

# THE TENNESSEAN

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## There are many way to find mental health treatment that meets your needs | Opinion

*The current pandemic has impacted the mental health of many Americans over the past two years. Here are some ways to find a guide to behavioral health treatment.*

**Michael Genovese** Guest Columnist

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### Key Points

- Michael Genovese, M.D., J.D., is a clinical psychiatrist, addiction specialist, and the chief medical officer of Acadia Healthcare.

Over the last 18 months, we've learned to expect the unexpected.

Some of us watched our loved ones lose their fight with COVID-19. Many of us waited patiently for vaccines that would allow us to return to some form of normalcy. Almost all of us had to get used to wearing a mask in public spaces.

As we navigate through even more uncertainty with the threat of the delta variant and ever-changing pandemic precautions, we're all getting an excellent reminder of the cumulative toll these unusual times have taken on our society.

According to a Kaiser Family Foundation poll, about 4 in 10 adults in the U.S. have reported symptoms of anxiety or depressive disorder during the pandemic. That's a massive jump from the 10% who reported these symptoms in the first six months of 2019.

Many adults have also experienced increased trouble sleeping, a worsening of chronic conditions due to stress and an increase in alcohol consumption or substance use.

These concerns have helped open up conversations about the importance of mental health in some circles, but navigating the treatment landscape remains daunting. What were once one-week waits to book appointments with a therapist have turned into month-long ordeals.

Some substance use disorder clinics have turned potential patients away due to COVID-19 capacity restrictions. Calls to suicide prevention hotlines saw enormous spikes in the middle of 2020.

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### Where to look for behavioral health treatment?

Telehealth has been the answer for many, offering a bridge to care at a time when in-person treatment was, in many cases, not an option. Many treatment providers are now offering both virtual and hybrid care models.

Pursuing treatment — especially with the rise in online wellness apps — has never been more accessible, but it has also never been more overwhelming. While new technology is exciting and there are worthwhile apps to consider when looking for help, these are often best used as a complement rather than a comprehensive solution.

Apps can be a good entry point into the behavioral health system, allowing users to become conversant in the language of mental health or addiction treatment. They can also be an excellent resource for aftercare planning, particularly for those in remote areas who may have less access to follow-up treatment.

It's important to find a treatment that targets your unique needs and helps guide you toward the type and level of care that is right for you. There are free resources out there that will point you toward personalized programming and comb through the often unpleasant processes of admissions and vetting so that you don't have to.

Acadia Healthcare's Treatment Placement Specialists® (TPS) team is one such option, as it uses a nationwide group of experts to connect clients with treatment programs and specialty services. It's a complimentary, real-time service that runs from pretreatment consultation to helping with step-down care. TPS also verifies insurance benefits and identifies the right level of care for each person's needs — inside or outside of Acadia's formal network.

## Free resources are available for mental health treatment

The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) offers a free, confidential, 24/7 national helpline that provides treatment referrals and information 365 days a year. The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) has a help line over the phone, an online chatroom and a 24/7 text message crisis support feature.

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The process of how we search for behavioral health treatment is shifting by the minute and there is no shortage of ways to pursue the care that is right for you. Talk to friends and family members, along with a trusted physician, about the viability and value they've found in telehealth apps or online wellness resources.

At the end of the day, it's most important to find the care that meets your needs rather than checking a series of boxes based on a set of symptoms.

Don't let this ever-changing treatment landscape deter you. Take advantage of the resources that have your best interests in mind. Listen to the guidance of those you trust.

You and your long-term well-being deserve it.

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