So you want to be...

... a Psychiatrist.

What they do:
A psychiatrist is a licensed physician who specializes in the diagnosis, treatment, and prevention of mental illnesses. They may work with their clients on everyday problems like stress or more complex issues like schizophrenia. Psychiatrists prescribe medications, provide talk therapy, and care for patients with complex medical problems. They may work primarily in an office, in a hospital, or some combination of the two. Subspecialties include child and adolescent psychiatry, geriatric (over 65 years old) psychiatry, addictions, forensic psychiatry, and consultation/ liaison psychiatry.

How much they make:
$176,230 average salary

What education they need:
Typically a bachelor’s degree with pre-medicine coursework followed by medical school and residency

How long it takes:
4 years for bachelor’s
4 years of medical school
4-6 years of Residency/Fellowship depending on specialty

Where to go in Nebraska:
MD at Creighton University or University of Nebraska Medical Center
Psychiatry Residency is a joint program between Creighton & UNMC

... a Psychologist.

What they do:
A psychologist is an independently licensed behavioral health professional who performs psychological assessments, provides therapy, and conducts research for a variety of mental health disorders. Licensed psychologists require a doctoral degree in an applied area of psychology (i.e., clinical, counseling, or school psychology). Typical academic requirements involve four years of graduate school and a clinical internship.

How much they make:
$98,000 average salary

What education they need:
Typically a PhD (Bachelor’s degree in Psychology is required for admission to PhD program)

How long it takes:
4 years for bachelor’s degree
4 years of graduate work, plus 1 year internship for PhD
1 year supervised post-doctoral professional experience for licensure

Where to go in Nebraska:
PhD programs in Clinical, Counseling, or School Psychology at University of Nebraska-Lincoln

... a Physician Assistant.

What they do:
Physician assistants (PAs) practice medicine under physician supervision. PAs conduct histories and physicals, perform psychiatric evaluations and assessments, order and interpret diagnostic studies, establish and manage treatment plans and order referrals as needed. A broad medical education — which includes classroom study and clinical rotations in psychiatry, emergency medicine, internal medicine, geriatrics and family practice — provides PAs with a solid foundation from which to address the diverse medical needs of mental health patients.

How much they make:
$89,870 average salary

What education they need:
Typically a bachelor’s degree, then PA graduate school including a mix of classroom work and supervised patient care over 2-3 years

How long it takes:
4 years for bachelor’s degree
2-3 years for Master’s PA degree

Where to go in Nebraska:
Master’s programs at UNMC and Union College
Master’s program at UNK starting in Fall 2015.

... a Psychiatric Nurse Practitioner.

What they do:
Nurse practitioners are advanced practice registered nurses (APRN-NP) who can diagnose and treat mental illnesses. This is an advanced practice license beyond that held by registered nurses. With collaborative agreements with psychiatrists, psychiatric nurse practitioners offer psychiatric/mental health assessments, order laboratory tests, conduct psychotherapy, and manage medications. They specialize in treating those who have more serious mental health and illness problems than those managed by a local primary care physician, including major depression and serious mental illnesses.

How much they make:
$89,020 average salary

What education they need:
Typically a Bachelor of Science in Nursing (BSN) and Master of Science in Nursing (MSN). Psychiatric Nurse Practitioners chose a specialty track in their master’s coursework.

How long it takes:
4 years for bachelor’s degree
2 years of graduate work for MSN

Where to go in Nebraska:
MSN program at UNMC in Psychiatric Mental Health Nursing

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... a Social Worker.

What they do:
Provides counseling for social, health, and mental health problems. In addition to being therapists, social workers have various roles in agencies, such as case managers who coordinate psychiatric, medical, and other services on their clients’ behalf. Others, with a Master of Social Work (MSW) or licensing as a clinical specialist (LCSW), provide treatment for diverse problems including child and adult mental health, domestic violence and family distress.

How much they make:
$37,750–52,390 average salary, depending on specialty and degree

What education they need:
Typically a Master of Social Work (MSW) degree (Bachelor’s degree is required for MSW program)

How long it takes:
4 years for Bachelor’s
1-2 years of graduate work for MSW
3,000 hours of experience required for licensure

Where to go in Nebraska:
BSW at Chadron State University, Creighton University, Nebraska Wesleyan University, Union Colleges, University of Nebraska at Kearney, and University of Nebraska at Omaha.

... Clinical Mental Health Counselor.

What they do:
Provides counseling with emphasis on prevention and treatment of mental illness. Works with individuals and groups to promote optimum mental and emotional health. May help individuals deal with issues associated with mental illness, stress management, self-esteem, aging, and family, parenting, and marital problems.

How much they make:
$44,910 average salary

What education they need:
Master’s degree in counseling

How long it takes:
4 years for bachelor’s degree
3 years for a master’s degree

Where to go in Nebraska:
MSEd at UNK; MA and MS programs at UNO

... Substance Abuse Counselor.

What they do:
Evaluates for substance use disorder, recommends treatment options, and helps clients develop skills to recover from substance use disorders.

How much they make:
$41,530 average salary

What education they need:
High school diploma plus additional classroom and clinical training hours.

How long it takes:
6,300 hours of supervised clinical training required for licensure; Associate, bachelor’s or master’s degree in related field can be substituted for part of the clinical training required

Where to go in Nebraska:
Associate degrees or certificates in Drug/Alcohol Counseling at Central, Metropolitan, and Southeast Community Colleges

Quick facts on Behavioral Health Careers

Created in 2009 by the Nebraska Legislature in response to the Safe Haven crisis, the Behavioral Health Education Center of Nebraska (BHECN) addresses the shortage of trained behavioral health providers in rural and underserved areas.

We improve the behavioral health of Nebraska’s residents by increasing the number of providers, improving accessibility, and building competence in the behavioral health workforce.

But BHECN can’t do it alone. We partner with academic institutions, behavioral health care providers, government agencies, and communities to build a behavioral health workforce that meets Nebraska’s needs.

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So you’re thinking about a career in behavioral health? There are lots of career options in the field. We have some of what you need to know about seven of the most popular behavioral health careers in Nebraska.