

# Supporting GPs in providing mental health care in the community

by the Agency for Integrated Care

*As we commemorate World Mental Health Day on 10 October 2023, let us take a look at the support that is available for General Practitioners (GPs) in caring for patients with mental health issues and their caregivers.*

To enable persons with mental health needs to seek early treatment near their homes and receive better support in the community, the Agency for Integrated Care (AIC) and Ministry of Health (MOH) have developed and implemented the Community Mental Health (CMH) Masterplan since 2012, to build an integrated community mental health network across the health, social and community care sectors.

As part of the CMH Masterplan, the Mental Health GP Partnership (MHGPP) was established, where GPs play a key role in enabling early identification and improved access for mental health services.

Building upon the efforts to strengthen mental health support in the community and primary care, AIC worked with Primary Care Networks (PCNs) to develop the Primary Care Network-Mental Health (PCN-MH) Initiative, as part of the existing MHGPP, to offer team-based and holistic care and support for patients with mental health and chronic conditions.

Based on an annual survey conducted among doctors in the MHGPP, **about 2,500 clients with mental health and/or dementia conditions** were seen in 2022.

As of September 2023, there were over **400 Mental Health GP Partners** in Singapore.

The top 2 common presenting issues among patients seen by Mental Health GP Partners in 2022 were **anxiety** and **depression**.



## Role of a Mental Health GP Partner

A Mental Health GP Partner provides care to patients with mild to moderate mental health and chronic health conditions through:

- ⊗ Providing consultation, diagnosis, pharmacotherapy, and treatment to support patients in coping and improving daily functioning.
- ⊗ Providing education and resources for caregivers on how to better engage and support their loved ones and connect them with appropriate resources.
- ⊗ Adopting a team-based approach involving medical and allied health services such as the Community Intervention Team (COMIT) and Assessment and Shared Care Team (ASCAT) to provide comprehensive support.

## Support for Mental Health GP Partners

### *Competency and capability building*

GPs enrolled in MHGPP will be partnered with the specialist-led multi-disciplinary ASCATs at restructured hospitals for trainings, case support and right-siting of patients' care. All structured trainings and case consultation are done through psychiatrists from the ASCATs. GP Partners may consult ASCATs for advice on the management of complex cases. For patients with higher care needs, GP Partners may escalate these patients to ASCATs for faster triage to specialist care.

*"Appreciate the ASCAT doctors' support through various communication platforms in providing ad hoc consultation and advice to managing complex patients."*

- Feedback from a Mental Health GP partner

## *Team-based support for psychosocial interventions*

GP partners may also refer patients requiring psychosocial interventions to the allied health-led COMITs who can provide assessment, counselling, therapy, case management and psychoeducation support for patients with mild to moderate mental health and/or dementia conditions, as well as their caregivers.

For GPs who are part of the PCN-MH, they can also tap on their PCN nurse counsellors to provide counselling for patients with mild mental health conditions, while referring patients with mild to moderate conditions to COMITs.

## *Patient care made affordable*

By participating in the national GP schemes such as Community Health Assist Scheme (CHAS) and Chronic Disease Management Programme (CDMP), eligible patients will be able to receive affordable care for chronic and mental health conditions in the GP setting. CDMP complements CHAS subsidies, allowing eligible patients to tap on Medisave to claim for outpatient treatment of the chronic conditions to defray the costs of the treatment received.


Additionally, the accessibility and affordability of mental health care for patients in the community is further enhanced with the drug support offered to GP Partners, where they are able to place orders for psychiatric drugs from NHG pharmacy at an affordable cost.

Scan the QR code and log in to Primary Care Pages to access a curated set of Community Mental Health resources:



## Join the MHGPP today!

**For more information on the programme, get in touch with your PCN HQ, or your AIC Account Manager if you are not in a PCN.**

 <https://for.sg/gpamfinder>

For more information on available mental health services and resources, please email AIC at [ccmh@aic.sg](mailto:ccmh@aic.sg).