

# Over 630 GPs now part of scheme to treat mental health issues

Programme lets them access lower-cost psychiatric medications, support networks

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Mental health support in primary care has expanded here, with the number of general practitioners (GPs) who can access lower-cost psychiatric medications and support networks for managing complex mental health conditions rising to over 630 at the end of 2025.

This is up from more than 520 the year before, according to data from the Ministry of Health (MOH).

These doctors are part of the Mental Health General Practitioner Partnership (MHGPP) programme, which was launched in 2012 to enable GPs to identify, diagnose and manage patients with more complex mental health conditions.

At the same time, 23 out of 28 polyclinics now offer mental health services. MOH expects all polyclinics to offer such services over the next three years, a spokesperson said. It plans to expand the network of polyclinics to 32 by 2030.

This growth is part of the National Mental Health and Well-being Strategy to make care more accessible in the community.

The majority of participating GPs are from clinics under Singapore's preventive health initiative Healthier SG, which supports these primary care doctors with evidence-based guidance for patient care and information on community resources.

Since Jan 1, 2026, MOH has implemented new protocols for major depressive disorder and generalised anxiety disorder.

The protocols guide GPs in identifying and managing patients, including referring them to the GP's paired partners, such as community intervention teams (COMIT), for treatments that do not involve medication, such as counselling and psychotherapy.

For cases of more urgent and severe mental health needs, the MHGPP doctors also have access to the psychiatrist-led assessment and shared care teams, which can determine if hospitalised services are required at a hospital.

Previously, said Dr Jonathan Yeo from Family Medicine Clinic Chuanmoo, more GPs and family physicians would have assessed a patient's condition before prescribing the appropriate medication, and referred the patient to a psychiatrist only if his condition was complex or if he was at risk of self-harm.

The introduction of the new protocols has empowered primary care providers with a road map for holistic care.

Besides educating their patients on general lifestyle measures and prescribing medication if required, these doctors can now refer their patients for supportive counselling, psychoeducation and psychotherapy by allied health professionals, said Dr Yeo.

Community mental health teams here are fully funded by the Government, and there is no out-of-pocket cost to patients.

These allied health professionals can co-manage the patient together with the doctor by assessing if what is required is social interventions to address underlying difficulties, psychotherapy to treat dysfunctional ways of thinking and behaviour patterns, or counselling to cope with life changes, for instance, he added.

Even for the new care protocols, one of Dr Yeo's recent patients, who had been struggling with depressive symptoms for some time, would have been assessed to have mild depression, based on the patient's score on the Patient Health Questionnaire-9. This screening tool entails patients answering how often they have experienced nine core symptoms of depression

over the past two weeks. However, Dr Yeo said, the care protocols led to a revised diagnosis of moderately severe major depressive disorder.

In addition, the use of the Columbia-Suicide Severity Rating Scale as part of the protocol helped him to determine that the patient's risk



Most of the participating GPs are from clinics under preventive health initiative Healthier SG, which supports primary care doctors with guidance for patient care and information on community resources. PHOTO: IJUNE ZHANG

of suicide was low.

"The patient chose to continue being followed up by me, and as I also have postgraduate training in mental health, I was comfortable to continue delivering care to this

patient despite the moderate severity of the condition," he said.

For family medicine specialist Kenneth Teo from Kenneth Tan Medical Clinic, having a guide helps him discuss with patients

their options, as many do research their condition and treatment options before seeing a doctor.

"With the new protocols, I'm able to provide them with some psychological advice, connect them to mental health services in the community, or consider a referral to my paired COMIT team, ABIS Singapore," Dr Tan said.

"The COMIT team keeps me updated on whether the referral is successful, and I am able to follow up with the patient and see if the psychosocial interventions are helping or if we need to consider starting medication.

"Many patients actually improve on their symptom assessment scores through this approach."

Dr Tan said his patients are often surprised to learn that he is able to create a mental health plan for them that could involve school or corporate counsellors, private

mental health services, free COMIT services, or a referral to a tertiary hospital.

CHAS subsidies and MediSave can be tapped by Pioneer Generation, Merdeka Generation and CHAS card holders seeking care at MHGPP GP clinics, for mental health conditions under the Chronic Disease Management Programme.

MOH said the public can find community mental health and dementia services near them at <https://moh.gov.sg/wayfinding>.

If the clinic is part of Healthier SG, those card holders can also get enhanced subsidies for selected chronic medications.

MOH said it is currently reviewing the need to develop care protocols for other mental health conditions moving forward.

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## Mental health • More GP partners

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