



Feeling Better

A guide to the
mental health system
and getting the
help you need



Be part of the change.

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Why you may need this booklet

Maybe you are having thoughts or feelings that concern you and that are interfering with your life. Perhaps you have been diagnosed with a mental illness and you need help. Or maybe you are looking for help for a friend or family member.

You are not alone.

This guide was developed with the help of people who have experienced mental illness or mental health problems; people who know what you're going through and want to share what they've learned. People who know that applying for help from government programs can be frustrating and confusing, especially if you are stressed, scared or ill.

I've always stayed under the radar. I wish I had known there were so many people who are willing to help. Dealing with it on my own, unmedicated — it would have been better to know that there are actually people out there willing to help walk you through a difficult time.

— A consumer in Washington State

You can feel better.

Mental illnesses are medical conditions that can affect your thoughts, feelings, behavior, relationships and daily functioning. Nobody knows what causes mental illness, but we do know that for most people it's a combination of something you're born with (biological) and something in your environment (for example, trauma or major life stress).

Mental illnesses are treatable. Most people with mental illness can feel better and can lead fulfilling and productive lives. There are many forms of help available, including therapy, medication, peer support, case management, other services or a combination.

You can get help.

There are many places you can get help. Where you start may depend on what you need at this moment and what you want. This booklet explains some of your options and provides you with advice on where to go and what to say.

How to find help in Washington

Call a toll free information line. Page 15 lists statewide information lines that can help you locate services in your community. Calls are typically answered within 24 hours.

Call 211. All communities in Washington are served by 24-hour community resource lines that are staffed by people who can listen to what you are going through and help you locate services nearest you.

Call the Regional Support Network (RSN). RSNs are the local Mental Health Authority that fund a variety of treatment and support services, determined by local need.

Page 13 lists the Mental Health Crisis Lines available by county.

Look on the internet. This booklet includes web addresses for a variety of organizations that provide medical, mental health, financial and other helpful services.

Use key words. Throughout this booklet you will find key words for searching in the phone book and on the internet. On page 3 we also offer key words to use when asking for help that can make the process go more quickly and smoothly.

I would not just let it ride. Seek help and don't stop until you get the help you need.

– A consumer in Washington State



Getting the help you need

Use key words and know what to ask for

Asking for help is hard for everyone, perhaps harder when you are not sure what's wrong, and you don't feel well.

Interviews with people who have been there suggest that you will get what you need more quickly and smoothly when you can describe how you are feeling and ask for help. It also helps to know what to ask for.

If you are clear that you need to talk to someone about a mental health problem, there is a better chance that your call will be routed more quickly.

I had been in and out of the fog for years, and when I started to realize, yeah, I really need to get help, I didn't know where to turn. When I called . . . somebody came on and said, "What can I help you with?" and I said, "Well I really don't know right now." They said, "Okay, please hold."

– A consumer in Washington State

Before you call

- Be prepared to describe exactly how you are feeling or what mental illness(es) you have been diagnosed with. This can be hard to do, but it will help you.
- Figure out how soon you need an appointment. Sometimes the wait for such things as routine medical appointments can be 4–6 weeks. Can you wait that long? If not, ask about “same day” or “walk in” appointments.
- Figure out what you need. Do you need a refill on your medication? Do you want to talk to someone? If you don't know, that's okay. But if you do know, it will help to be specific.

If you need help today

- Share if you have a mental illness or mental health problem, and that you need help today.
- Say that you would like help figuring out what's wrong.
- Describe why you need help – this may mean saying what you are thinking, feeling or doing that concerns you.
- Ask about a “same day” or “walk in” appointment.
- Say if you have been prescribed medication in the past.
- Say if you need help getting your medication now.

