

When you're ready to ask for help, the last thing you need is to get overwhelmed by the process of *finding* a therapist.

If you don't have experience or knowledge of how the mental health field in Winnipeg and beyond works, it's easy to get confused as you try and find the right person to join you on your journey.

It's important to have a sense of what services and providers are available, and how they work - so that you're plugging in to the *right help* for you. Below you'll find an *imperfect and not exhaustive* summary of things that are helpful to know as you start your search for a counsellor in Winnipeg and beyond.

As you start your journey of looking for some support, here's my effort to consolidate what prospective clients might need to know as they begin their search.

## 1. Titles

In Manitoba there is no set term that all people providing mental health services use. Some may identify as a counsellor, counselling therapist, psychotherapist, therapist, mental health therapist, psychologist, or social worker. Depending on the degree procured and type of work they are doing, folks may identify using different titles. Psychologists and social workers have to have been registered to use those specific titles, but unfortunately *counsellor*, *therapist*, and *psychotherapist* are titles anyone can claim - so it's important to do some digging into the type of education your therapist has.

Those with relevant mental health degrees can work to register with the Manitoba College of Social Workers and be granted status as Registered Social Workers by providing verification of substantial equivalency. This is required for folks who want to work in government funded positions in our province. While the MCSW is presently responsible for registering counsellors in Manitoba, it should be noted that the process of meeting their requirements is rigorous, and *not* all clinicians with relevant training are able to meet the requirements. There is work currently in progress to create a provincially regulated body for counselling therapists and associated professions, though it is still in development stages. More info can be found here <http://www.fact-manitoba.org/faqs.html>.

## 2. Education

There are many streams of study that can lead one to providing one-on-one (or couple/family/group) therapy services. Folks with any of the credentials below\* may provide counselling services in Manitoba.

- Applied Counselling Certificate (a shorter certificate program, not a masters level or Ph.D level program)
- Bachelor of Social Work (BSW)
- Registered Psychiatric Nurse (RPN)
- Masters of Science (M.Sc) in *counselling therapy, psychology, or family relations and human development*
- Masters of Social Work (MSW)
- Master of Arts (MA) in *counselling, or counselling psychology*
- Master of Education (M.Ed) in *counselling, counselling psychology, school psychology,*
- Masters of Marriage and Family Therapy (MMFT)
- Masters of Psychotherapy and Spirituality (MPS)
- Ph.D in *clinical psychology or counselling psychology*
- Psychiatrist, *a medical doctor trained to diagnose and prescribe medication helpful in the management of mental health disorders*

\*there may be other relevant degrees not listed

## 3. Accrediting Bodies

If you are looking to obtain mental health services in Winnipeg, it's helpful to check out the larger accrediting body that your potential therapist belongs to. Clinical psychologists belong to the Psychological Association of Manitoba (<https://www.cpmb.ca/>) and as members, are required to operate according to their practice guidelines.

Master's trained clinicians may belong to one of a number of credentialing bodies. These include (but may not be limited to):

The Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association (CCPA) *with credentialed therapists using the Certified Canadian Counsellor designation - C.C.C.*

The Canadian Professional Counsellors Association (CPCA) *with credentialed therapists using the Registered Professional Counsellor designation - R.P.C.*

The Manitoba College of Social Workers is the accrediting body for registered social workers (and others with equivalent counselling experience), *who identify using the letters RSW*. Note that a social worker with a Bachelors of Social Work (BSW) has a 4 year degree, whereas someone with a Masters of Social Work has done an additional two years of graduate studies and practicum placement in the field.

Registered Psychiatric Nurses belong to The College of Registered Psychiatric Nurses of Manitoba. They complete a 4 year degree focused on nursing related to mental health, and are part of the mental health delivery system in Manitoba. Some psychiatric nurses choose to pursue private practice work, offering private fee for service therapy. Some may also have a Masters degree in Psychiatric Nursing (MPN).

Those with a Masters in Marriage and Family Therapy (MMFT) would register with the Canadian Association of Marriage and Family Therapists (CAMFT) or the American Association of Marriage and Family Therapists (AAMFT) with *registered therapists using the Registered Marriage and Family Therapist designation - RMFT*. This means they have completed a required amount of supervised counselling hours beyond the completion of their degree, and have been granted status as 'registered' members.

School psychologists register with the Manitoba Association of School Psychologists, the MASP.

Those who have completed a Master's degree in counselling or related field from a theological institution may belong to the Professional Association of Christian Counsellors & Psychotherapists (PACCP).

Belonging to an accrediting body and obtaining special letters behind their name isn't simply a counsellor status symbol, it's a way of making sure that a clinician has met the educational requirements, practicum standards, and supervision requirements to provide good therapy. It also means they would carry insurance to practice, which is an important thing to keep therapists and clients safe. Any members of regulated bodies also have a code of conduct and ethical guidelines to follow, meaning there are channels available to clients to report unethical or questionable therapist conduct.

It's also worthwhile to be aware that some associations have members who support their work, but aren't necessarily credentialed/registered/legitimate health professionals. For example, I could join the Canadian Psychological Association as a member, but I am not a psychologist. It is important to note that *membership in a counselling or psychological association does not always mean someone is a registered or certified member of the association*. Certified or registered members should always have proof of membership and a registration/certification number they can provide.

