



# Assisted outpatient treatment terminology

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# Mental illness terminology

# Mental illness terminology

- **Mental illness:** A **maladaptive** pattern of psychological, emotional, and/or social behavior not related to an individual's culture or developmental stage. It is considered maladaptive because it results in impaired function in some area of life (e.g., social, occupational).
- **Serious mental illness (SMI):** Certain mental illnesses can be so severe a person is unable to function on a consistent basis in major areas of life, often to the point they are considered disabled. The most common diagnoses associated with SMI are schizophrenia, schizoaffective disorder, and bipolar disorder. SMI is sometimes also referred to as SPMI (serious and persistent mental illness).
- **Developmental disability (DD):** Term used to refer to disorders that originate in childhood resulting in life-long functional limitations (e.g., autism spectrum disorder).

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- **Basic physical needs:** These are the needs that must be met to avoid harm. Examples include hygiene (bathing & grooming), ambulating (moving around) and nutrition (eating enough). Often referred to as *activities of daily living* (ADLs).
- **Psychosis:** A symptom that causes impairment in a person's connection to reality, resulting in perceptions of the world that are false but appear real. As a result, people behave in response to their perception of reality, likely causing impairment in an important area. There are many symptoms, but two of the most common are:
  - **Hallucinations:** Perceiving sensations that are not present (e.g., hearing voices).
    - **Command hallucinations:** Auditory hallucinations instructing someone to do something, often things that might result in harm to self or others.
  - **Delusions:** False beliefs someone holds, and although clearly not true, are acted upon as though they were. No amount of information can change their belief. Paranoia, where a person believes someone is trying to harm them in some way, is a common example.

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- **Manic episode:** Abnormally and persistently elevated, expansive, or irritable mood lasting at least 1 week (without intervention). Mania is far more extreme than simply being “happy” or “angry” and the mood lasts most of the day. Common symptoms include high impulsivity, hyperactivity, decreased need for sleep, and inflated sense of importance (grandiosity).
  - **Hypomania:** Elevated mood that is less intense and shorter in duration than mania.
- **Major depressive episode:** Low mood and/or loss of interest and pleasure lasting most of the day, almost every day, for at least 2 weeks. Disturbances in sleep, appetite, and cognitive performance (e.g., memory) are common, and collectively result in impairment in a person’s ability to function in at least one area of life (e.g., social, occupational).

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- **Impulsivity:** A symptom of some mental illnesses characterized by acting without considering the consequences, often placing someone at risk for some type of harm.
- **Crisis:** A condition where someone has exhausted their ability to cope with the psychological/emotional demands they are facing.
- **Suicidal ideation:** Thoughts a person has of ending their life. Sometimes they are considered passive, e.g., wishing they would die.
- **Suicide attempt:** Intentional, serious effort to end one's life. Someone with previous attempts is like a good candidate for AOT.

# Mental illness terminology

- **Schizophrenia:** A mental illness characterized by recurring psychotic episodes that greatly impairs a person's ability to function. People living with schizophrenia often exhibit bizarre behavior, are difficult to communicate with, and are resistant to treatment.
- **Bipolar disorder** (*formerly manic-depressive disorder*): A mental illness where an individual experiences both major depressive episodes and manic or hypomanic episodes over the course of their life.
- **Schizoaffective disorder:** A mental illness that consists of both schizophrenia symptoms and mood symptoms (i.e., major depressive or manic/hypomanic episodes).
- **Substance use disorder (SUD):** An ongoing pattern of substance use resulting in distress and inability to function in at least one area of life (e.g., social, occupational). Sometimes presented in a substance specific way, e.g., AUD (alcohol use disorder), OUD (opioid use disorder). *Note: substance use disorder alone does not meet the criteria for AOT.*
- **Co-occurring disorder (COD):** The presence of both a mental illness and an SUD.

This training is presented as a part of the  
**Assisted Outpatient Treatment Toolkit**  
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<http://behaviorhealthjustice.wayne.edu/aot>