness, and there exists a substantial likelihood that, as a result of mental illness, the person will, in the near future, (a) cause serious physical harm to himself or others as evidenced by recent behavior causing, attempting, or threatening harm and other relevant information, if any, or (b) suffer serious harm due to his lack of capacity to protect himself from harm or to provide for his basic human needs, and
- 2) The person is in need of hospitalization or treatment, and,
- 3) The person is unwilling to volunteer or incapable of volunteering for hospitalization or treatment.

This practice is commonly called a “paperless” Emergency Custody Order (ECO). If the officer believes the situation is not a risk to anyone, he/she will leave (in most localities). If you still feel the individual is still at risk, then you can pursue obtaining a formal, written (“paper”) ECO from a Magistrate. In some localities, the officer will not leave the scene without first contacting the local CSB emergency services. In this instance, the CSB can assist with obtaining the ECO.

### *How do I petition the Magistrate?*

It is recommended that you first contact your local CSB/BHA emergency service or crisis program for a consultation. Depending on the information that you provide and/or their observations, they may advise that you then contact your local magistrate. The phone number is listed in the phonebook or online. Based on your personal knowledge of the person and the circumstances, you will need to give the Magistrate information about how the person meets the following criteria:

- 1) The person has a mental illness,
- 2) There exists a substantial likelihood that, as a result of mental illness, the person will, in the near future

- a. Cause serious physical harm to himself or others as evidenced by recent behavior causing, attempting, or threatening harm and other relevant information, if any, or
  - b. Suffer serious harm due to his lack of capacity to protect himself from harm or to provide for his basic human needs, and
- 3) The person is in need of hospitalization or treatment, and
- 4) The person is unwilling to volunteer or incapable of volunteering for hospitalization or treatment

Other forms of information you should provide, that the magistrate is legally required to consider, include the following:

- i. The recommendations of any treating or examining physician or psychologist licensed in Virginia, if available;
- ii. Any past actions of the person;
- iii. Any past mental health treatment of the person; providers are legally required to disclose all information necessary and appropriate to the process;
- iv. Any relevant hearsay evidence;
- v. Any medical records available;
- vi. Any affidavits submitted, if the witness is unavailable and it so states in the affidavit, and;
- vii. Any other information available that the magistrate deems relevant

If the evidence suggests probable cause that the individual meets the above criteria, the magistrate may issue an ECO. The police are notified by the magistrate and will take the individual into custody. Once in custody, there is a 4-6 hour window for a qualified mental health clinician to adequately evaluate the individual. A mental health evaluation can occur at a CSB or hospital setting. Once the evaluation has been conducted, the magistrate reviews all the evidence readily available to determine if there is probable cause necessitating a Temporary Detention Order (TDO). By law, the magistrate uses the same criteria and evidential sources used in issuing the ECO in rendering this decision (Refer to the previous questions relating to petitioning criteria for the specific language). The magistrate's decision will determine if the person will receive immediate involuntary treatment.

*What happens if a TDO is issued?*

The police will escort the individual to the designated involuntary service or hospital sanctioned by the magistrate. During the transportation, the individual may be restrained. The individual will remain at this facility for up to 48 hours, receiving care until a commitment hearing is held.

Again, depending on if the order is issued on a weekend or holiday, the order may extend up to 72 hours. If the TDO is not issued, then the individual will be released.

*What is a commitment hearing?*

The commitment hearing is a court process involving a special justice who hears evidence, and decides whether the person meets the criteria for involuntary commitment, and ultimately delivers the disposition that will be carried out by the CSB or other mental health care providers. The commitment hearing is a legal proceeding. The individual will receive a court appointed attorney who will **represent their wishes**. Family members should be aware of this and come prepared to provide alternative evidence if they believe the individual in question is not requesting the most appropriate care for himself/herself. The special justice is legally required to initially offer the individual the opportunity to accept voluntary hospitalization. Once the Special Justice has rendered a decision, it is binding.

