Can Psychologists Diagnose ADHD in Australia?



Can psychologists diagnose ADHD? In Australia, a registered psychologist may assess and diagnose ADHD when this is within their education, training and professional competence. The process is more than completing a checklist. It involves understanding a person's developmental history, current functioning and the other factors that may be contributing to attention, organisation, impulsivity or emotional regulation difficulties.

For many people, this question comes up after a school raises concerns, a GP suggests an assessment, or years of difficulties begin to make more sense in adulthood. Knowing who does what can make the pathway feel clearer.

Can psychologists diagnose ADHD?

Psychologists are registered with the Psychology Board of Australia and are qualified to conduct psychological assessment and provide diagnoses within their scope of practice. A psychologist who works in ADHD assessment can gather clinical information, administer structured measures, interpret assessment findings and prepare a diagnostic report or letter.

A psychologist is not a medical practitioner and does not prescribe medication. If medication is being considered, that discussion sits with a GP, paediatrician or psychiatrist. The psychologist's assessment can provide useful clinical information for that medical appointment, but each prescriber makes their own decisions about medical care.

This distinction is often helpful for people navigating the system. An ADHD assessment and a medication consultation are related parts of care, but they are not the same appointment and do not need to be provided by the same clinician.

What an ADHD assessment with a psychologist involves

ADHD is not diagnosed from one conversation, a school report alone or an online questionnaire. A psychologist considers whether a longstanding pattern is present, how it affects daily life and whether another explanation needs consideration.

The exact process varies with age and the reason for referral. A child assessment commonly involves a parent or caregiver interview, developmental history, information from school and age-appropriate structured measures. Where appropriate, the psychologist may also meet with the child or adolescent to understand their experience of learning, friendships, routines and emotional wellbeing.

For adults, the assessment generally includes a detailed account of childhood and adult functioning. This matters because ADHD is a neurodevelopmental presentation, so the psychologist considers whether relevant patterns were present earlier in life, even when they were not recognised at the time. School reports, family input or other historical records may be helpful where available, but they are not always available for an adult seeking a later-life assessment.

A psychological assessment may include:

- a clinical interview and full developmental history
- structured ADHD rating scales or questionnaires
- information from parents, partners, schools or other relevant people, with consent
- assessment of attention, executive functioning, learning or cognitive skills where indicated
- consideration of anxiety, depression, sleep difficulties, trauma, substance use, medical factors and other presentations that can overlap with ADHD.

The purpose is not to force every difficulty into one label. It is to form a clinically grounded picture of what is occurring and what support may be useful.

Why developmental history matters

People can appear to manage for years while using a great deal of effort. A child may keep up academically but have persistent difficulty with organisation, transitions or completing work. An adult may have developed systems that help at work, while home responsibilities, study, parenting or changing demands expose ongoing executive-function difficulties.

A developmental history gives context to these patterns. It also helps the psychologist consider whether the presentation is consistent with ADHD, another condition, more than one condition, or a combination of personal circumstances and mental health factors. This is particularly relevant when anxiety, low mood, sleep disruption or learning difficulties are also present.

Who else may be involved?

An ADHD pathway can involve more than one health professional. That does not mean the process is being duplicated. Each clinician has a different role.

A GP may be the first point of contact and can discuss referrals, physical health considerations and available care options. A paediatrician or psychiatrist may be involved where medical assessment or medication decisions are required. A psychologist can provide assessment, diagnostic support, psychological therapy and practical planning for the functional difficulties associated with ADHD or related presentations.

For a child or adolescent, schools may contribute observations about classroom learning, behaviour, friendships and organisation. For adults, a partner, parent or another person who has known them over time may be invited to provide information. Consent is obtained before the psychologist seeks or shares information with others.

When a person has both ADHD and another diagnosis or concern, coordination can be especially useful. The assessment report may outline the information considered, diagnostic conclusions where appropriate, areas of functional impact and recommendations for ongoing support. Recommendations might relate to school adjustments, workplace strategies, psychological therapy, sleep support, further assessment or discussion with a medical practitioner.

What happens if ADHD is diagnosed?

A diagnosis can be one part of a broader clinical plan. It does not automatically determine what happens next, and it does not require a person to make any immediate decision about medication.

Some people want practical strategies for planning, task initiation, emotional regulation, routines or communication at home. Children and adolescents may need coordinated support involving caregivers and school. Adults may want to consider the effect of ADHD-related difficulties on work, study, relationships, finances or

parenting.

Psychological therapy can focus on the functional difficulties a person is experiencing. Depending on the assessment findings, this may include behavioural strategies, cognitive-behavioural approaches, sleep support or work on anxiety and depression. Where a prescriber is involved, the psychologist can work alongside that clinician while remaining within their own role.

A diagnosis may also identify the need for other assessments. For example, a psychologist may recommend further investigation of learning difficulties, autism spectrum disorder, sleep problems or mental health concerns when the available information suggests these should be considered.

Do people need a referral to see a psychologist for ADHD assessment?

A referral is not always required to book a psychological assessment. People may self-refer, or they may be referred by a GP, paediatrician, psychiatrist, school or allied health professional.

A GP referral can still be useful, particularly when there are medical concerns, when coordination with a prescriber may be needed, or when the person wants to check whether they may be eligible for a Medicare rebate. Medicare rebates are only available where the person has an eligible referral and Mental Health Care Plan, and where the service meets current Medicare requirements. A clinic can explain fees, appointment arrangements and rebate requirements before an assessment begins.

At Behavioural Neurotherapy Clinic in Doncaster, psychologists provide ADHD assessment and diagnostic support for children, adolescents and adults, as well as psychological therapy and multimodal planning. In-person appointments are available for people across metropolitan Melbourne, with Zoom telehealth appointments available Australia-wide where suitable.

Choosing the right next step

The most useful starting point depends on the reason an assessment is being sought. A parent or caregiver may need a clearer picture of a child's learning, behaviour and development. An adult may want to understand longstanding patterns that have affected study, employment or relationships. A GP may need a structured psychological assessment to inform coordinated care.

Before booking, it can help to ask what information the assessment will include, whether reports are provided, how collateral information is gathered, and how the psychologist coordinates with a GP or other referring professional. These practical details matter because an assessment is not simply about reaching a diagnostic label. It should leave the person with clear information about the clinical findings and the available pathways for support.

Clarity often begins with a careful account of what has happened over time, not with a quick answer. A psychologist can provide that structured assessment process and help map the next step with the other professionals involved.

For more information

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