If you can wait for an appointment

- Share if you have a mental illness, or need help figuring out what's wrong, and ask for an appointment.
- Say if you have a diagnosis or history of mental illness.
- Say if you have been prescribed medication in the past.
- Say if you need help getting your medication now.
- Ask about peer counselors, or peer support organizations (see Page 10 for contact information), or other forms of help and support that may be available between now and your appointment.

Get help with paperwork

Getting signed up for the help you need can involve a long and complex set of forms. Some consumers name it as the biggest barrier to getting the help they need, especially when they are sick.

There are a number of people who can help. Don't be afraid to ask.

- Peer counselors or peer support groups (See Page 10 Peer Support)
- The business office at the clinic
- Eligibility and social workers (See Page 11 Financial Assistance)

You have options for help

Getting help often starts with a finding out what's wrong.

You may know something is wrong but you don't know what. Many people find that it's easier to begin to take care of themselves when they have a better idea of what's wrong. A diagnosis does not define who you are. It is simply a way to identify the kinds of help that may be most useful to you. Of course, if you are uncomfortable with an initial diagnosis, you can get a different opinion.

The correct diagnosis means you can begin learning about what's going on with you through reading and talking to others. It also means you can find a medication that works for you if you choose to use medication.

The best thing for my son was when he was told, "This is what you have," and he could go home and look it up on the internet and he could find people who lead absolutely good lives . . .

– A family consumer in Washington State

You can either start with a doctor or health care provider, or go to a community mental health center. You have options.

Go to a community mental health center

Whether or not you have health insurance, community mental health centers are available to all people. Services are offered on a sliding fee scale. Community mental health centers also offer a variety of support services – such as case management and support groups – that help people in their recovery.

Where do I find other people like me? How can I get plugged into group activities? For me it was finding the community mental health center.

– A consumer in Washington State

You have the right to an assessment within 10 days

Community mental health centers are required to schedule an intake interview within 10 days of your request. Your initial appointment will be an assessment to help identify your mental health needs. If you are eligible, you will work with a mental health professional to help you begin to develop specific goals and types of services that will be most beneficial. The goal is for you to be centrally and actively involved in driving the process where decisions are made regarding your treatment.

How to find a community mental health center

Phone Call 1-800-446-0259 for the community mental health center near you. This is the Mental Health Division in the Washington State Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS). Calls to this line are answered Monday–Friday, 8am–5pm.

Call 211. This is a 24-hour, 7-days-a-week information and referral service available throughout Washington State, no matter where you live. Staff also offer emotional support and referrals to services in your community.

Internet Search for “Community Mental Health Centers in Washington State” or go directly to <http://www1.dshs.wa.gov/mentalhealth/>. Click on Local Mental Health Services for a listing of Authorized Community Mental Health Agencies near you.

Phone book Look in the Community Services section in the phone book under Community and Human Services – Mental Health Services.

See a doctor or health care professional

The best place to start is your family doctor if you have one. They are not as adept at mental health issues but will focus on specific problems.

– A consumer in Washington State

If you have health insurance call your health care provider. If it is after-hours, they may have a consulting nurse line or an on-call line.

Get established with a regular doctor. You automatically have credibility. Tell them what you are going through — say “I really need to talk to someone,” and they can get you hooked up with a therapist. It also helps to have a copy of your history.”

— A consumer in Washington State

If you don't have health insurance or you don't have a health care provider call a Community Health Center. They offer services to all people on a sliding fee scale.

How to find a community health center, or “free clinic”

Phone Call 211. Tell them you don't have insurance and ask for the number for the nearest community health center.

We have a community health center that has a sliding fee scale. You can see doctors on free clinic days.

— A consumer in Washington State

Internet Search for “Washington Association of Community and Migrant Health Centers” at <http://www.wacmhc.org/>. Look at the left column and click on “CHC's in Washington” and scroll down for centers in your county.

See a mental health professional in private practice

If you have insurance find out if you can call a therapist directly or if you need a referral from your physician.

