

North Queensland Psychological Therapies Group Therapy Program (NQPTGTP)

The North Queensland Psychological Therapies Group Therapy Program (NQPTGTP) aims to improve access to quality primary mental health care for vulnerable and disadvantaged individuals across North Queensland (Cairns, Townsville & Mackay districts)

The NQPTGTP provides short-term mental health support for people experiencing moderate mental health issues and who have difficulty accessing other services.

Funding is capped each financial year and the focus is on clients with the highest needs.

General Practitioners and other approved referrers within the North Queensland PHN region can refer a capped number of clients to the NQPTGTP each calendar year.

1. Background

Group Therapy programs are an integral part of Psychological Therapies service delivery, and complement client counselling, support & education.

The NQPTGTP seeks to provide a variety of group-based therapies to enhance the quality of life of clients in the NQPHN catchment area. Group-based therapies are both effective and cost effective. There are many published research reports supporting the efficacy of group-based therapies, e.g. for the treatment of depression

Group Therapy programs provide both clinical treatment and psychoeducation to clients with either risk of or detectable signs and symptoms of mental health disorder.

Group therapy Programs have been long standing in mental health service delivery. It is essentially a form of psychotherapy in which one or more therapists treat a small group of clients together as a group.

Group Therapy can refer to any form of psychotherapy when delivered in a group format. The types of groups potentially available include interpersonal group therapy, cognitive behaviour therapy groups, and a wide range of symptom-specific groups for generalised anxiety disorder, depression, social anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder, anger management, panic, agoraphobia, hoarding disorder, obsessive compulsive disorder, and eating disorders.

Additionally, the broader concept of group therapy can be taken to include any helping process that takes place in a group, including support groups, skills training groups (such as anger management, mindfulness, relaxation training or social skills training), and psychoeducation groups.

Clinical treatment in a group setting focuses on addressing identified symptoms within a group format and drawing on group members' experiences and interactions to support change.

Psychoeducational groups impart information and promote skill-building related to a specific area of concern or interest. Psychoeducation seeks to promote quality of life through mobilisation of individual strengths.

2. Client Eligibility for Group Therapy Program

Eligibility for the NQPTGTP is the identical to eligibility for individual psychological therapy

To be eligible individuals who wish to participate need to meet all the following criteria:

- have a non-acute moderate mental health condition. The short-term, goal-oriented focused psychological strategies that Psychological Therapies provides are of most therapeutic value to individuals with common disorders of mild to moderate severity.
- be unable to access services because of financial disadvantage, hold a current health care card or pension card, or be identified as a low-income earner (identified by their referring health practitioner).
- have a mental health treatment plan (MHTP) or a Child Treatment Plan (CTP) or be accepted as a provisional referral until these can be arranged.
- reside in the NQPHN catchment area.
- **NB:** individuals with more severe illness whose conditions may benefit from short-term interventions may also be provided with Psychological Therapies services.

Individuals with an existing approved Psychological Therapies referral do not require an additional/new Psychological Therapy referral

3. Referral Sources

An individual with an approved Psychological Therapies Referral can be referred for Group Therapy by their Psychological Therapies provider.

An individual with an approved Psychological Therapies Referral can be referred for Therapy by a Connect to Wellbeing Clinician.

An individual who meets the Psychological Therapies eligibility criteria can be referred by their General Practitioner (GP) or another approved referrer for individual and/or group therapy services.

Including from:

- Psychiatrists or Paediatricians (and for Perinatal Depression services, obstetricians and maternal and child health nurses can refer patients).
- In some circumstances other clinicians may make a provisional referral (refer to Mental Health Stepped Care Services Operational Guidelines <https://www.nqphn.com.au/mental-health-services/>)

Individuals/clients without an approved Psychological Therapies referral in place are not eligible for group therapy services outlined in this document.

4. Group Therapy Program Referral Management

Generally, each calendar year there will be several approved group therapy programs made available that clients are eligible to participate in.

These will be listed on the Connect to Wellbeing website: **Approved Group Therapy List** (<https://www.connectowellbeing.org.au/resources>).

