

Mental Health (MH) is commonly understood as a continuum of mental states ranging from positive wellbeing to experiences of serious mental illness and crisis. MH is not a fixed state; it can shift dynamically and uniquely throughout a person’s life in response to internal and external factors such as stress, trauma, community context, interactions with others, biological variations, and available supports.

The descriptions below are not clinical diagnoses. Instead, they provide insight into states of mind and behaviors that may help indicate a participant’s level of MH functioning at different points in their recovery journey. Recognizing a participant’s current level of MH functioning can help guide care plan goals and action steps.

💡 Temporary states or isolated incidents do not necessarily require MH intervention. However, persistent or severe MH barriers may necessitate urgent response.

💡 Decompensation in MH doesn't mean permanent illness, and positive changes and interventions can support recovery. Early identification of and response to distress can make a big difference.



Thriving/Flourishing

Positive functioning in daily life and relationships

- Sense of Purpose & Meaning
- Healthy Boundaries
- Strong Coping Skills
- Fulfilling Relationships
- Effective Communication
- Emotional Regulation

Surviving

Experiencing persistent difficulties, but maintaining basic functioning

- Difficulty Concentrating
- Self-Critical
- Negative Thoughts
- Loneliness
- Social Disconnection
- Restricted Range of Emotions
- Feeling 'On Edge'
- Irritability
- Persistent Low Mood
- Worry
- Mild Anxiety
- Sleep Disturbances

Struggling

Experiencing challenges consistent with an MH condition

- Social Withdrawal
- Isolation
- Lasting Sadness
- Hopelessness
- Severe Cluttering
- Intense Anxiety
- Drastic Mood Changes
- Panic
- Persistent Feelings of Worthlessness
- Risk Taking
- Self-Harm
- Impaired ADLs/IADLs

Crisis

Intense decompensation requiring immediate intervention

- Extreme Emotional Distress
- Complete Loss of Coping Skills
- Acute Psychosis
- Hallucinations
- Suicidal Ideation
- Overdose
- Dangerous Reckless Activity
- Aggressive Action
- Violence

Term	Definition
Mental Health Decompensation	A deterioration of a person’s psychological functioning to a level where they are less able to cope with stressors or maintain previously effective levels of mental stability.
Mental Health Condition	A clinically significant disturbance in a person’s thoughts, emotions, or behavior.
Serious Mental Illness (SMI)	Diagnosed mental, behavioral, or emotional disorders that cause severe disruption of daily functioning, affecting work, school, relationships, and self-care.
Recovery	A personal journey to improve health, wellness, and self-direction. Not just a lack of symptoms. It involves striving to reach one’s full potential. It is rooted in hope and respect. For mental health, recovery can begin at any time, with or without diagnosis or treatment. It can involve building healthy relationships, securing housing, working, accessing education, substance use care, and reconnecting with a sense of purpose.

Ongoing Trainings and Clinical Supervision are Vital

- Access HFH’s [Capacity Building Trainings and Process Groups](#)
- Practicing cultural humility and responsiveness
- Effective diffusion and redirection techniques
- Maintaining healthy boundaries to prevent trauma and burnout
- Recognizing and managing transference, grief, and personal triggers
- Navigating rejection, disengagement, and disrespect

Interventions That Support Mental Health Care



Psychotherapy:

Talk therapy to process emotions, build coping skills, and enhance MH functioning.



Medical Care & Prescriptions:

Psychiatric evaluation, medication, and guidance to reduce symptoms and support stability.



Emotional Support Animal:

A companion animal providing comfort, reducing stress, and supporting emotional wellbeing.



Peer Support:

Guidance and encouragement from individuals with lived mental health experiences.



Caregiving:

Ongoing daily support with ADLs/IADLs, ensuring safety, stability, and continuity of care.



Inpatient MH Care:

Structured, short-term hospital stay for safe stabilization and intensive treatment.



Care Team Coordination:

Collaborative care planning through provider communication and case conferencing.



MH Care Navigation:

Assistance with appointments, medication adherence, and advocacy to support engagement.