For me it has been therapy. I am lucky enough to have insurance, but I only get 10 sessions. That's what I do best with. I've noticed when I haven't been able to see my therapist because it's not covered, that's when I start spiraling down.

— A consumer in Washington State

Tips about insurance and mental health

Insurance companies have toll-free customer service call centers that can help you sort out your coverage and their requirements. Many limit the number of mental health visits available each year. This can

be deceptive. Once a person is diagnosed with a serious mental illness it is possible to establish that you have a chronic illness, and to work out a treatment plan with your doctor that assures medically necessary services.

There are a number of options. Go back to the insurance company. They have to send you a letter in layman's terms explaining each and every reason why they are denying your claim. You can appeal and ask for a 72-hour expedite. Go to the next level of appeal and use the company's grievance process. Tell them, "This is a very complex case. I want an exception to benefit."

– A family peer counselor in Washington State

What to do

- Ask your provider up front if they can ask the insurance company for ongoing services based on your diagnosis.
- If your benefits run out, get a note from your primary care physician that says these services are 1) medically necessary, 2) least costly, and 3) with this medically necessary care, prognosis is good.

I've always had that conversation from the get go. I know I'll need more than the eight visits allowed. I talked to my doctor about when she fills out her paperwork if she could ask for ongoing services based on my diagnosis being a chronic condition. If you need more due to your diagnosis, establish that there is a mental health history, and it is a chronic condition, and some exceptions can be made.

– A consumer in Washington State

When benefits run out there are exceptions. If the service is part of your care, get a note from your primary care physician that says these services are 1) medically necessary, 2) least costly, and 3) with this medically necessary care, prognosis is good.

– A family peer counselor in Washington State

A tip about moving and keeping services

If you are currently getting services from somewhere and you move, ask the people who were treating you to write you a note stating how long you were treated and the medications you are on. If you were being treated by a physician, you may just need to ask for a copy of your medical records.

Find out about peer support

Many people report that their lives turned around with the help of peers — people who have experienced mental health problems and know what you are going through.

Some mental health agencies and hospitals employ certified peer counselors. Peer counselors and peer support organizations are especially helpful when navigating the complicated system of services and filling out the required paperwork.

That's where peer support comes in — even if it's not formal peer counseling from an agency; being able to talk to somebody that is going through the same thing. Not just complaining, but working together on solutions.

— A consumer in Washington State

Ask for peer counselors, also called family navigators. When I call a parent or caregiver back I tell them I am doing this work based on my own experience as a parent. I can still address the system challenges, their anxiety and frustration, validate what they're feeling and provide assistance so that by the time they get off the phone they have something they didn't have before.

— SAFE WA Family Navigator

The National Alliance for Mental Illness (NAMI) is really good on peer support. This fall I am teaching a class called "Peer to Peer" which is an educational course on wellness. And it's also kind of an informal support group — it's support and education at the same time. After the class we go on to run a support group for six months so we have a continuation of the work we've done.

— A consumer in Washington State

When you contact a community mental health center or the Regional Support Network in your county, ask if there are peer support groups and certified peer counselors in your area.

There are also some statewide organizations that can help you get connected. See Peer Support Organizations on Page 15.

Ask about financial assistance

There are a variety of publicly funded programs that help people pay for medical and mental health services.

Adults must be unable to work or determined to be at least temporarily disabled.

Children must be uninsured and be in families with a certain income level.

Washington State Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS)

Call or visit DSHS to find out if you qualify for financial or medical assistance.

DSHS has Community Services Offices (CSOs) in every county in Washington with people who can determine if you qualify for assistance. They can also help you figure out if you are eligible for Social Security disability benefits, and advise you on how to apply.

Here are some of the services that you can ask about.

- **General Assistance – Expedited Medical Disability (GA-X)** provides monthly cash and medical benefits to persons who have been determined to have a disability that will last a year or more. Medical information is forwarded to special medical professionals who determine GA-X eligibility. If you meet the GA-X criteria, you will also get help in filing for Supplemental Security Income (SSI).
- **Medicaid:** DSHS administers a series of programs which help certain low-income residents with medical coverage at little or no cost. These programs typically serve pregnant women, children, families with minor children, aged, disabled adults, blind and disabled persons and those in need of long term care.