#### **4. What's the Difference?**

There may be differences in how clinicians approach a client's presenting issue depending on what training they received. For example, therapists who obtain an MFT would be more systems oriented therapists, meaning they look at a client's experience in light of how they fit into their larger family/social system, whereas psychologists often lean towards utilizing cognitive behavioural interventions.

Some clinicians identify as attachment therapists (with attention given to a client's attachment style and attachment history), others may use a CBT framework (identifying how a client's thoughts impact behaviour). Some may use a mindfulness based approach, solution focused framework, or brief therapy. Psychodynamic or psychoanalytic therapists seek to help clients identify ways in which unconscious or perceptions from childhood may be impacting thought or behaviour in adulthood. In reality, many clinicians integrate various theories as they work with clients, tailoring their approach to best suit the presenting concerns of the client.

Some therapeutic approaches may be preferred over others, so if you are to see a clinician and don't click with the way they work - it may mean that you are looking for therapy with a different feel. It may be worthwhile to check out a therapist with a different approach to therapy if your first try is not a fit.

Therapy is definitely not a one size fits all experience, and there are many, many ways of coming at the same issue.

#### **5. Fees and Extended Health Insurance Coverage**

Fees for therapy can be wide ranging. Therapy rates in Winnipeg on average, for a Master's level trained therapist, range from \$80 to \$150/hr depending on experience and education. The Psychological Association of Manitoba suggests the recommended rate for

psychologists be at the \$180/hr mark, though each clinician would set their own fee structure.

Not all clinics offer reduced rate fees, though some do have a reserved amount of space for reduced fee or sliding scale clients.

In terms of extended health benefits covering therapy, each provider and plan has different requirements.

Some plans cover **psychology services**, meaning services provided by a clinical psychologist - someone with a Ph.D, and who is registered by the Psychological Association of Manitoba.

Others may also cover **registered social workers** or folks who have an RSW behind their name. Note that some master's trained therapists in other disciplines *other than social work* have been able to obtain status as registered social workers. Check with your prospective clinician if this is something your plan offers, and you hope to have covered.

Lastly, plans may also cover **clinical counselling or psychotherapy** which may mean any therapist who belongs to a counselling or psychotherapy organization. Be sure to confirm with your benefit provider that the organization that your specific therapist belongs to is on their list of approved providers.

Some health plans may allow coverage from health spending accounts to cover therapy services if your practitioner isn't covered specifically by your plan, but again, this is plan specific - so make sure you check in with your benefits provider before assuming you'll be covered.

## **6. Private pay, publicly funded, or employee assistance plan?**

Mental health services can be hard to access. Full stop. It's unfortunate, but true. Especially for those who are not in mental health *crisis*, but who require support to live well or sort out a stuck spot.

For those in mental health crisis, there are free, publicly funded services available. The Crisis Response Center at Health Sciences Center is a 24 hour mental health emergency clinic. Folks experiencing immediate crises should find their way there, or could also access other resources found here: <http://klinik.mb.ca/crisis-support/>.

In Winnipeg shared care clinics also have a counsellor on staff, and so having a conversation with your GP can be a way to access services. Referrals for psychologists can be made by GP's as well, though it may take a long time before you are able to be seen. Youth struggling with mental health crisis are often referred to the Manitoba Adolescent Treatment Center (MATC), though many parents still elect to pay privately for outside services as well.

Some people may have mental health services as part of their employee benefits plan. These are often referred to as "EAP" or employee assistance plan. Many insurers cover short term therapy, often ranging from 3 to 12 sessions, and *have specific providers that they would send you to in order to receive these services*. EAP services can typically be accessed by contacting your extended health benefit provider. It is important to note that the number of sessions and 'rules' around continuing with your therapist may differ from plan to plan after your allotted sessions run out. Some plans allow you to pay out of pocket for sessions beyond what they provide, while some plans prohibit continuing services with your clinician after the plan maximum is reached. This is something to check in on if you anticipate needing more sessions than your plan provides.

A note on EAP services: it is quite typical to *not* be able to pick a specific clinician when obtaining EAP services. If you are not finding your therapist to be a good fit in the first session or two, *ask for a different one*.

Due to the lack of available public resources or insufficient EAP support, many people turn to private pay clinics or clinicians for mental health support.

## **7. Special Training & Ongoing Education**

Mental health providers may also elect to specialize in specific streams of therapy. This may mean that therapist may have a Master's degree, but may also be trained in play therapy. I have additional training in EMDR, a specific therapy that addresses trauma. Other clinicians have chosen to pursue even more niche markets, like equine therapy. Ongoing education is critical to continued growth as a clinician, and it is common that practitioners will branch out into more specialized areas with skillset specific training.

If a clinician purports to offer therapy services for a specific skillset or market, like working with children or couples, it is entirely reasonable to expect they would have pursued specialized training in that arena. A play therapy certificate, or advanced training in a particular method of couples therapy (such as Emotion Focused Therapy or The Gottman Method) would be evidence of quality ongoing training.

Professional therapists complete formal studies and their practicum with a base level of competence and skill at treating an array of mental health issues, but like any career - more training in specialized areas would lend itself to greater capacity to treat that specific population or concern.

If you're going to see someone about a specific issue, it's okay to ask a therapist if they have training specific to that area.

### **8. Other questions?**

If there are questions you have that aren't covered by the info above, feel free to pop a message and I'll keep adding relevant and helpful info.

Deciding to see a counsellor is a big deal. Hopefully this might make things a little clearer as you seek support.