The multilingual 24/7 Help Line (1-800-854-7771) is a unified entry point for all mental health and substance use care in LA County.

Responding to a Mental Health Crisis



Urgent Scenario:

- First, check for on-site MH support.
- Offer Psychiatric Urgent Care.
- Dial 988 for Suicide & Crisis Lifeline.
- 24/7 Help Line is always available: (1-800-854-7771)
- Notify supervisor and relevant staff.



Emergency:

- Take action to address immediate safety risk(s).
- Dial 911, provide callback # and location, and describe situation and any person(s) involved.
- Notify supervisor and relevant staff.



Safety & De-Escalation Tips

- Stay Calm
- Listen
- Express Concern Without Judgment
- Be Clear & Concise
- Manage Body Language
- Be Professional
- Direct Bystanders to Safer Space
- Don't Take it Personally
- Use Buddy System When Appropriate
- Leave Area if Feeling Unsafe



For more helpful tips on connecting with participants who are experiencing mental health challenges, see the [ICMS Outreach & Engagement Info Page](#)



If you see something, say something right away.



We value the incredible work you do. It's always okay to ask for help.

LA County's Permanent Housing Integrated Services Program (ISP) includes the critical interventions of ICMS, FSP, HSSP, and CENS to support housing retention and improved health and wellbeing. Each time ICMS coordinates care with an MH service provider, the "ISP Care Coordination" Service should be recorded in the Case Notes in CHAMP.

Use DMH Referrals to Connect ICMS Participants to LA County's Behavioral Health Care Continuum

Housing Supportive Services Program (HSSP): Site-based MH services in PSH buildings

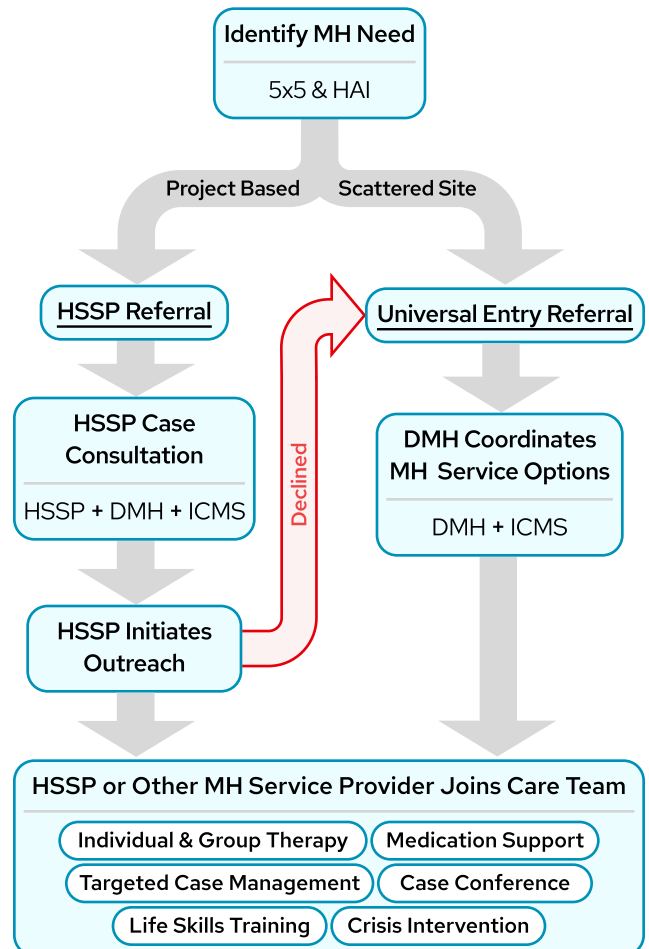
Universal Entry Referral: Unified entry point and triage for all MH service levels



Reminder: Your agency may have in-house MH services that could provide additional support.



Confirm universal sharing consent status before submitting MH care referrals.



PH² is an advanced outreach option for participants at risk of eviction who aren't engaged in MH services and who reside in buildings without onsite HSSP. **If your PSH building has HSSP onsite, contact HSSP instead.**

Comments, Questions, or Feedback about this guide? [Let us know](#)