Some of the possible outcomes of a commitment hearing are:

- The petition may be dismissed and the individual released
- Mandatory outpatient treatment may be ordered, up to 90 days
- The individual can be allowed to voluntarily remain in the hospital if they are capable and willing to do so and if they agree to stay for a minimum of 72 hours and give 48 hour notice of their intention to leave
- The individual may be involuntarily committed. Legally, inpatient commitments can continue for up to 30 days.

## Resources and Links

### **The Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Services (DBHDS)**

The state agency overseeing community-based and hospital-based mental health systems. DBHDS is not a direct care provider.

<http://www.dbhds.virginia.gov/Default.htm>

### **Virginia Association of Community Services Boards (VACSB)**

Resource to locate local community services boards (local mental health providers) (804) 330-3141 or [www.vacsb.org](http://www.vacsb.org)

### **CrisisLink**

A suicide crisis hotline available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

1-800-273-TALK or <http://crisislink.org/>

### **National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH)**

The mission of NIMH is to transform the understanding and treatment of mental illnesses through basic and clinical research, paving the way for prevention, recovery, and cure.

<http://www.nimh.nih.gov/index.shtml>

### **Department of Medical Assistance Services (DMAS)**

DMAS is the agency that administers Medicaid and the State Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) in Virginia.

<http://www.dmas.virginia.gov/>

### **National Alliance on Mental Illness of Virginia (NAMI Virginia)**

NAMI Virginia is an organization that provides support, education, and advocacy for all those affected by mental illness.

1-888-486-8264 or [www.namivirginia.org](http://www.namivirginia.org)

### **Virginia Organization of Consumers Asserting Leadership (VOCAL)**

VOCAL is a nonprofit consumer-led organization dedicated to mental health recovery, empowerment and peer leadership.

804-343-1777 or [www.vocalvirginia.org/](http://www.vocalvirginia.org/)

### **Mental Health America of Virginia (MHAV)**

MHAV is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, advocacy organization for individuals with mental illness.

804-257-5591 or [www.mhav.org/](http://www.mhav.org/)

### **Psychiatric Society of Virginia (PSV)**

The Psychiatric Society of Virginia is a district branch of the [American Psychiatric Association](http://www.psychiatry.org), with over 500 member psychiatrists. PSV focuses its efforts on advocacy of mental health issues, the advancement of psychiatry, and service to the community.

<http://www.psva.org/>

**Virginia Office for Protection and Advocacy (VOPA)**

VOPA is an independent state agency that is charged with ensuring and protecting the rights of people with disabilities in Virginia.

804-225-2042 or [www.vopa.state.va.us](http://www.vopa.state.va.us)

**Lawyer Referral Service of Virginia State Bar**

Provides legal information and discounted consultation.

1-800-552-7977 or [www.vsb.org/site/public/lawyer-referral-service/](http://www.vsb.org/site/public/lawyer-referral-service/)

**Legal Aid**

Provides free civil legal services to eligible low-income residents.

1-866-534-5243 or <http://www.valegalaid.org/>

**Human Rights Committee of DBHDS**

Protects the legal and human rights of individuals receiving services in facilities or programs operated, licensed or funded by the Department.

1-800-451-5544 or <http://www.dbhds.virginia.gov/OHR-LHRC.htm>

**211 Virginia**

2-1-1 VIRGINIA is a free service that provides contact information for a range of services available in communities in Virginia and statewide.

Dial 2-1-1 or [www.211virginia.org](http://www.211virginia.org)

*The information contained in this brochure is provided as a service to the community, and does not constitute legal advice. We try our best to provide quality information but we make no claims, promises or guarantees about the accuracy, completeness, or adequacy of the information contained in this brochure. As legal advice must be tailored to the specific circumstances of each case, and laws are constantly changing, nothing provided herein should be used as a substitute for the advice of competent counsel.*

## Notes