

WHAT IS A **PSYCHOLOGIST** AND HOW CAN THEY HELP?

What Does a Psychologist Do?

A psychologist is trained to assess and diagnose problems in thinking, feeling and behaving as well as helping people overcome or manage these problems.

Psychological tests help us understand a person's problems in thought, mood and behaviour so that problems can be accurately diagnosed and matched with the right treatment. In many provinces, only psychologists, physicians and nurse practitioners can make a mental health diagnosis.

Psychologists also help people overcome or manage their problems using a variety of psychological treatments or psychotherapies. The mental health problems that people experience most often are depression and anxiety, but psychologists also provide treatment in the following areas:

- fears and phobias
- problems in learning and memory
- the impact of psychological factors on physical illnesses like diabetes, heart disease, chronic pain, and stroke
- the psychological aspects of terminal illness and end-of-life care
- addiction and substance use (e.g. smoking, alcohol, drugs)
- stress, frustration and anger in roles and relationships
- marital and family problems
- psychological factors related to work performance, school, recreation, and sport
- mental health issues and problems associated with criminal behaviour

- the psychological and cognitive impacts of brain injury and dementia
- developmental problems that occur in childhood, like ADHD and Autism
- the psychological impacts of traumatic events
- eating disorders



Where Do Psychologists Work?

Psychologists work in a number of different settings including:

- hospitals and rehabilitation centres
- community and family practice clinics
- private practices
- correctional facilities
- schools and universities
- social service agencies

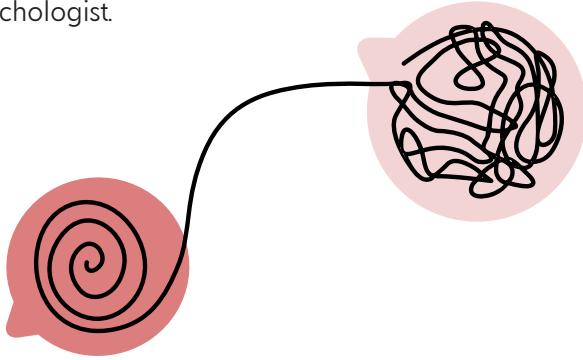
How Do You Become a Psychologist?

Like other health professionals, psychologists in Canada are licensed by a province or territory. A doctoral (e.g. a PhD) degree in psychology is typically required to become licensed as a psychologist in North America but, in some Canadian provinces, a master's degree is the entry-to-practice requirement. On average, it takes 6 years of university study to complete a master's degree and 10 years to complete a PhD.

The CPA has standards of accreditation for programmes that train psychologists at the doctoral level. Graduates from accredited programs complete, at minimum, 600 hours of practical training at the masters' level and 1,600 hours of residency training at the doctoral level.

In most Canadian jurisdictions, psychologists seeking to obtain their licence complete another 1,600 hours of supervised practice after they have completed their master's and/or PhD.

In addition, they must complete a series of practice, ethics and jurisprudence (legal) exams before they are eligible for independent practice as a psychologist. Only those who have successfully obtained a licence as a psychologist, from a provincial or territorial regulatory body (eg, College of Psychology), can call themselves a psychologist.



How are Psychologists Different from other Mental Health Professionals?

There are a number of mental health professionals who help people live with a mental health condition, such as a psychiatrist, family physician, psychotherapist, counsellor or social worker. Psychologists are the experts when it comes to developing, administering, scoring, and interpreting tests of personality and intellectual functions which are often the foundation of a mental health diagnosis. Because of the academic nature of their training, psychologists are trained to do research, program development and evaluation – all key skills in providing accountable and evidence-based mental health care to Canadians.

Why Psychological Assessment Matters

Psychological assessment can be key to making a mental health diagnosis, and an accurate diagnosis is key to establishing an effective treatment plan. Assessment and diagnosis may also be necessary for access to mental disorder related accommodations at school or work.

Psychological testing helps to better understand and address the:

- developmental and learning problems of a child
- memory problems experienced by an older adult
- social or interpersonal problems someone experiences at school, home or work
- fitness of someone to stand trial or if they are a danger to themselves or others

Psychotherapy and You

Psychologists are experts in providing psychotherapy to their clients (such as CBT — cognitive behavioral therapy). The research on psychotherapy is clear:

- 1.** It is effective with a wide variety of mental health disorders such as depression, anxiety, eating disorders, and substance use; there is also good evidence that CBT reduces the negative symptoms of psychotic disorders as well as traumatic brain injury.
- 2.** It is less expensive than, and at least as effective as, medication for the most frequent mental health conditions affecting Canadians, like depression and anxiety.
- 3.** It works better than most medication(s) for most types of anxiety.
- 4.** Leads to less relapse of depression when compared to treatment with medication alone.
- 5.** Leads to patients who do better following through on treatment, feel less burdened by their illness and have lower suicide rates when used with medication to treat bipolar disorder.
- 6.** Helps to prevent relapse when included in the services and supports for persons living with schizophrenia.
- 7.** Reduces depression and anxiety in people with heart disease, which leads to lower rates of disease-related deaths when combined with medical treatment.
- 8.** Psychotherapy saves about two dollars for every dollar spent, leading to a 20% - 30% savings in health care costs.