

## Group Therapy Is an Effective, Evidence-Based Therapy that Increases Mental Health Access

Let's Make Sure Everybody Knows

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Several studies and articles over the last few years have highlighted the fact that the US is in the midst of a mental health crisis.

[FACT SHEET: Biden-Harris Administration Highlights Strategy to Address the National Mental Health Crisis | The White House \(https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/05/31/fact-sheet-biden-harris-administration-highlights-strategy-to-address-the-national-mental-health-crisis/\)](https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/05/31/fact-sheet-biden-harris-administration-highlights-strategy-to-address-the-national-mental-health-crisis/)

[The State of Mental Health in America | Mental Health America \(mhanational.org\) \(https://www.mhanational.org/issues/state-mental-health-america\)](https://www.mhanational.org/issues/state-mental-health-america)

[Mental Health in America: A Growing Crisis \(psychiatristimes.com\) \(https://www.psychiatristimes.com/view/mental-health-america-crisis\)](https://www.psychiatristimes.com/view/mental-health-america-crisis)

Drastic increases in the demand for services in conjunction with workforce shortages in terms of availability of therapists to meet that demand have contributed to unmet needs, resulting in people not receiving the help they need. A singularly important analysis published in the *American Psychologist* (Whittingham et. al., 2023) shows that if 10% of the unmet need for psychotherapy in the US was met with group therapy and not individual therapy the following would occur:

- 3.3 million more people would be served, providing significantly improved access to mental health treatment;
- The need to add new therapists to the workforce (currently at 34,473 additional therapists) would be reduced; and
- Savings of more than \$5.6 billion in mental health care costs would be realized (Whittingham, et. al., 2023).

When looking at how individual and group therapy are utilized nationwide under third-party payment, only 2% of the mental health services provided in private practice are group therapy. Most group therapy takes place in inpatient and structured outpatient agency settings like substance abuse clinics or hospitals, typically for clients whose conditions have become more chronic and/or severe. This leads to bottlenecks of care, as private therapists often have full caseloads and become unable to take on new clients when their needs are less severe and can be managed in an outpatient setting.

**Our Call to Action:** *Add one or more groups to your private practice.* Also, encourage your colleagues to add groups to their private practices. Share this article to demonstrate the need for more groups to address mental health needs in our communities.

The evidence for the effectiveness of group therapy exists. The recent launch of an Evidence-Based Group Treatment website at <https://evidencebasedgrouptherapy.org/> is a key resource that can be used to demonstrate the effectiveness of groups. This website has been developed by an international team of renowned mental health professionals and supported in a collaborative effort by the American Group Psychotherapy Association (AGPA)

with funding provided by the Group Foundation for Advancing Mental Health, the American Psychological Association's Society of Group Psychology and Group Psychotherapy (Division 49), and the German Health Ministry. The development team was chaired by AGPA past President Gary Burlingame's, PhD, CGP, AGPA-DF, lab at Brigham Young University and Bernhard Strauss', PhD, lab at the Institute of Psychosocial Medicine, Psychotherapy, and Psychooncology at Jena University Hospital in Germany (see the accompanying interview with Dr. Burlingame in this issue of the *Group Circle*).

Group Therapy is a Triple E Treatment. The meta-analytic research and state of the field contained in this new website demonstrates that group therapy is:

- *Effective* – Effective for a wide range of conditions, including but not limited to depression, social anxiety, and addictions;
- *Equivalent* – Equivalent outcomes to individual therapy for a wide range of conditions; and
- *Efficient* – Group therapy increases access to therapy as it allows therapists to see more clients per week.

Group therapy will be key for mental health treatment access, and this new website will serve as a resource for effective, disorder specific group treatments supported by evidence. It can serve as a resource for treatment information and the basis of trainings to increase practitioners' comfort in providing group therapy. Moreover, agencies who provide the highest percentage of group treatment in the US could extend their group treatment offerings by employing evidence-based protocols found on the website for the most common psychiatric disorders.

**Our Call to Action: *Share this website broadly.*** Link to it from your website and social media accounts to demonstrate the power and effectiveness of this treatment in which you specialize. Provide it to third-party payers with whom you interact to advocate for the use of groups. If you have any contacts with third-party payers, and/or would like to be involved in efforts to advocate for the use of groups, contact Diane Feirman, CAE, Public Affairs Senior Director, at [dfeirman@agpa.org](mailto:dfeirman@agpa.org). If you have contacts at newspapers or magazines, consider making a connection with us so that we can pursue the inclusion of content on group therapy (this includes local newspapers, who often need content). You can also share the [Group Works](#) resource to address many of the general public's common questions about group therapy.

AGPA is working to increase its public outreach efforts to promote the benefits of group therapy as an effective and cost-effective mental health treatment. We are increasing the content we have on hand to publicize the benefits of group therapy, inspire therapists to run more groups, and encourage those seeking mental health services to request group as a treatment option. We are also promoting mental health awareness and wellness through our website [www.agpa.org](http://www.agpa.org) and our social media platforms on [Facebook](#), [LinkedIn](#), and [Instagram](#)

**Our Call to Action: *If you post on social media, please like and reshare our content, as well as comment on it to increase visibility to your colleagues, friends, and family.*** If you personally post information related to mental health and group, tag us [@agpa01](#) to show your support and to potentially be reposted on AGPA's channels.

The need for mental health services is real and urgent. The evidence shows that group therapy can play a significant role in increasing access to effective treatment while managing costs. The **Call to Action** for all of us is to spread the word about group therapy as an effective treatment method through all the avenues available to us. We know groups work. Let's work together to tell everyone about them.

## Reference

Whittingham, M., Marmarosh, C.L., Mallow, P., & Scherer, M. (2023). Mental health care equity and access: A group therapy solution. *American Psychologist*, 78(2), 119–133. <https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0001078>.