

Levels of care in eating disorder treatment

What the four treatment settings mean — inpatient, residential, partial hospitalization and outpatient — and the questions that tell them apart.

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Eating disorder treatment in the US happens in four main settings. SAMHSA's facility survey records the settings each facility reports, and this directory lists them as "levels of care". A clinician chooses the level after an assessment — the names below help you understand that recommendation.

Outpatient

Scheduled sessions — therapy, dietitian visits, medical checks — while you live at home and keep school, work or caregiving. Intensive outpatient programs (IOP) meet several days a week for a few hours. SAMHSA's mental-health survey does not report intensive outpatient separately, so an IOP may appear here as "outpatient"; ask the program.

Partial hospitalization (PHP)

A full day of structured programming — typically five to seven days a week — with supervised meals, while you sleep at home. Programs call it day treatment too. It is the middle step between living at a facility and living at home.

Residential

You live at a non-hospital facility during treatment: meals, groups and medical checks on site, around the clock. Residential is for people who are medically stable enough to leave hospital but need 24-hour support.

Inpatient

Hospital-level, 24-hour care for medical stabilization or an acute psychiatric need — the highest intensity setting, usually the shortest stay. Discharge typically steps down to residential or PHP.

Questions that tell them apart

Ask each program: How many days a week and how many hours a day? Are meals supervised, and which ones? Is a doctor on site or on call at all hours? Who decides when a client steps up or down a level? What does a week of programming look like, hour by hour?

Where the data comes from

The service settings on each listing come from SAMHSA's FindTreatment.gov, which republishes the facility's N-SUMHSS survey answers. Settings change: confirm the current program with the facility before you decide.

This guide is information, not medical advice. In a medical or mental health emergency, call 911 in the US, or call or text 988, the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline.

Frequently asked questions

Which level of care do I need?

A clinician decides that after an assessment of medical risk, symptoms and daily needs. This guide explains the settings so you can understand the recommendation, not so you can diagnose yourself.

What does SAMHSA's data say about each program?

Each listing on this site is a facility that told SAMHSA's national survey it runs a program or group for persons with eating disorders. The survey names the service settings it reports, not the diagnoses it treats.

What if I or someone I know is in crisis?

In the US, call or text 988, the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline, or call 911 in an emergency. This site is a directory, not a crisis service.

Sources

[SAMHSA FindTreatment.gov, Behavioral Health Treatment Services Locator](https://findtreatment.gov/) — [https://findtreatment.gov/FindTreatment API developer guide](https://findtreatment.gov/FindTreatment-API-developer-guide) — <https://findtreatment.gov/assets/FindTreatment-Developer-Guide.pdf>

[Eating Disorder Directory, about this site](https://eatingdisorder.fyi/) — <https://eatingdisorder.fyi/>