

# Supporting general practice to provide mental health services

## Supporting general practice

WA Primary Health Alliance recognises that general practice is the cornerstone of primary healthcare, working on the front line to keep Western Australians well and out of hospital.

There are a variety of ways WAPHA supports general practices to provide important services, including for people experiencing (or at risk of) mental illness.

WAPHA invests more than \$4 million a year to support General Practitioners, including: online clinical decision-making support; online, telephone and face-to-face support; digital integration; and enhanced practice support programs.

WAPHA engages and collaborates with general practices across the state to develop and implement quality treatment and support plans, services and activities that meet the unique health needs of the local community.

WAPHA staff maintain ongoing contact with general practices and provide regular general practice education events and emerging clinical leaders events.

WAPHA also provides general practices with data sharing reports that help them better understand their patient population. WAPHA sends regular newsletters with important clinical and practice management updates to GPs and practice staff.

## WAPHA's mental health initiatives

WAPHA commissions mental health and alcohol and other drug services from

non-government organisations and health service providers. The focus of WAPHA's mental health commissioning is primarily to support people experiencing mild-moderate mental health issues, (including people living in rural and remote areas) who experience barriers to accessing the Medicare Benefit Scheme Better Access program and therefore require additional support to access similar care.

WAPHA also funds discrete initiatives to support clinical care coordination of people with severe mental illness, psychosocial supports and headspace centres.

WAPHA focuses on co-occurring health and mental health issues and understands that an individual's mental health impacts on their physical health and vice versa.

In commissioning mental health services, WAPHA requires service providers to engage with primary care to address the physical health needs of consumers. It is WAPHA's intent to build capability in the chronic disease programs to recognise and respond to mental health issues.

WAPHA understands that patients with multimorbidity (two or more chronic health conditions) are increasingly common in general practice, posing a challenge for both patients and practitioners, due to the complexity of care and its impact on patients' lives<sup>1</sup>. WAPHA promotes treatment that is patient-focused, whilst imposing the smallest possible treatment burden.

WAPHA is working with State Government partners, the Mental Health Commission, the Department of Health and Health Service Providers to facilitate better transitions for individuals moving between phases of care, medical complexity and service locations.

## HealthPathways WA

Delivered by WAPHA, HealthPathways WA provides clinicians with clear and concise online guidance for assessing, managing and referring patients (including those with mental health issues) across Western Australia. The pathways are developed by a collaboration between health practitioners, drawing on clinical and practical knowledge from GPs, hospital specialists and allied health professionals.

More information, including links to registration, can be found at the [HealthPathways WA](http://www.healthpathways.wa.gov.au)

1 Harris M., Dennis S. & Pillay M. *Multimorbidity: negotiating priorities and making progress*. Reprinted from *Australian Family Physician*, Volume 42, Number 12, December 2013.

## PORTS

The Practitioner Online Referral Treatment Service (PORTS), is a state-wide GP referral option providing telephone and online mental health treatment and support to people who are financially disadvantaged and unable to access existing services. PORTS is available to people aged 16+ years with mild-moderate symptoms of low mood, depression, stress, anxiety or substance use problems. No Mental Health Care Plan is required to access the service.

The aim of the program is to streamline the referral process to ensure patients access the right care, at the right time, in the right location. More information regarding PORTS, including how to refer patients, can be found at [ports.org.au/](http://ports.org.au/)

## Initial Assessment and Referral service

WAPHA is developing a state-wide initial assessment and referral (IAR) service for GPs and other referrers. The IAR is staffed by experienced and suitably qualified clinicians and will improve the consistency and quality of patient intake, assessment and referral, thereby leading to better treatment outcomes for patients.

The IAR helps GPs and their patients make informed treatment choices to improve the targeting of psychological interventions and treatment supports within an explicit shared decision-making framework.

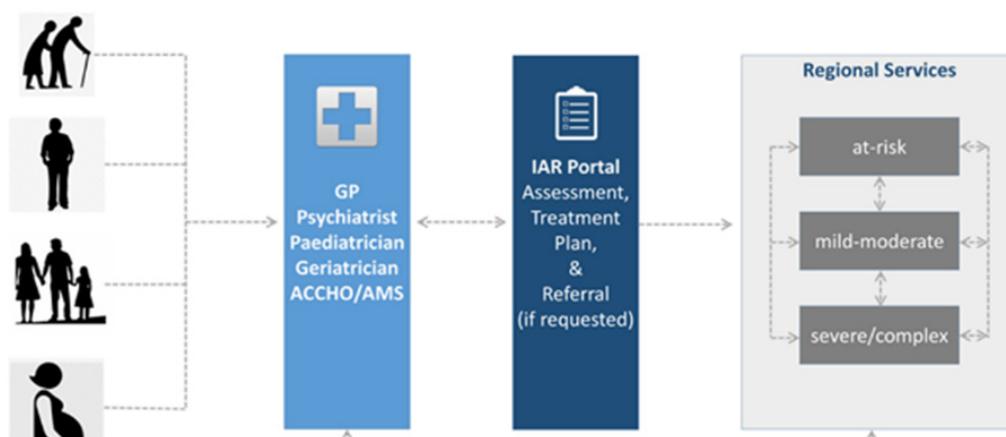


Figure 1: Initial assesment and referral pathway



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This is one of a series of factsheets regarding mental health and primary health care, developed by WAPHA. Further factsheets and other resources can be found at [www.wapha.org.au/mental-health-framework](http://www.wapha.org.au/mental-health-framework). The information in this factsheet was accurate at Decemeber 2020.