Children and families may qualify for financial and medical assistance.

Ask if your family qualifies for:

- **Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)** provides monthly support to children and families who reside in Washington and meet specific income requirements.

- **State Child Health Insurance Program (SCHIP)** provides coverage for children’s medical costs. This includes mental health, alcohol and substance abuse services, supplies and medical equipment.
- **Medicaid:** DSHS administers a series of programs which help certain low-income residents with medical coverage at little or no cost. These programs typically serve pregnant women, children, families with minor children, aged, disabled adults, blind and disabled persons and those in need of long term care.

Adults 65 and older qualify for Medicare. You can apply through the federal Social Security Administration.

Ask for help with paperwork

Your application can be delayed when the paperwork is incomplete. DSHS has financial service workers and social workers who can help. Ask for help, or simply write on the application “I need help.”

I tell people “Go to the office, take a number, and tell them you need help filling this out.” A lot of people are given the forms, take them home, try to fill them out and then say “Screw it — it’s too hard.”

– A consumer in Washington State

If possible, apply in person. You can apply online, but the process is complex and time consuming and mistakes will delay your application. It is best to ask for help. Every Community Services Office has people who will help you with the paperwork.

How to find the DSHS Community Services Office

Phone Call 211. Ask for the phone number for the DSHS Community Services Office.

Internet Visit Access Washington at <http://access.wa.gov/>. Look in the section “How Do I?” and click on “Find services within DSHS.” Click on “Find your local DSHS Community Services Office.”

Phone book Look in the Government Listings section in your phone book under Washington State Department of Social and Health Services.

What to say

The application process will be easier if you provide as much information as possible. Here are some key words and statements that will help the receptionist connect you with the help you need. Tell the receptionist:

- You need help with mental health and medical services.
- If you have been diagnosed, or if you have a history of mental illness.
- If you have a disability, and what that disability is.

Bring in as much documentation as you can

They will need copies of your bills and a bank statement if you have one. Bringing them with you will speed up the process. If possible, bring any documents that apply, such as:

- Rent statements
- Utility bills
- Bank statements
- Pay stubs
- Medical bills
- Letters from your doctor and mental health provider if you have one
- Letters from family members or friends that provide financial support, if any
- Letters from roommates describing the portion of the rent that each of you pay



Resources in Washington State

Statewide Information and Assistance Lines

Washington State Division of Behavioral Health
and Recovery Information Line

1-800-446-0259

<http://www1.dshs.wa.gov/Mentalhealth/>

An information and referral line staffed Monday–Friday, 8am–5pm
Calls during the week will be responded to within 24 hours; calls on
Fridays will be returned by Monday.

Washington Information Network 211

www.win211.org

Dial 211 from anywhere in Washington State to speak to a 211
Information and Referral Specialist for assistance, or dial toll-free
1-877-211-WASH (9274) for resources in your community.

Youth 'N Action!

(206) 543-8596 or (509) 954-7373

www.youthnaction.org

For youth 14 to 24 years who have been affected by mental illness
and/or emotional challenges.

NAMI Washington – National Alliance on Mental Illness

(360) 584-9622

www.nami.org and click on “State and Local NAMIs”

Education, advocacy and assistance for adults, children and families
with 25 affiliates throughout Washington.

Washington State Mental Health Crisis Lines

If there is a life-threatening emergency, please call 911.

Suicide prevention 1-800-273-8255; TTY: 1-800-799-4TTY (4889)

For all other mental health crises Call the number listed below for your county.

