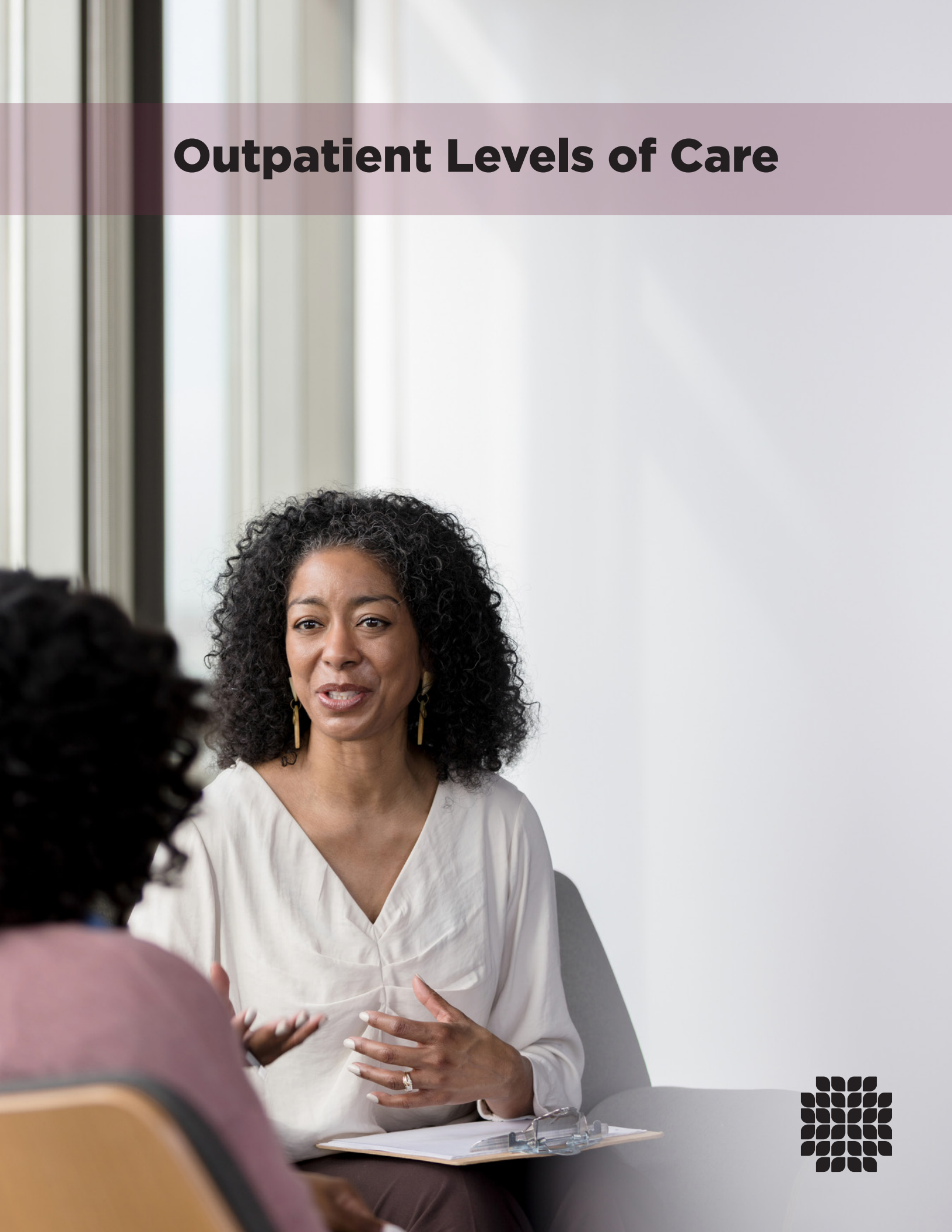


Outpatient Levels of Care



What is outpatient mental health care?

All of us exist as mind, body, spirit, and emotions. Only when the whole person is treated – not just the symptoms, but the underlying concerns – can positive outcomes be lasting.

