

Health psychologist

Health psychologists use their skills and knowledge of psychology to promote wellbeing and healthy behaviours across the population.

You'll be specially trained to understand the psychological and emotional aspects of health and illness and to bring about improvements in healthcare and related behaviours. For example, you may help people to lose weight or stop smoking. You'll also use your skills to try to improve the healthcare system overall, for example by advising doctors about the best ways to communicate with patients.

Psychological therapies - life skills

Life as a health psychologist

Health psychology is a rapidly evolving profession that uses the practice and application of psychology to study behaviours relevant to health, illness and healthcare.

Your work will involve:

- identifying behaviours that may impact on a person's health, for example smoking, drug abuse, poor diet, and understanding how psychological theories and interventions can support behaviour change and prevention
- looking at ways on how best to encourage behaviours such as exercise, a healthy diet, good oral hygiene, health checks/self-examination and attending preventative medical screenings
- investigating the nature and effects of communication between health professionals and patients, including interventions to improve communication
- examining the psychological impact of illness on individuals, families and carers
- applying psychological interventions to help people manage their illnesses and cope with symptoms such as pain

You will:

- work directly with individuals or small groups (often in a clinical setting and within a multidisciplinary team) or
- focus on developing remote interventions to be applied across public health programmes

You could work across a range of healthcare providers or in education as a teacher and/or researcher. You could also advise organisations such as NHS trusts and local authorities.

You will be provided with ongoing supervision to help you engage in self-reflection, seek and respond to feedback, and develop your professional knowledge and skills.

How much can I earn?

If you're employed by the NHS, you'll be on a national pay and conditions system called Agenda for Change ^[1] (AfC ^[2]).

There are nine pay bands and you'll usually be paid at band 6 while you train. After completing your training you'll be paid at band 7 and can progress to higher bands with experience.

Terms and conditions can vary if you are employed outside the NHS.

You'll promote healthier lifestyles and find ways to encourage people to improve their health and wellbeing.

How about the benefits?

As a health psychologist, you can:

- make a difference
- work flexible and part-time hours

If you're employed by the NHS, you'll also have good holiday entitlement and access to:

- an excellent pension scheme
- NHS discounts in shops and restaurants

Must-have skills

Health psychologist roles vary greatly, but you'll need:

- a good understanding of the role of data in developing health policy
- capacity for study and continued learning
- an active interest in preventative approaches to healthcare

To work directly with patients (usually in a clinical environment), you'll need to be able to:

- empathise and communicate well with a wide range of people
- work comfortably in a multidisciplinary team

If you work in a research capacity and/or are looking at large-scale health behaviours and interventions, you'll need to be able to:

- confidently apply data and work with statistical models
- work on your own as well as alongside others

You'll also need to be able to demonstrate the values of the NHS Constitution ^[3].

Entry requirements

You'll need an accredited degree in psychology recognised by the [British Psychological Society](#) [4] (BPS) which enables eligibility for [Graduate Basis for Chartered Membership](#) [5]. From there, you will need to complete a BPS-accredited Master's degree in health psychology and then complete a doctoral-level qualification in health psychology.

Entry requirements for the Master's degree include some relevant experience, which can be gained through paid or voluntary roles. For example, you may have been employed in nursing or social work, or you could have shadowed a health psychologist.

It is important to check individual training courses for information about specific entry requirements and the kind of experience that is expected.

How to become a health psychologist

Once you have your Master's degree, you'll need to have completed a doctoral-level qualification (usually a PhD) in health psychology.

See the [BPS qualification in health psychology information](#) [6].

Where a career as a health psychologist can take you

Once you have qualified as a health psychologist, there is a wide range of opportunities open to you in settings including primary, secondary or [tertiary care](#) [7]. You could work within the NHS, the third sector or academia.

You could also apply for a trainee [high intensity therapist](#) [8] role within an NHS Talking Therapies service (formerly IAPT), which provides evidence-based therapies for people with anxiety and depression.

As your career develops there will be opportunities to take on greater responsibility and progress within your organisation. In a clinical setting, for example, you could become consultant psychologist or head of a psychological service.

It's important to note that a two-year psychological professions funding rule policy was implemented on 1 April 2022. This means that if you start NHS-funded psychological professions training from April 2022, you won't be eligible for NHS funding for further psychological profession training for two years from the expected completion date of your first training, where it would lead to a change in your job role. ? ?

Visit the [funding for psychological professions training programmes web page](#) [9] for more information about NHS funding.

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University of Stirling

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Other roles that may interest you

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