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What is the difference between **Psychologists**, **Psychiatrists** and **Counsellors**?

Psychologists and psychiatrists both undergo many years of extensive formal training. The basic difference is the focus of the training they have received.

Psychiatrists have a degree in medicine like your family physician, followed by specialized training in the diagnosis and treatment of mental illness, emotional disorders, and behavioral problems. They may more often choose to prescribe medication in the treatment of difficulties. Their fees are covered by the Medical Services Plan, but there can be long waiting lists to be seen on referral. Psychologists in Alberta are licensed and regulated by the College of Alberta Psychologists.

Psychologists have completed a bachelor's degree and then continued in graduate training in psychology (the study of human development, learning, and behavior), and may have specialized in the assessment, diagnosis, and treatment of mental illness, emotional disorders, and behavioral problems. Although they may have training in the uses of medication to treat mental illness, they do not prescribe medication. Psychologists work to help people understand the nature of difficulties they may be dealing with, develop insight and skills to minimize and manage the impact of problems, and may coordinate with other health service providers, including physicians. Psychologists are also the only professionals specifically trained and qualified in the development, research, and administration of specialized psychological tests used to assess elements of intelligence or achievement, personality characteristics, mental and emotional disorders, and/or the effects of brain injury. Fees for psychologists' services are covered by private payment, extended medical plans, employee assistance programs, or through government agencies or other special programs. Psychologists in Alberta are licensed and regulated by the College of Alberta Psychologists.

Counselors may have a range of backgrounds and may have master's or doctoral level degrees from counseling programs. However, individuals may otherwise refer to themselves as a "therapist" or "counselor" but may or may not have training in the assessment or treatment of mental health issues. Titles such as "Registered Clinical Counselor" do not mean that individuals are formally regulated or specifically trained. Counselors are not regulated under the Health Professions Act. When you choose a Registered Psychologist, you can be assured that the professional has extensive formal training, supervision, and knowledge in their declared area of expertise; is expected to meet or exceed basic standards of practice and ethical responsibilities; and maintains an annual program of continuing education.