Mental health care exists in many forms, including outpatient care. –During outpatient treatment, individuals receive a variety of mental health services within a clinical setting rather than being admitted to a residential treatment center or a hospital. Those seeking mental health care through an outpatient program may have a history of treatment at various levels, including residential, subacute inpatient care, traditional outpatient counseling (occasional one-on-one therapy with a psychiatrist or therapist), or they may have no previous history of treatment whatsoever and are seeking professional help for the very first time.

For patients who do not require 24/7 care, outpatient treatment provides an excellent option. For some, outpatient treatment is the beginning of their quest to learn to cope with stressors and manage their mental health. For others it offers a continuation of higher-level care they received previously in-patient at a hospital or treatment facility.

Treatment plans in outpatient may range from short-term counseling to long-term treatment programs that are individualized to focus on the patient's specific struggles. While some may be able to manage their symptoms with just a few hours of treatment every month, another person may need more support and structure while providing the flexibility they need to live their lives – going to work or school or managing family responsibilities. That is where outpatient services can be an ideal solution. Programs that focus on continued outpatient care support with evidence-based integrative therapies and counseling are the most beneficial in helping to boost patients' mental health wellness and prevent relapse.



Why seek outpatient mental health care?

For many struggling with mental health concerns, outpatient mental health treatment is the most common form of treatment that individuals seek.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), “Mental health is an integral and essential component of health.” Achieving optimal mental health allows individuals to be productive, seek and achieve personal goals, cope with life’s typical stressors, and contribute to one’s community. Yet mental health disorders are affected by multiple factors, as is the case with physical health. Some of these factors interact and can be biological, social, or psychological in nature and some may stem from past trauma or Adverse Childhood Events (ACEs). Statistics prove that the threat of eroding mental wellness and the danger of relapse is something to be aware of considering:

- Drug overdose deaths in 2020 reached 93,331 – the highest number ever recorded.¹
- The 2020 National Survey on Drug Use and Health revealed that over 40 million people ages 12 and over reported having a substance-use disorder (in the year leading up to their response).²
- For individuals ages 15-44, depression is the leading cause of disability in the United States.³
- Suicide is the second leading cause of death in adults 15-44 years of age and the 10th leading cause of death in the United States, responsible for one death every 11 minutes.⁴
- Anxiety disorders are the most common mental illness in the U.S., affecting 40 million adults in the United States age 18 and older, or 18.1% of the population every year.⁵

Failing to receive needed mental health treatment can have profound negative impacts. When individuals don’t get proper care, they may continue to struggle with feelings of shame, guilt, and isolation. These negative emotions can exacerbate distress and further complicate efforts to find help.



Benefits of outpatient care

The goal for mental health treatment, including outpatient care, is to equip individuals with the ability to achieve better health and happiness to experience:

- Reduced anxiety
- Improved moods
- Clearer thinking
- A greater sense of calm or inner peace
- Increased confidence and self-esteem
- Reduced depression risk
- Improved relationships with family, friends, and colleagues