GPs wanting to refer a client directly to a group therapy program must refer the client to Connect to Wellbeing for Psychological Therapies (Refer to Eligibility criteria).

Connect to Wellbeing staff will undertake intake, triage & assessment and the relevant client referral & assessment information will be entered into Redicase. Connect to Wellbeing will then liaise with the Group Program facilitator to discuss the clients' suitability for the group,

and the referral will be forwarded to the relevant Group Facilitator for review and registration if approved.

Individual providers of Psychological Therapies wanting to refer their existing eligible client into an approved group therapy program should contact the Group program facilitator directly (Contact details available on the Approved Group listing) to discuss the group availability, the client and their suitability to attend.

Accepting referrals for a Group Therapy Program

The identified Group Therapy Facilitator for each approved Group Therapy determines the client group that will participate and has full responsibility for acceptance of referrals to the group and determining group suitability, including:

- Reviewing client suitability/appropriateness and eligibility prior to registering a client
- Liaising with the referrer/provider or with the client directly, by phone or in person, to determine suitability for the group.
- Ensuring that the group is viable, and numbers are adequate.

When considering a client's suitability for a Group Therapy Program the Group Program facilitator should consider the following:

- The client's needs
- The client's mental health condition
- The client's motivation to attend the program
- The client's capacity to communicate, relative to the group being offered.
- The client's emotional resilience.
- Any other health/physical issues that may present as a barrier to participation.
- Any potential or actual risk factors

Facilitators must confirm the client registrations for a group using the **Group Therapies Participant Commencement Form** available on the Connect to Wellbeing website: <https://www.connectowellbeing.org.au/resources>. Confirmation of client registrations must be made at least one week prior to the commencement of the group.

5. Practitioner Eligibility

All group sessions are facilitated by a suitably qualified health professional.

A Group therapy program **must** be facilitated by a current approved provider of Psychological Therapies.

6. Number of Group facilitators

Group sessions can be conducted by one facilitator; however, it is a general recommendation that two facilitators lead group sessions with each facilitator meeting the Psychological Therapies eligibility criteria to provide services

The determination regarding the number and/or make up of facilitators required should be relevant to the requirements of the Group being undertaken.

For Example:

- Where a group is larger in terms of participant numbers, the group should have more than one facilitator,
- Where the group has potential to trigger emotional responses within participants the group should have more than one facilitator.
- Psychoeducation groups with up to 12 participants may be suitably conducted by one facilitator

Additionally, group sessions can be facilitated by an approved Psychological Therapies service provider (the Group Program facilitator) and another individual deemed suitable by the group Program facilitator (e.g. a psychotherapist that is not a psychological therapies provider, or a GP)

Note: (as per section 12) payment, regardless of the number of facilitators will be made per participant, per session only.

Appropriate specialist service providers may be directly sourced for a single session to support a group. These may be either paid or volunteers. Where a specialist provider is paid, it is the responsibility of the Group Program facilitator to provide this payment.

7. Group Therapy Services

Group therapy programs must be delivered in a manner consistent with the NQPHN Stepped Care program guidelines and must be evidence-based therapeutic interventions.

Approved Group Therapy programs of not more than 12 Sessions are approved to be conducted once only within the relevant calendar year. A decision to exceed the recommended maximum should be made as a result of a discussion with, and approval by the NQPHN.

Approval to repeat a group within the financial year must be sought from the NQPHN in writing and relate the rationale for the request and provide indicative progress/results of the Group Therapy program completed.

Group Therapy Sessions

Up to 12 group therapy sessions per eligible individual can be provided within a calendar year.

Group therapy sessions are expected to be not less than 30 mins in duration

Group therapy programs are expected to be between 3 and 12 sessions in length.

Group sessions do not count towards individual psychological therapies session in a calendar year.

Group Therapy participant numbers

Group Therapy sessions will typically involve 6-10 participants.

It is recognised that group therapy can be hampered by limiting client attendance numbers to 6 to 10 people. This can be restrictive and impractical, particularly in rural settings, where it is difficult to get six people to attend due to challenges associated with travel, fluctuating participant motivation and wellness.

