



**AMERICAN
PSYCHOLOGICAL
ASSOCIATION**

Why Hire a Psychologist?

A CASE FOR PSYCHOLOGISTS IN INTEGRATED CARE

Developed by the APA Integrated Specialty Care Advisory Group: Amy Walters PhD (editor and Awareness group chair), Jennifer Antick PsyD, Kathleen Ashton PhD, Lindsey Bloor PhD, Caroline Lassen-Greene PhD, Laurie Ivey PhD, Matt Kridel PsyD, Diana L Prescott PhD, Erika Rutledge PhD, Kim Smolderen PhD, David Songco PsyD, Erin Swedish PhD, Amy Van Arsdale PhD, Shannon Virtue PsyD, and Wendy Ward PhD.

Psychologists are scientists of behavior change and are well-suited for the demands of integrated care. Psychologists complete doctoral-level education in behavioral sciences and thousands of hours of supervised clinical training (pre- and post-doctoral) with a broad variety of patient populations, practice settings, and evidence-based treatment interventions. This document highlights how a psychologist's training and role development add value to interdisciplinary team-based care.

Integrated care settings require a different skill set than traditional mental health practice. To provide efficient and effective services (consultation, intervention and treatment), clinicians in integrated care settings need advanced communication and case conceptualization skills, foundational knowledge of the medical specialty in which they are working, a deep understanding of behavior change principles, and extensive experience with evidence-based interventions. These settings also require clinicians who can work at a fast pace and handle a variety of presenting problems (from general mental health to medical specialty issues), as well as confidently recognize and respond to patients experiencing psychiatric crises (e.g., psychosis, suicidality, manic episode) or significant cognitive issues (dementia, delirium).

Analogous to utilizing a range of providers from physicians, physician assistants and nurse practitioners on the medicine side, the same is true for the behavioral sciences.

The list below highlights why hiring a psychologist represents a strategic investment that brings advanced capabilities to integrated care teams.

- **Training:** Many mid-level providers complete 1-2 years of postbaccalaureate training, while psychologists complete 5-8 years of advanced training in their field (master's and PhD coursework, internship/residency, and postdoctoral training). Psychologists obtain extensive training in the following areas of study: human development, behavior, learning, motivation, emotion, cognition, psychopathology, psychological assessment, communication skills, group dynamics, statistics, program development and quality improvement; making them an asset to interdisciplinary medical teams.
- **Advanced clinical skills:** Psychologists obtain advanced skills in psychological assessment, diagnosis, case conceptualization, and behavioral treatment planning.

- » Psychologists are trained to integrate complex information, which aligns well with the demands of treating complex patients (e.g., multiple medical problems, co-morbid mental health conditions, issues with cognition).
- » In several states, psychologists with additional postdoctoral training can prescribe psychopharmacological medications.
- » Only psychologists are trained in conducting psychological and neuropsychological evaluations, which are valuable services in many medical subspecialties.
- **Consultation:** Psychologists are experts in providing consultation in a variety of settings and for a variety of problems including clinical concerns, training challenges, systems issues, and ethics.
 - » Integrated psychologists improve overall quality of care and help reduce liability of healthcare systems, by ensuring that mental and behavioral health needs are identified and addressed early, decreasing the risk of adverse events, medical errors, and costly readmissions.
 - » They also enhance the functioning of healthcare teams—improving communication, reducing conflict, and fostering more effective collaboration. In turn, psychologists support workforce well-being by reducing burnout in other medical professionals through expert consultation and system-level interventions, ultimately creating a more sustainable and higher-quality workplace environment.
- **Curriculum development:** Psychologists are qualified to develop evidence-based curriculum for the training of other professionals. In the integrated setting, they often provide professional development to medical providers, residents, mental health clinicians, and clinic staff.
- **Supervision:** Psychologists are equipped to provide supervision to pre-doctoral and post-doctoral trainees, as well as master's level clinicians.
 - » With their substantial knowledge in behavioral science and clinical practice, psychologists are well-suited to support medical resident training and often serve on faculty of residency programs.
- **Translating research into practice:** Psychologists help bridge the gap between research and clinical practice. As behavioral scientists, they are proficient in research principles and data analysis. They obtain extensive training in conducting, interpreting, and applying research to support quality improvement in clinical practice.
- **Population health:** Psychologists support population health initiatives by bringing evidence-based behavioral change practices to health promotion and disease prevention programs (e.g., diabetes, obesity, cardiac rehabilitation, tobacco cessation, pain management), enhancing clinical outcomes. By making prevention programs and primary care interventions more effective, psychologists help reduce overall healthcare costs by decreasing the need for emergency department visits, inpatient treatments, and re-admissions.
- **Financial Rationale:** Research suggests adding psychologists to integrated care teams helps reduce the overall cost of care by avoiding escalation to higher levels of treatment (e.g., emergency department or inpatient), offering supervision to a broad range of trainees (creating greater access to care and breadth of billing) and enhancing provider satisfaction (reducing burnout and turnover costs).*
- **Team-based care:** Integration is all about team-based care. Psychologists play a critical role alongside psychiatrists, social workers, nurses, specialty care physicians and other advanced practice providers who create a well-rounded team needed to meet the demands of complex patients presenting in medical subspecialty practice.

For additional information on training differences in integrated behavioral health care professionals, see Ward, W. L., Washburn, J. J., Triplett, P. T., Jones, S. L., Teigen, A., Dolphin, M., Thienhaus, O. J., & Deal, N. (2023) Role Distinctions and Role Overlap Among Behavioral Health Providers, *Journal of Clinical Psychology in Medical Settings*, 30; 80-91.

*This is an evolving area of research and a future focus of the APA Integrated Specialty Care advisory group.