The Treatment Continuum: Stepping into Care

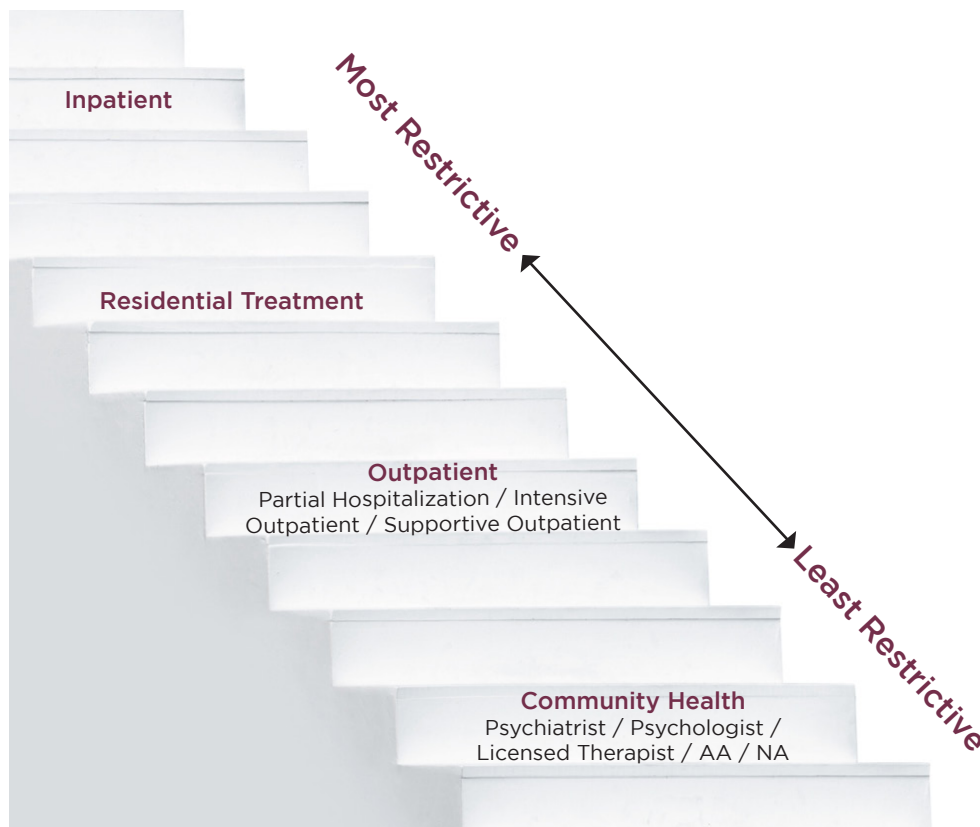
Individuals seeking outpatient care or continuing care after inpatient treatment are often looking to elevate their quality of life by improving their mental health state. Those who benefit the most from outpatient programs are individuals who are able to fully engage in all aspects of care offered and don't require the supervision of round-the-clock staff.

People seeking outpatient care are often individuals who:

- Have recently completed a 30-45 day residential or 7-10-day inpatient program and are “stepping down” for support as recommended by their individual discharge plan. Some may have been in residential care and now require less intensive care.
- Are seeking additional support by “stepping up” from individual counseling. Some may be looking for a program that allows them to receive more structured care than individual therapy and who may be in need of more support than occasional talk therapy.
- Are seeking proactive care to arrest struggles as they escalate and to prevent a spiral that helps avoid inpatient treatment.
- Are looking to transfer from another outpatient treatment program.

Moving through the mental health care continuum may include starting off in outpatient and “stepping up” to residential or inpatient, or perhaps starting in inpatient or residential and “stepping down” to outpatient or community mental health care with one-on-one therapy sessions. There is more than one way to seek care or execute a continuing care plan. The important thing is for individuals to seek the care they need regardless of where that journey begins.

While inpatient and residential treatment provide a higher level of care, outpatient care guided by highly trained professions offers more flexibility and is generally lower in cost than residential care, often making it more accessible to more individuals.



Levels of Outpatient Care

Partial Hospitalization Program (PHP) and Intensive Outpatient Program (IOP)

Generally outpatient services are offered at two levels: a Partial Hospitalization Program (PHP) and an Intensive Outpatient Program (IOP). Some programs focus on adults ages 18 and older of all genders with a variety of mental health conditions, while some specialize in children and teens. Depending on need and progress, clients may receive care at one or both levels. In each program, individuals are best served when they receive a variety of evidence-based, research-supported services provided by a team of dedicated experts. Comprehensive programs may offer treatment for any or all of the following: mood disorders, unresolved trauma, and co-occurring disorders.

The advantage of participating in outpatient programs is the flexibility that allows PHP and IOP clients to return to their home or an alternative supportive residence, and be able to work, attend school, participate in volunteer activities, and otherwise engage in a healthy independent lifestyle. Leaving treatment each day allows clients to step outside of the therapeutic environment to practice some of the skills learned in therapy in real-life settings, providing clients the opportunity to gradually transition back to daily life.



Partial Hospitalization Program – Easing the Transition to Daily Life

PHP is the highest level of outpatient care and is frequently the “step-down” program recommended after completing a residential or inpatient program. However, many people start their healing process directly at the PHP level.

