

# Differences Among Mental Health Professionals in Iowa

## Psychologists

Psychologists hold a doctoral degree in clinical psychology or another specialty such as counseling or education. A psychologist is qualified to administer and interpret neuropsychological or psychological tests and assessments that can help diagnose conditions. They treat patients through psycho-therapy (by talking with them) but they do not prescribe medication. They may use individual, group or family therapy. Some may have training in specific forms of therapy like cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), dialectical behavior therapy (DBT) and other behavioral therapy interventions.

**Degree requirements:** Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) in a field of psychology, EdD (Doctor of Education) or Doctor of Psychology (Psy.D.). They attend graduate school (4 to 6 years) and do at least 2 to 3 additional years in specialized training.

**Licensure & credentials:** Psychologists are licensed by licensure boards in each state.

## Counselors, Clinicians, & Therapists

These masters-level health care professionals are trained to evaluate a person's mental health and use therapeutic techniques based on specific training programs. They operate under a variety of job titles—including counselor, clinician, therapist or something else—based on the treatment setting. Working with one of these mental health professionals can lead not only to symptom reduction but to better ways of thinking, feeling and living.

**Degree requirements:** Master's degree (M.S. or M.A.) in a mental health-related field such as psychology, counseling psychology, marriage or family therapy, among others.

**Licensure & credentials:** Varies by specialty and state. They go to graduate school for two years. To obtain Licensure (LMFT), they must complete a certain amount of additional supervised clinical hours, and receive a passing score on a state licensing examination.

## Clinical Social Workers

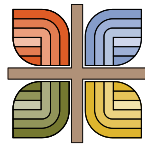
Clinical social workers are trained to evaluate a person's mental health and use therapeutic techniques based on specific training programs. They treat patients with psychotherapy (by talking with them) and can provide individual, family- and group therapy. They are also trained in case management and advocacy services.

**Degree requirements:** Master's degree in social work (MSW)

**Licensure & credentials:** Examples of licensure include: LISW, Licensed Independent Social Workers (has completed required 4,000 hours and successfully passed LISW examination); LMSW, Licensed Master Level Social Worker (requires 4,000 hours social work practice under a licensed independent social worker post-initial licensing LMSW exam); ACSW, Academy of Certified Social Workers.

## Other Professionals You May Encounter

Certified Peer Recovery Specialists are trained, certified and prepared to provide peer support, mentoring and guidance within a licensed mental health and substance abuse agency/organization. They assist to provide a permanent critical component that will substantially improve a person's ability to sustain recovery/wellness in the continuum of care.



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# Providers Who Prescribe & Monitor Medication

## Psychiatrists

They can diagnose mental health conditions, prescribe and monitor medications (if needed) and provide psychotherapy (talk treatment). Some have completed additional training in child and adolescent mental health, substance use disorders or geriatric psychiatry.

**Degree requirements:** MD degree (Doctor of Medicine) or DO (Doctor of Osteopathy). They attend medical school (4 years) and do specialty training in psychiatry (3 years for adult psychiatry and 2 more years for child/adolescent specialty).

**Licensure & credentials:** Licensed physician in the state where they are practicing.

## Psychiatric-Mental Health Nurse Practitioners (PMHNP)

Psychiatric or mental health nurse practitioners can provide assessment, diagnosis and therapy for mental health conditions or substance use disorders. Iowa authorizes the NP to prescribe medications or devices, including controlled substances. Iowa uses the “full practice” regulatory structure which allows nurse practitioners to practice to the full extent of their skill and training without physician supervision.

**Degree requirements:** Master of Science (MS) or Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) in nursing with specialized focus on psychiatry.

**Licensure & credentials:** Licensed nurse in the state where they are practicing.

## Primary Care Physicians

Primary care physicians and pediatricians can prescribe medication, but you might consider visiting someone who specializes in mental health care. Primary care and mental health professionals should work together to determine an individual’s best treatment plan.

**Degree requirements:** Doctor of Medicine (M.D.) or Doctor of Osteopathic Medicine (D.O.).

**Licensure & credentials:** Licensed physician in the state where they are practicing.

## Family Nurse Practitioners

Family nurse practitioners (FNP) can provide general medical services like those of a primary care physician, based on each state’s laws. Like primary care physicians, they can prescribe medication, but you might consider visiting someone who specializes in mental health care. Family nurse practitioners and mental health professionals should work together to determine an individual’s best treatment plan.

**Degree requirements:** Master of Science (M.S.) or Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) in nursing.

**Licensure & credentials:** Licensed nurse in the state where they are practicing.

## Psychologists

Iowa now allows psychologist to prescribe psychotropic medications. It requires a post-doctoral Master’s degree in clinical psychopharmacology. Requires practicum and 2 years of supervision with 2nd year to focus on prescribing to populations if psychologist desires to have children, elderly and pregnant women as part of their practice. Requires ongoing collaborative practice agreement with a prescribing physician and that physician is not limited to psychiatrists. This includes consultation with managing physician when patient is pregnant, or has serious medical condition as listed in Iowa Code r:645-244.6.