Adams County
509-488-5611
(collect-Othello)
509-659-4357
(collect-Ritzville)

Asotin County
1-888-475-5665

Benton/Franklin County
1-800-783-0544
509-783-0500

Chelan County
1-800-852-2923
509-662-7105

Clallam County
360-374-5011
360-374-6177

Clark County
1-800-626-8137
360-696-9560

Columbia County
1-866-382-1164

Cowlitz County
1-800-803-8833
360-425-6064

Douglas County
1-800-852-2823
509-662-7105

Ferry County
1-866-268-5105

Franklin County
1-800-783-0544

Garfield County
1-888-475-5665

Grant County
509-765-1717
(TTY/TDD collect)
1-877-467-4303

Grays Harbor County
1-800-685-6556

Island County
1-800-584-3578

Jefferson County
360-385-0321

King County
1-866-427-4747
206-461-3222

Kitsap County
360-479-3033 or
1-800-843-4793

Kittitas County
509-925-9861
509-925-4168
(after hours)

Klickitat County
1-800-572-8122

Lewis County
1-800-559-6696
360-748-6696

Lincoln County
1-888-380-6823

Mason County
1-800-270-0041
360-754-1338

Okanogan County
1-866-826-6191
509-826-6191

Pacific County
1-800-884-2298

Pend Oreille County
1-866-847-8540

Pierce County
1-800-576-7764

San Juan County
1-800-584-3578

Skagit County
1-800-584-3578

Skamania County
1-509-427-3850 #1

Snohomish County
1-800-584-3578
425-258-4357

Spokane County
1-877-678-4428
509-838-4428

Stevens County
1-888-380-6823

Thurston County
1-800-270-0041
360-754-1338

Wahkiakum County
1-800-635-5989

Walla Walla County
509-524-2999

Whatcom County
1-800-584-3578

Whitman County
1-866-871-6385

Yakima County
509-575-4200 or
1-800-572-8122

Peer Support Organizations

For local adult consumer and parent organizations, call the Division of Behavioral Health and Recovery at 1-800-446-0249.

Youth 'N Action! is a youth support program, for youth 14 to 24 years who have been affected by mental illness and/or emotional challenges. Calls to Youth 'N Action are answered within 24 hours.

Eastern Washington: 509-954-7373

Western Washington: 206-543-8596

www.youthnaction.org

Resources:

Youth Guide to the Washington Mental Health System, written by and for youth found at www.youthnaction.org under “Our projects.”

NAMI Washington – National Alliance on Mental Illness

Local chapters are available in 24 cities throughout Washington.

NAMI Washington Helpline: 1-800-782-9264

www.nami.org and click on “State and Local NAMIs”

Resources:

Education, advocacy and assistance

NAMI Basics is a weekly class offered for up to six weeks for parents and caregivers of children and youth living with mental illnesses.

NAMI Connections is a weekly recovery support group for people living with mental illness in which you learn from each other.

Peer-to-Peer is a class for people with mental illness who are interested in recovery. It consists of nine two-hour units and is taught by a team of three trained “Mentors” who are personally experienced at living well with mental illness.

Family-to-Family is a free, 12-week course for family caregivers of individuals with severe mental illnesses. The course is taught by trained family members.

In Our Own Voice is a unique public education program where two people in recovery from mental illness share personal stories.

Community Mental Health Centers

Washington Information Network 211

www.win211.org

Dial 211 from anywhere in Washington State to speak to a 211 Information and Referral Specialist for assistance, or dial toll-free 1-877-211-WASH (9274) for resources in your community.

Community and Migrant Health Centers

Washington Information Network 211

www.win211.org

Dial 211 from anywhere in Washington State to speak to a 211 Information and Referral Specialist for assistance, or dial toll-free 1-877-211-WASH (9274) for resources in your community.

Consumer Clubhouses

www.dshs.wa.gov/mentalhealth/clubhouses.shtml







Be part of the change.

To download this publication as a PDF or to order printed copies, go to www.dshs.wa.gov/geninfo/pubs3.html

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