Partial Hospitalization Programs provided within a highly structured treatment setting are an excellent option for individuals who need intensive therapy and a high level of support but no longer require round-the-clock monitoring. Patients in PHP typically receive comprehensive treatment services at a higher frequency than IOP for five hours a day, five days a week. Spanning a few weeks or a few months, the length of time clients spend in the PHP is dependent upon each individual’s needs, goals, and overall progress.

The structure of the PHP environment can be highly beneficial for clients who are stepping down from an inpatient or residential program, or who require more care than occasional therapy. The therapeutic setting supports healing by helping clients process difficult memories, change negative thought patterns, and establish the skills needed to achieve long-term healing.

Intensive Outpatient Program – Flexibility that Provides Time for Treatment & Life

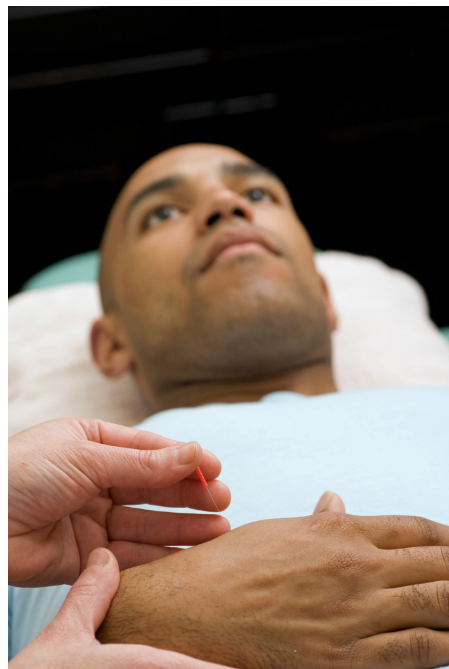
Offering convenience and flexibility for clients, the Intensive Outpatient Program (IOP) is less structured than that of a PHP but offers more support than is available in traditional outpatient treatment.

Clients who participate in the Intensive Outpatient Program typically receive at least 12 hours a week of services in a healing environment formatted to support the transition to home, work, and life within their community. A thorough evaluation and an assessment of needs will determine whether the IOP is the best fit for an individual and a customized treatment plan is assembled to assure that IOP clients receive continual support and guidance to hone new coping skills in addition to retaining previously-learned skills they may have experienced in treatment. The length of stay can range from a few weeks to a few months depending on each client's unique needs, goals, and progress.

What services are available in outpatient programming?

There are a wide variety of mental health services that may be available, including:

- Trauma Focused CBT (TFCBT)
- Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT)
- Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT)
- Motivational Intervening (MI)
- Behavioral Activation (BA)
- EMDR
- Experiential Therapy
- Mental Wellness Education
- Medication Management
- Individual Therapy
- Group Therapy
- Medically Assisted Treatment
- Psychodrama
- 12-Step Facilitation
- Distress Tolerance and Emotion Regulation
- Mindfulness and Relaxation
- Trauma Informed Yoga
- Dance and Movement Therapy
- Music Therapy
- Family and Relationship Dynamics
- Nutrition Wellness
- Massage Therapy
- Acupuncture



Who benefits from PHP and IOP Programs?

Excellent candidates for outpatient treatment are those with a strong support system and high levels of independence, and who are capable of managing their day-to-day responsibilities. With nearly 47% of U.S. adults with mental illness receiving mental health treatment in 2020, the trend is showing that the need is on the rise in the U.S. Those who may benefit from outpatient mental health programming may include:

- Individuals transferring from a higher level of care, such as a 30–45-day residential treatment facility.
- Individuals who require more support than occasional care to be successful.
- Individuals who may have one or multiple facets of life affected by unregulated thoughts or mood including: support systems, interpersonal relationships, work, school, affecting intermittent daily activity.
- Individuals who may have ongoing anxiety resulting in family conflict, depression affecting full time work capability or concentration levels, or unresolved anger resulting in hostility in the workplace.
- Individuals at risk of relapse or intense cravings due to recent initial sobriety from substance use or self-harm.
- Many individuals may have emotional trigger that he/she is unable to cope with such as death or loss of relationship, job, housing, etc.

