

FINDING A MENTAL HEALTH COUNSELLOR FOR PAIN

The overlap of anxiety, depression and pain is particularly common in chronic pain. Experiences of anxiety and/or depression can cause increased intensity of pain and flare-ups of pain often impact wellbeing. As well, people living with pain often deal with profound loss and unwanted changes in their lives and may experience these effects in a variety of ways including grief, anger and isolation.

Using self-help materials, receiving support from friends and family, or joining a local support group can help you develop coping skills. However, sometimes we need extra help. This is particularly true when your mental health is causing distress or interfering with some part of your life. Working with a counsellor may give you the additional guidance you need to manage the emotional and psychological impacts of living with pain.

To learn more about the connections between mental health and pain, please visit

<https://www.liveplanbc.ca/pain-education>

COUNSELLING APPROACHES FOUND TO BE EFFECTIVE FOR PEOPLE LIVING WITH CHRONIC PAIN:

- Cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT)
- Mindfulness-based stress reduction
- Acceptance and commitment therapy
- Motivational interviewing

You may consider speaking with your prospective counsellor about these modalities and choosing a method that works for you. Many counsellors are well-versed in the above methods, regardless of whether they specialize in chronic pain. Please note that although these approaches are found to be effective for addressing chronic pain, counselling is a highly personalized experience, and other modalities may be a better fit for you.

CHOOSING A PROFESSIONAL

It's important to choose a counsellor who is the right fit for you so you can build a healthy therapeutic alliance. "Therapeutic alliance" refers to the strength of relationship between client and counsellor. Research has proven that therapeutic alliance has a direct correlation to how successful counselling is and is arguably the most important factor for positive outcomes.

Your comfort and preferences are important factors in choosing a counsellor. Some things you may consider when selecting a counsellor could include whether you feel the counsellor understands the experiences of your gender and gender expression, ethnicity, religious background or culture, age/stage of life, sexual orientation, or any other life experiences that are an important part of who you are.

You may also want to consider:

- Location
- Availability of online vs. in-person sessions
- Waitlist times, if any

All these factors can help build a strong therapeutic alliance, which will help you reach your goals in counselling. Once you have selected a counsellor, you may consider requesting an initial consult to ensure they are the right fit for you before proceeding. Many counsellors offer an initial consult free of cost or at a reduced rate. Remember, it is okay to take your time to find the right fit!

Another factor to consider when choosing a counsellor is your budget. Please see below for information on how to find a counsellor depending on your financial situation.

FINDING A PRIVATE COUNSELLOR

If you have private health insurance or the financial means to do so, you may consider accessing counselling through the private sector. Health insurers may specify what designation and/or regulatory body your counsellor must be from to access coverage, so it is important to check with your insurer before selecting a professional.

Please check the resources below for online databases you can use to find private counsellors in your area:

- <https://painbc.ca/find-help/help-near-you>
- <https://www.firstsession.com/resources/how-to-find-a-counsellor-in-bc>
- <https://counsellingbc.com/counsellors>

- <https://bcacc.ca/counsellors/>
- <https://www.psychologytoday.com/ca/therapists/british-columbia>
- <https://painbc.ca/about/programs/pain-support-line>: 1-844-880-PAIN (7246)

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Hope for Wellness

Website: <https://www.hopeforwellness.ca/> (online chat available)

Contact information: 1-855-242-3310

Cost: Free

Description: The Hope for Wellness Helpline is available 24/7 for all Indigenous people across Canada. Services available in both English and French, and telephone support in Cree, Ojibway (Anishinaabemowin), and Inuktitut is available upon request (time for support in these languages may need to be scheduled in advance).

Help Starts Here

Website: <https://helpstartshere.gov.bc.ca/>

Description: Online search tool provided by the Ministry of Mental Health and Addictions which helps BC residents find mental health resources such as addiction treatment, counselling, wellness programs, and information/ tools.

FINDING AN AFFORDABLE COUNSELLOR

Many counsellors offer sliding-scale fees for clients who are unable to afford standard rates. If you need financial assistance with counselling, you can consider accessing private-pay counselling agencies that offer a sliding-scale rate. Various not-for-profit and government organizations also offer free or low-cost counselling services. Each provider will have varying eligibility criteria such as income thresholds, personal history, gender, age, etc. To determine if you are eligible, you can reference the provider's website or call them directly to inquire.

Many free or low-cost counselling services do not specialize in chronic pain. However, it is important to remember that therapeutic approaches found to be effective for people with chronic pain are widely practiced and a strong therapeutic alliance is one of the most important factors for success. Therefore, you can achieve positive results from counselling regardless of whether the counsellor specializes in chronic pain.

These resources are a good starting point to find affordable counsellors in your area:

- <https://www.ementalhealth.ca/>
- <https://willowtreecounselling.ca/wp-content/themes/willowtree/reduced-cost-counselling.pdf>
- [https://painbc.ca/about/programs/pain-support-line: 1-844-880-PAIN \(7246\)](https://painbc.ca/about/programs/pain-support-line: 1-844-880-PAIN (7246))
- <https://www2.gov.bc.ca/gov/content/health/managing-your-health/mental-health-substance-use/virtual-mental-health-supports>
- <https://openpathcollective.org/>

While counselling can help people work through issues that lead to thoughts of suicide, you need help more urgently if you are in crisis. You can get help right away by reaching out to your local crisis line <https://www.crisisservicescanada.ca/en/> 1-800-784-2433, calling 9-1-1, or visiting your local hospital. A counsellor can help support you going forward, once you are no longer in crisis.

REFERENCES

- <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3986332/>
- https://www.researchgate.net/profile/Adam-Horvath-3/publication/14828157_The_role_of_the_therapeutic_alliance_in_Psychotherapy/links/54bc62a30cf24e50e9404dbf/The-role-of-the-therapeutic-alliance-in-Psychotherapy.pdf