Who do I see for ADHD, Psychologist or Psychiatrist?



When attention, organisation, impulsivity or emotional regulation have been difficult for years, deciding where to seek help can feel like another executive-function task. The question of **psychologist or psychiatrist for ADHD** care is not about choosing one profession over the other. It is about understanding what each clinician can offer and building the right pathway for the person's needs.

For some people, a comprehensive psychological assessment and therapy are the main priorities. For others, medication assessment is also needed. Many children,

adolescents and adults benefit from care involving both a psychologist and a psychiatrist, with their GP and school or other supports involved where appropriate.

Psychologist or psychiatrist for ADHD: the core difference

Psychologists and psychiatrists are both qualified mental health professionals, but their training and roles differ.

A psychologist is trained in the assessment of behaviour, cognition, emotions and mental health. In ADHD care, a psychologist may conduct or contribute to a detailed assessment, explore whether ADHD criteria are met, identify co-occurring concerns, provide a written report where indicated, and deliver psychological therapy. Psychologists do not prescribe medication in Australia.

A psychiatrist is a medical doctor who has completed specialist training in mental health. Psychiatrists can assess and diagnose ADHD and, where clinically appropriate, prescribe and monitor medication. They also consider medical history, physical health, sleep, substance use, other medications and mental health conditions that may affect treatment decisions.

Neither role is inherently more suitable for every person. The most appropriate starting point depends on the questions that need answering, the complexity of the presentation and whether medication is being considered.

What an ADHD psychologist can help with

ADHD is not assessed through a single questionnaire, blood test or brain scan. A meaningful psychological assessment considers patterns over time and across settings. For a child, that may include home, school and social situations. For an adult, it may involve work, study, relationships, daily responsibilities and a review of childhood experiences.

A psychologist commonly gathers information through clinical interviews, standardised questionnaires, developmental and medical history, and information

from parents, partners, teachers or other relevant people. Cognitive or learning assessments may be recommended when there are concerns about academic progress, intellectual functioning, processing skills or specific learning difficulties.

This broader approach matters because ADHD-like difficulties can also arise alongside, or be influenced by, anxiety, depression, trauma, sleep problems, autism spectrum disorder, learning differences, hearing or vision concerns, family stress and physical health issues. An assessment should not assume that one explanation fits every difficulty.

Psychological therapy can also provide practical support after assessment. Therapy for ADHD may address planning and time management, task initiation, emotional regulation, problem-solving, self-critical thinking, parent strategies, communication and the impact of ADHD on relationships or self-esteem. Cognitive-behavioural and behavioural approaches are often adapted to the person's age, goals and circumstances.

For parents, support may include understanding how ADHD traits can affect routines, transitions, homework, behaviour and sibling relationships. It is not about blaming a child or parent. It is about creating consistent, realistic strategies that fit the family's everyday life.

What an ADHD psychiatrist can help with

A psychiatrist's role becomes especially relevant when medication is being explored. ADHD medicines are prescription medicines with specific regulatory requirements in Australia. A psychiatrist assesses whether medication may be appropriate, discusses potential benefits and limitations, considers risks and contraindications, and establishes a monitoring plan.

Medication is not a required part of ADHD care, and it does not replace supportive routines, psychological strategies, education adjustments or treatment for co-occurring conditions. Equally, some people find that medication assessment is an important part of their overall plan. The decision should be individualised and based on a careful clinical discussion.

Psychiatrists can also help where the clinical picture is more medically or psychiatrically complex. This may include significant mood symptoms, severe anxiety, obsessive-compulsive symptoms, substance-use concerns, psychosis, complex medication histories or uncertainty about how several conditions interact. In these circumstances, medical oversight can be particularly important.

Depending on the individual situation and relevant state or territory requirements, ongoing prescribing may involve a psychiatrist and GP working together. Your treating clinicians can explain the referral and prescribing arrangements that apply to you or your child.

Do you need both a psychologist and psychiatrist for ADHD?

Not always; a person who wants clarification about longstanding attention and executive-function difficulties, but is not considering medication, may begin with a psychologist. Someone who is seeking medication may need to see a psychiatrist, often with a detailed assessment report or supporting information available. The National Guidelines suggest that a multimodal approach is better than any individual approach.

In many cases, shared care is useful. A psychologist can provide comprehensive assessment and ongoing therapy, while a psychiatrist provides medical assessment and medication management where appropriate. A GP may coordinate referrals, physical health checks and parts of ongoing care. For children and adolescents, input from parents and school is often important; for adults, a partner, family member or workplace may contribute useful context with consent.

This does not mean every person needs multiple appointments with multiple professionals. Following a careful assessment, the care plan should match the clinical needs rather than follow a fixed formula.

Choosing where to start

A useful first question is: what do you need help with right now?

If the main need is a thorough understanding of whether ADHD may explain ongoing challenges, a psychologist experienced in comprehensive ADHD assessment may be an appropriate starting point. This can be particularly valuable where learning, behavioural, developmental, anxiety or autism-related questions also need consideration.

If medication is your immediate priority, speak with your GP about a psychiatrist referral and the information likely to be needed for a medical assessment. A GP can also review physical health, sleep, current medicines and other factors that may be relevant.

For a child whose teacher has raised concerns, it can be helpful to gather school reports, examples of learning concerns and any previous assessments before an appointment. For adults, old school reports are sometimes useful, but their absence does not automatically prevent assessment. Clinicians can explore developmental history through discussion and, where possible, collateral information from someone who knew the person in childhood.

What to ask before booking an assessment

It is reasonable to ask practical questions before making an appointment. You may want to know whether the clinician assesses children, adolescents, adults or all age groups; what information is required; whether reports are provided; how feedback is given; and whether therapy is available after assessment.

If medication may be considered, ask how the psychologist, GP and psychiatrist can share relevant information, provided you consent. Clear communication reduces the chance of repeating history unnecessarily and helps each clinician understand the broader picture.

It is also worth asking about appointment format. Some aspects of care can be provided by telehealth when clinically suitable, while other assessments may require in-person components. Behavioural Neurotherapy Clinic provides in-person appointments in Doncaster and Australia-wide telehealth consultations, with assessment and therapy pathways tailored to the person’s circumstances.

A diagnosis is a starting point, not the whole plan

Whether an assessment confirms ADHD, identifies another explanation, or finds several contributing factors, the purpose is greater clarity. A good clinical process should help translate that clarity into practical next steps.

Those steps might include therapy, parent support, school adjustments, workplace strategies, medical review, treatment for anxiety or sleep, or further assessment. Needs can also change across life stages. The supports that assist a primary-school child may differ from those needed by a university student, a new parent or an adult managing a demanding workplace.

Choosing between a psychologist and psychiatrist does not need to be a permanent decision. Begin with the professional best placed to address your current questions, then allow the assessment findings and treatment goals to guide what comes next.

For more information

Call (03) 9848 9100

Published: 27/08/2026 and updated on: 27/09/2026 by Dr Jacques Duff-PhD; BA Psych; Grad Dip Applied Psychology; FANSA; Clinical Neuroscientist