The minimum number of participants required to commence a Group is six (6) participants and three (3) participants to continue any group. *(from a variety of billing arrangements - if at least one (1) participant is a Psychological Therapies approved participant)*

The minimum practical group size may vary, depending on the nature of the program. This will be at the determination of the group facilitator. (e.g. for some group a minimum of 3 participants is not appropriate)

A decision to run/continue a group with less than the absolute minimum must be first approved by the NQPHN

It is the responsibility of Group facilitator to make participants aware that a group with numbers below the minimum size may be cancelled.

Generally, psycho-educational groups can be larger than treatment groups. The greater the treatment intensity, the smaller the group maximum.

Whilst it is expected that group sessions have between 6 and 10 participants, groups can be made up of clients under a variety of billing arrangements (i.e. Better Access, private-paying).

Where the referral relates to *Psychological Therapies - Children under 12 (PTC-U12)*, it is envisaged that children and their parents or other responsible adults may participate in such groups depending on the clinical appropriateness.

The below is an excerpt from NICE guidelines giving example to the differences in participant/facilitator ratios based on the group type:

	Facilitator to participant ratio	Length of program
Group-based psychoeducational programs		
Anxiety	1:12	1 x 2-hour session per week over 6 weeks
Cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT)		
Depression	2:8-10	10-12 sessions over 12-16 weeks including follow-up
Depression with chronic physical health problem	1:6-8	6-8 weeks

8. Group Resources/Materials

It is the responsibility of the Group Program Facilitator to ensure that the resources/materials required to enable delivery of the Group Therapy session are developed or acquired prior to commencement of sessions.

E.g. provision of material/s resources such as:

- Aims, objectives and course structure
- Facilitator manuals and participant workbooks and handouts
- promotion and advertising material
- Evaluation tools

Marketing

Group Therapy Facilitators are responsible for marketing their own Group Therapy Program (e.g. Production of a flyer regarding the intended group to circulate to potential referrers)

Connect to Wellbeing will support the promotion of a Group Therapy at the request of a Group Therapy Facilitator. Groups will also be listed on the Connect to wellbeing Website.

Group Therapy Facilitators should identify indicative commencement and completion dates for the group Therapy program.

9. Program evaluations

Evaluation assists in judging the quality and effectiveness of services and are an essential part of the service delivery.

Evaluation Measures

K10+ pre and post intervention measures must be collected and reported for all clients. Measures/assessments should be undertaken at the initial (first) session and at completion of the group program.

Other measures may be used where this has been indicated in the approved Group Therapy application

All group therapy clients will be required to have each of the individual session details entered into Redicase to enable data capture and payment

Experience of Service survey

All clients participating in group programs can provide feedback on their experience with the group activity they have attended.

The group facilitator must ensure that *Experience of Service* questionnaires at the end of the final session or alternatively are mailed out (with a self-addressed return envelope) to all participants two weeks after the completion of a group program

The surveys and envelopes can be obtained from Connect to Wellbeing upon request.

Group facilitators are asked to collate the data and provide feedback regarding the results via the Provider Operations Committee.

10. Group program reporting requirements

Group Program Facilitators are to provide a written summary report regarding the Group Program undertaken. The summary report relating the client participation and progress, and mental health outcomes is to be submitted via email to the chair of the *Connect to Wellbeing Provider Operations Committee* within two weeks of the conclusion of any group program.

Group Program Facilitators should complete clinical notes within their usual client record system regarding Individual group participants, relating the client's participation and progress, and mental health generally.

A summary regarding the participants progress within the Psychological Therapies Group Program must be provided to the referrer/GP post completion of sessions (in the same way Individual sessions are reported)

Confidentiality

Special attention should be paid to e-mail correspondence between Group facilitators and referrers. No client names or other personal information should be used in general email correspondence. Information can securely be related via Redicase, encrypted email or via fax.

