

## Psychiatrists, Psychologists & Counsellors: What's the Difference?

This fact sheet compares psychological services that sex and gender diverse (SGD) people may use. It compares the work of psychiatrists, psychologists and counsellors.

**Note:** To find SGD-friendly services, please visit:

<http://gendercentre.com/resources/>

### For Medical Transition in Australia

The table on the next page compares mental health services for treatment in regards to a medical transition in Australia.

Differences will also apply depending on the state or territory that you live in. For more information on these regional differences, please visit

<http://www.ftmaustralia.org/transition/>

[getting-started-australia.html](http://www.ftmaustralia.org/transition/getting-started-australia.html)

The following table compares the work of psychiatrists, psychologists and counsellors in terms of three areas:

**Training:** What training is required for these professionals to practice? Is registration with a formal body required?

**Focus of service:** Generally speaking, what are the differences in approach between the fields of psychiatry, psychology and counselling?

**For medical transition:** What should I know about seeing these practitioners for the purposes of medical transition?

## For Other Purposes Not Related to a Medical Transition

If you do not seek to medically transition, you may choose to see either a counsellor, psychologist or psychiatrist, depending on your needs.

For example:

if you need advice about depression, you could see a counsellor, psychologist or psychiatrist, as well as your GP

if you need support in disclosing your gender identity to your family, work colleagues or others, you might choose to see a counsellor or a psychologist.

A good quality rapport with your GP is recommended, as they can assist you with deciding what type of practitioner to see.

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<http://gendercentre.com/>

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	Psychiatrists	Psychologists	Counsellors
Training	<p>Before being allowed to register as a psychiatrist, a person must graduate from medical school as a doctor and then complete further medical training specialising in psychiatry – that is, the study and treatment of mental disorders.</p>	<p>Psychologists must have at least 4 years of university degree, plus either 2 years supervision, a Masters degree or a Doctorate (PhD or DPsych)</p> <p>Restrictions apply to all who want to use the title 'psychologist' in any form in all states and territories of Australia, and all psychologists practising psychology must register with the Psychology Board of Australia (PBA)/Australian Health Practitioners Regulation Agency (AHPRA)</p> <p>Psychologists can work in academic settings (research and teaching) and clinical settings (working in therapeutic contexts). However, only psychologists who are registered with the PBA to work in clinical settings are allowed to use the title 'psychologist'.</p>	<p>To practise informally as a counsellor, one does not usually require any qualification</p> <p>To practise formally as a registered counsellor, a person typically has to complete two to three years of study, and 12 months of supervised training</p> <p>The terms 'counsellor', 'psychotherapist' and 'social worker' are currently self-regulated, with several organisations campaigning for government regulation.</p>
Focus	<p>The focus of modern psychiatry is almost completely biologically motivated, and problems such as depression, anxiety and general mental disorders are perceived as biochemical imbalances and treated with medication</p> <p>Seeing a psychiatrist is much like seeing a doctor. Based on your symptoms, you will most likely be prescribed medication to eliminate these symptoms</p> <p>Some psychiatrists conduct therapy, although their original/core training is based in a medical or biological model of health.</p>	<p>Rather than approaching problems from a biochemical perspective, psychologists are more likely to perceive them from a behavioural perspective and ask you about your present and past behaviour, your feelings, and core reason for your concerns</p> <p>Psychologists have a much deeper awareness of the behavioural causes of problems than psychiatrists do, thus making sessions less rigid and often based on a personalised approach that suits you</p> <p>Psychologists are not permitted to prescribe medication.</p>	<p>Rather than imposing a medical or behavioural model on clients, counsellors typically encourage their clients to direct the session</p> <p>Through reflecting, listening, and sometimes challenging the statements that you make, the counsellor is able to create an environment where you are able to rebuild your own sense of trust and intuition</p> <p>This process allows you to overcome the problems you are experiencing without relying on someone else. The responsibility remains in your hands throughout the session.</p>
For medical transition	<p>You may need to seek out a psychiatrist who specialises in gender identity issues, as others may have little understanding of this specialist area</p> <p>The psychiatrist's role is to diagnose <b>Gender Identity Disorder</b>, a disorder listed in the <b>Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Health Disorders, Fourth Edition (DSM IV)</b>. In making this diagnosis, they write up a report to be sent to medical doctors so hormones and/or surgery can be started</p> <p>Generally, the psychiatrist would like to see someone for approximately 6 sessions before they will give a diagnosis. However, please note this can vary from person to person.</p>	<p>You may need to seek out a psychologist who specialises in this area</p> <p>Like psychiatrists, psychologists can give a diagnosis of Gender Identity Disorder. They then write up a report/letter to be sent to medical doctors so that treatment with hormones and/or surgery can begin. However, some doctors and surgeons prefer this letter to be written by a psychiatrist (in addition to a psychologist's report)</p> <p>With a referral from a GP or psychiatrist, Medicare rebates are available for up to 12 sessions per calendar year. This means that you only pay the <i>gap fee</i> for these sessions (the fee difference between what Medicare covers and what the psychologist charges – usually \$20 to \$80).</p>	<p>It is advisable to see a counsellor who has experience in counselling SGD people</p> <p>Seeing a counsellor may be more for support and advocacy rather writing reports and letters</p> <p>Counsellors cannot give diagnoses, but they are able to assist you (and close personal others) through a time that may be challenging.</p>