PHP/IOP can aid in:

- Crisis intervention – preventing the need for emergency care in overcrowded emergency rooms – which is an inefficient and expensive way to care for individuals experiencing a mental health crisis.
- Continuum of care – helping to avoid the feelings of distress from the reduced support of their lives after residential care without the protective influence of inpatient care.
- Easing transitions – transition to home can be difficult and confusing. Patients and families can practice the skills as they get triggered at home under professional guidance of their treatment team without the restrictions of being away from home.
- Filling the gaps – the transition offered by PHPs and IOPs helps clients navigate frequent obstacles that may threaten continuity of care such as:
 - » Lack of availability of outpatient provider appointments for new patients. Limited providers have immediate availability. Often patients can continue medication management and monitoring while they await a new patient appointment with a traditional provider that can be four-six weeks away from IP discharge date.
 - » Transportation to appointments. Often, PHP/IOP aids with transportation to appointments. This will help initiate needed treatment while patient continues stabilization and work out a long-term transportation plan.
 - » Needing to get back to work. An IOP is often a great transition for those that need to get back to work or do not have the ability to commit to a PHP. An IOP often offers flexible days/times of treatment working around work. Having the support network of an IOP can help ease the transition into the work environment and common occupational triggers.

Referrals

While individuals typically do not need a professional referral to participate in outpatient mental health programming, it is common for individuals to be referred from a variety of sources including:

- EAP: Employee Assistance Programs
 - Employee performance and absenteeism, hostility, under the influence
- Schools: Primary and University levels
 - Aggression with authority and peers, isolation, academic performance, hyperactivity, bullying
- ERs and IP acute programs (spell out abbreviations the first time)
 - Expedited admissions, direct aftercare referrals for continued monitoring of symptoms
- PCPs and Family Practitioners
 - General psychiatric medication management, sleep/appetite trouble, reports of abuse, trauma, self-harm
- Psychiatrists and other Independent Practitioners
 - Psychiatric intervention requiring more than weekly or monthly meetings.

For Therapists: When to Recommend Outpatient Care

Recommending Outpatient programming can be the right preventative and proactive treatment for clients when:

- They are frequently requiring crisis appointments
- They are frequently cancelling appointments and/or no showing
- They are verbalizing trouble with daily functioning
- It is apparent they would benefit from a medical evaluation
- They have plateaued in traditional individual counseling
- They are struggling with socialization skills
- They may be able to benefit from a supportive group environment that encourages and often improves:
 - Communication skills and socialization skills
 - Self-awareness (by listening to others with similar issues)
 - The ability to express issues and accept criticism from others
 - Modeling healthy behaviors and attachments with others

Continuing Care to Build on Recovery Success:

What to Expect When Leaving Treatment

The goal for continuing care through outpatient programming is to help individuals continue to gain the confidence and abilities they need to achieve stability and resiliency in their lives that allows them to recognize unhealthy triggers to better cope with life's daily challenges. Each individual's progress determines the length of programming, and once the program is completed aftercare planning may include referrals to traditional outpatient programs, community resources, or additional support groups

Finding outpatient programming that is right for you

Each individual's healing journey to seek optimal mental and physical health looks different. Known for its long-standing reputation for treating a variety of mental health conditions, since 1983, Sierra Tucson offers PHP and IOP programming at its Tucson, AZ, Scottsdale, AZ and Southlake, TX treatment centers. By combining a variety of therapies, clients are afforded the opportunity to achieve a holistic, well-rounded, positive sense of self and all-encompassing wellness – physically, mentally, emotionally, socially, and spiritually.

Contact us today for information to see how Sierra Tucson outpatient programming is tailored to meet each client's unique needs and how we can help you take the next steps in seeking mental health care.

References:

- Drug Overdose Deaths in the U.S. Up 30% in 2020 (cdc.gov)
- Reports Results | CBHSQ Data (samhsa.gov)
- Facts & Statistics | Anxiety and Depression Association of America, ADAA
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- The Benefits of Mental Health According to Science (positivepsychology.com)