11. Risk management

Group Program Facilitators with each group session, must ensure that client/participant risk is considered and managed as might be necessary where a group member/participant:

- fails to attend a group as planned
- experiences a personal crisis
- discloses risk to self or others
- demonstrates inappropriate/aggressive behaviour

Facilitators too, must consider risk/s in relation to themselves and their cofacilitators.

It is also suggested that Group facilitators consider the proposed venue/environment in relation to risk/potential risk and determine whether it is suitably appropriate for the Group Therapy sessions.

The safety of all individuals associated with a group Therapy Program is paramount.

12. Funding/Payment

Where a provider of Psychological Therapies is a 'Block funded' provider (not a fee for service provider), then the provision of a group therapy session to an individual will be identified as an 'occasion of service' as set out within that service's contractual arrangements

Where the Group Therapy Provider is a 'fee for service' provider (i.e. Not a block funded service provider), claims for payment are to be made on an appropriately titled tax invoice which is correctly addressed and includes the following details:

- description of services (e.g. Group Therapy Session) and fees payable;
- date(s) of service;
- whether the fees are GST inclusive or exclusive; and
- the provider's ABN.

Please note:

- Payment, regardless of the number of facilitators or length of session will be made per participant, per session only.
- Only one (1) DNA per block of 6 sessions (per participant) is accommodated for in terms of payment/occasion of service.

Fee for Service 'Fee Schedule'

(Please refer to your organisation's contract to review the payment schedule as the following table does not apply in some circumstances).

Session Amounts	GST Excl. Amount	GST Amount
Group session – standard rage per participant	\$75.00	\$7.50
Group session – DNA / Cancellation Fee (1 DNA per block of 6 Sessions)	\$37.50	\$3.75

13. Claims for payment

Where a tax invoice is submitted for payment of service, it is essential that Group Program Facilitator confirm that:

- the description on the invoice is in line with the services specified in the Group Therapy 'Letter of Approval'
- the number of sessions claimed on the tax invoice does not exceed the number of sessions approved
- the sessions claimed do not occur on a date prior to the approval date on the 'Letter of Approval'
- a claim for payment is not made for sessions that have been cancelled
- the claim for payment is submitted post completion of data reporting within Redicase for each participant

Invoices must be forwarded within one month of the last group program session. Connect to Wellbeing may approve payment for claims outside the timeframe only under exceptional circumstances.

Invoices that meet these requirements should be paid within 30 days.

14. Cancellation of Group Programs

Where a Group Program Facilitator is unable to attend a group program, they must advise Connect to Wellbeing immediately and endeavour as a matter of urgency to find a suitable alternative facilitator (keeping in mind that all groups must be facilitated by an approved provider of Psychological Therapies)

The Group Program Facilitator may cancel or postpone a group program where commencing or continuing the program is not viable (e.g. insufficient participant numbers) or inappropriate.

15. Group Therapy Application Process

An Expression of Interest (EOI) will be distributed annually requesting the submission of group therapy applications

Contracted Psychological Therapies providers are requested to submit a **Group Therapies Application Form** (<https://www.connecttowellbeing.org.au/resources>) for any group therapy programs they would like to conduct.

The EOI will identify the date submissions must be received by and the means by which the submission can be submitted (email, online webpage)

Proposed group programs and any reviews of current programs will be formally considered by representatives from the NQPHN and Neami National's Connect to Wellbeing Program.

Considerations in developing submissions for group therapy programs could include:

- Local knowledge of unmet clinical need
- research data relating to a client group that indicates an unmet need
- stakeholder / client group expressed identified needs
- requests for specific group programs

If two or more applications are submitted by the one organisation, the organisation is expected to prioritise the preferred application/s (as not all applications may be approved).

All group programs are to have an identifiable evidence-based rationale, and a clear program structure with an aim, goals, measurable objectives and an evaluation process linked to the program goals.

16. Approval and Notification Process

Representatives from the NQPHN and Neami National's *Connect to Wellbeing* Program will assess all applications received. Applications that do not provide evidence based therapeutic interventions will not be approved.

Suitable applications will be approved subject to funding.

Contract Representatives will be notified of the outcome of their application/s within 4 weeks of the nominated EOI closing date.