

# How to Access Mental Health Support in RURAL and REMOTE COMMUNITIES

Access to mental health services can be complex for a variety of reasons. This is especially true in rural areas. Yet there are action steps you can take to find help for yourself or someone else in need.

## Barriers to Care



of individuals in rural areas are without adequate access to services

One of the major challenges in rural areas is a lack of providers. There is a national shortage of mental health professionals. This leaves more than **90% of individuals in rural areas without adequate access to services each year.**<sup>1</sup> Other barriers to care in rural areas may include cost, travel distance, and stigma.<sup>1,2</sup>

Another challenge in rural areas can be limited access to the **internet.** Yet there may be free sources you can use to connect, such as public libraries and "hotspots" with free Wi-Fi. These can include coffee shops or shopping areas, for example. Here are [simple tips to find common free Wi-Fi spots.](#)

## STEPS YOU CAN TAKE to Learn About Mental Health

In spite of these barriers, you do have a voice in your care. There are a few basic steps you can take to learn more about mental health. This can help you find sources of support and guidance that you can trust.

**1** Start a conversation with your health care provider and ask for assistance.

**2** Take time to search online for information on mental health.

It's important to use reliable sources for information. These sources can include national associations or even regional health systems in your area. A few examples of trustworthy sources include:

- [National Alliance on Mental Illness](#)
- [Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration](#)
- [Suicide Prevention Resource Center](#)
- [SMI Adviser: Guidance for Individuals and Families](#)

You shouldn't use these sources for self-diagnosis. Yet they can give you a better understanding of symptoms and offer answers to common questions. This can lead to good conversations with your health care provider and help them find the mental health support you need.

## Telehealth Visits



There are ways to see a mental health professional even if in-person visits are not possible. Advances in technology expand the options now available through telehealth platforms. More health care providers now use these platforms, which makes it easier to find and access support.

Telehealth is a convenient way to access care from your computer, tablet, or smartphone.<sup>3</sup> Data show that it provides accessible and effective care as an alternative to in-person visits.<sup>4</sup> SMI Adviser offers guidance on [how to prepare for your telehealth visit](#) so you get the most out of it.

## E-Mental Health Services

E-mental health – or electronic mental health – is another way to find support. These mobile apps and text services also provide a level of privacy compared to the usual face-to-face counseling<sup>5</sup>. Examples of e-mental health options include apps that offer access to a therapist via texting, or crisis support numbers that accept both calls or texting.

## STEPS YOU CAN TAKE to Reduce Stigma

Sometimes it may feel uncomfortable to talk about what you experience. You may have concerns that others may think less of you if you have a mental illness. These feelings of fear and shame are a result of stigma. Stigma can sometimes cause people to avoid treatment or not fully explain their symptoms to their health care provider, as they would with other health conditions.<sup>6</sup>

The keys to [reducing stigma](#) are information and education.<sup>2</sup> That's why talking to your healthcare provider is a good first step. Just like diabetes or hypertension, there may be changes to your body chemistry, thinking, or coping abilities. As you learn more about your symptoms, it may feel more comfortable to you to seek support.

The words we use [when we talk about mental health](#) are also important. The right language can reduce stigma and make it easier to ask for support. Remember to:

1

Be kind to yourself.

2

Practice empathy with others.

3

Be an advocate for your friends, family, and co-workers.

4

Take care of your physical health to improve your overall well-being.

5

Seek out others and find support with spiritual resources and local or virtual [peer support groups](#).

## There is Hope

If you live in a rural community, it does not mean that you have to struggle with mental health symptoms alone. Talk to your health care provider to find resources that support your mental health needs. You may have options for care that are not limited to your local area or geography.



**1 in 5** Americans live with a mental health condition, and everyone has their own story.

Know that **YOU** are **NOT** a diagnosis. You can take actions that help challenge myths and misconceptions.

## Additional Resources

[NAMI Helpline](https://www.nami.org/About-NAMI/Contact-NAMI) 1-800-950-NAMI (6264)

[SAMSHA Helpline](https://www.samhsa.gov/1-800-662-HELP) 1-800-662-HELP (4357)

[National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](https://www.suicideline.org/) 1-800-273-8255

## References

1. Day SC, Day G, Keller M, Touchett H, Ampoker AB, Martin L, Lindsay JA. Personalized implementation of video telehealth for rural veterans (PIVOT-R). *Mhealth*. 2021 Apr 20;7:24. doi: 10.21037/mhealth.2020.03.02. PMID: 33898593; PMCID: PMC8063014.
2. Schroeder S, Tan CM, Urlacher B, Heitkamp T. The Role of Rural and Urban Geography and Gender in Community Stigma Around Mental Illness. *Health Education & Behavior*. 2021;48(1):63-73. doi:10.1177/1090198120974963
3. Langarizadeh M, Tabatabaei MS, Tavakol K, Naghipour M, Rostami A, Moghbeli F. Telemental Health Care, an Effective Alternative to Conventional Mental Care: a Systematic Review. *Acta Inform Med*. 2017;25(4):240-246. doi:10.5455/aim.2017.25.240-246
4. Dwyer A, de Almeida Neto A, Estival D, Li W, Lam-Cassettari C, Antoniou M. Suitability of Text-Based Communications for the Delivery of Psychological Therapeutic Services to Rural and Remote Communities: Scoping Review. *JMIR Ment Health*. 2021 Feb 24;8(2):e19478. doi: 10.2196/19478. PMID: 33625373; PMCID: PMC7946577.
5. Chen JA, Chung WJ, Young SK, Tuttle MC, Collins MB, Darghouth SL, Longley R, Levy R, Razafsha M, Kerner JC, Wozniak J, Huffman JC. COVID-19 and telepsychiatry: Early outpatient experiences and implications for the future. *Gen Hosp Psychiatry*. 2020 Sep-Oct;66:89-95. doi: 10.1016/j.genhosppsych.2020.07.002. Epub 2020 Jul 9. PMID: 32750604; PMCID: PMC7347331.
6. Bharadwaj P, Pai MM, Suziedelyte A. Mental health stigma, *Economics Letters*, 159,2017: 57-60. ISSN 0165-1765, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.econlet.2017.06.028>.

### GRANT STATEMENT:

Funding for SMI Adviser was made possible by Grant No. SM080818 from SAMHSA of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). The contents are those of the author(s) and do not necessarily represent the official views of, nor an endorsement, by SAMHSA/HHS, or the U.S. Government.