

Demand for mental health treatment continues to increase, say psychologists

October 19 2021



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As the impact of the pandemic on mental health continues, psychologists are reporting a large increase in demand for treatment of anxiety and depression compared with last year, according to [a new survey](#) by the

American Psychological Association.

Many psychologists also said they had increased workloads and longer waitlists than before the [pandemic](#).

"As more people seek treatment for mental health conditions, the demands on psychological practitioners have increased," said Arthur C. Evans Jr., Ph.D., APA's CEO. "Like many other [health care providers](#), psychologists are feeling the pressure."

More than 8 in 10 (84%) psychologists who treat [anxiety disorders](#) said they have seen an increase in demand for anxiety treatment since the start of the pandemic, compared with 74% a year ago. Demand for treatment of depression is also up, with 72% of psychologists who treat depressive disorders saying they have seen an increase, compared with 60% in 2020. Other treatment areas with greater demand included sleep-wake disorders, obsessive-compulsive and related disorders, and substance-related and addictive disorders, the survey found.

The number of psychologists who reported receiving more referrals this year almost doubled from last year (from 37% in 2020 to 62% this year). Almost 7 in 10 psychologists (68%) with a waitlist reported that it had grown longer since the start of the pandemic.

With these indicators suggesting many psychologists are working at or beyond capacity, more than 4 in 10 (41%) reported being unable to meet the demand for treatment (up from 30% last year), and 46% said they felt burned out (up from 41% last year).

"These numbers highlight what we have been saying since the early days of the pandemic—we are facing a [mental health](#) tsunami," Evans said. "We need to continue to support treatment via [telehealth](#), and we must invest in screening, prevention, and innovative interventions to expand

access to various levels of care."

The pandemic led to a switch to telehealth for many psychologists, and virtually all clinical psychologists continue to provide at least some services remotely (96%), according to the survey. While few have returned to seeing patients entirely in person since a year ago (about 4% vs. 3% in 2020), a greater number of psychologists have adopted a hybrid approach of seeing some patients in person and some remotely (50% vs. 33% in 2020), revealing a slow progression back to the office.

APA continues to advocate for continued flexibility in insurance coverage of telehealth services, including audio-only telehealth, as well as equal coverage and reimbursement for telehealth services in comparison with in-person treatment. Telehealth services enable patients from underserved communities—such as [rural areas](#) and communities of color—to access these services, often for the first time.

Demonstrating that telehealth is here to stay, 96% of psychologists said that the use of telehealth during the pandemic has proven its effectiveness as a therapeutic tool, and 93% said that they intend to continue providing telehealth as an option in their practice after the pandemic.

In coping with the additional demand for [treatment](#), more than three-quarters of psychologists said that they were able to maintain a positive work-life balance (77%, up from 66%) and nearly two thirds said that they practiced self-care (64%, up from 55%).

MethodologyThe 2021 American Psychological Association's COVID-19 Practitioner Survey was distributed to approximately 26,400 doctoral-level active licensed psychologists (both APA members and non-members) in the U.S between Aug.30 and Sept. 17, 2021. A total of 1,141 psychologists responded. This was a non-probability sample, and

thus it is not possible to calculate [confidence intervals](#) or margins of error.

The 2020 COVID-19 Telehealth Practitioner Survey was fielded from Aug. 28 to Oct. 5, 2020. A total of 1,787 [psychologists](#) responded to that [survey](#).

More information: www.apa.org/pubs/reports/practitioner/covid-19-2021

Provided by American Psychological Association

Citation: Demand for mental health treatment continues to increase, say psychologists (2021, October 19) retrieved 4 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2021-10-demand-mental-health-treatment-psychologists.html>

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