

PUBLIC PSYCHIATRY FELLOWSHIP: HOW AND WHY TO APPLY

General Subspecialty Overview Questions

What is this subspecialty?

Public/Community psychiatry embraces the social mission of medicine and focuses on the care of people with complex mental health needs receiving services that are typically publicly funded. It aims to mitigate the impact of social determinants of health, mental illness and substance use problems on healthcare access, treatment and outcomes. Public Psychiatry uses a recovery oriented, systems based practice approach to care and there is a focus on leadership, administration, policy and legal aspects of care.

What kinds of patients do psychiatrists in this subspecialty see?

Public/Community Psychiatrists usually treat people with complex needs who are being served in community organizations and clinics. Most of these programs serve people with severe mental illness (psychotic spectrum disorders, bipolar, complex depression, trauma, borderline personality disorder, substance use disorders). More recently there is a significant emphasis on integrated care- involving seeing people with common mental disorders (depression and anxiety) in primary care settings, or providing medical care for people with SMI in behavioral health settings.

In what settings do psychiatrists in this subspecialty work?

There is a wide range of clinical and administrative settings, ranging from hospital-based outpatient clinic, to community non-profits, ACT teams and other intensive community programs, emergency rooms, crisis programs, shelters, criminal justice system, state hospitals, local and state mental health authorities policy offices.

Can I get board (ABPN) certification in this subspecialty?

As of 2019 there is no Board Certification by ABPN for Public Psychiatry. ACGME does recognize Public/Community Psychiatry as a subspecialty.

American Association for Community Psychiatry (AACP) in collaboration with APA provides a [certification exam](#) at the cost of \$250. Psychiatrists are eligible for the certification exam if they have completed a Public or Community Psychiatry Fellowship or if they have worked in a community setting for a minimum of 2 years full time or 5 years part time. The exam is offered through the APA Learning Center- more details about the creation can be found here:

<https://psychnews.psychiatryonline.org/doi/10.1176/appi.pn.2018.11b2>

Why Do a Fellowship?

Why do a public psychiatry fellowship?

The current healthcare landscape is proving to be ever more challenging for people and doctors alike, and there are many shortcomings in the delivery of care. If you are frustrated by inefficient and sometimes ineffectual care provided in some systems and if you are inclined to want to fix these systems, a public psychiatry fellowship is for you. A public psychiatry fellowship can provide you with the conceptual framework to understand organizational dysfunction and the tools to address the problems.

Most fellowships also focus on management and leadership training which can prove useful for those seeking administrative roles.

What type of career might you pursue after a public psychiatry fellowship?

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Some Public Psychiatrists have purely clinical careers working in the above settings. The majority have a mix of clinical and administrative careers- for example, about two thirds of the graduates from the Columbia University/NYSPI program go on to have leadership roles at program or agency levels (usually Medical Director positions). Several alumni have gone on to be leaders in policy and behavioral health administration at county, state and national levels. Many alumni have pursued academic careers, often involving health services research as well as education and training related to public psychiatry.

Specific Subspecialty Resources

What is the national organization for public and community psychiatry?

The American Association for Community Psychiatrists ([AACP](#)).

Should I join and how much does it generally cost?

Yes! And it is free for medical students, residents and fellows.

When is the annual meeting typically, and are there trainee scholarships to attend?

The American Association for Community Psychiatry was scheduled to hold its first annual meeting in October 2020 in Philadelphia, however this was cancelled due to COVID-19. Instead, a series of online plenary talks and workshops will be conducted between the summer and fall of 2020. See the website for more details.

The American Association for Community Psychiatry in conjunction with the American Psychiatric Association organizes a meeting called Institute of Psychiatric Services (IPS): the Mental Health Services conference. IPS takes place in October. The American Psychiatric Association offers different fellowships (Public Psychiatry, Diversity, Minority, Leadership, Advocacy) that provide scholarships.

To learn more about IPS visit:

<https://www.psychiatry.org/psychiatrists/meetings/ips-the-mental-health-services-conference>

To learn more about the APA fellowships visit:

<https://www.psychiatry.org/residents-medical-students/residents/fellowships/available-apa-apaf-fellowships>

Where can I read more about this subspecialty area?

- Handbook of Community Psychiatry 2012th Edition. by Hunter L. McQuiston (Editor), Wesley E. Sowers (Editor), Jules M. Ranz (Editor), Jacqueline Maus Feldman (Editor)
- Yale Textbook of Public Psychiatry 1st Edition. by Selby Jacobs (Editor), Jeanne Steiner (Editor)

Does the national organization for this subspecialty have a mentorship program?

Yes, AACP offers a mentorship program for its members. You should contact the communications director of AACP if you are interested in joining.

How can I get more involved in the national organization for my subspecialty?

Becoming a member of AACP for free.

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Fellowship Application Process

How do I learn about all the public psychiatry fellowships nationally, and when should I start learning about them?

The AACP website has a comprehensive list of all the public psychiatry fellowships listed by state: [AACP - Fellowship Training Opportunities](#)

It is advisable that you start discussing your interest with mentors in your PGY3 year. Attending the [Mental Health Services](#) conference in October of your PGY 3 year can help you get to know the various opportunities available. The Public Psychiatry Fellowship Directors and alumni from the major programs nationally hold a panel every year describing unique aspects of each fellowship and a Q&A with prospective applicants.

Of note- during COVID-19 pandemic, the in-person conferences were cancelled or switched to online format. Even in the absence of such conferences, the Public and Community Psychiatry Fellowship Directors will hold an online “open house” allowing prospective applicants to get to know each program.

When does the application season typically begin?

Programs accept applications starting July 1st (of your PGY 4 year). Some fellowships have a later interviewing schedule, check with their specific websites/ coordinators. There is a list of Public/Community Psychiatry Fellowships on the AACP website.

Is there a formal Match through NRMP?

No, public psychiatry fellowships recruit their fellows by offering positions directly, after the interviewing process.

To how many programs should I apply?

Each program offers different opportunities and has different strengths. Ideally you should explore all the available programs and apply to those who align more with your interests.

How competitive is getting a fellowship spot?

As for all subspecialty fellowships in psychiatry, fellowship programs are not as competitive as residency. Competitiveness varies by program and there are over 20 programs nationally. If you are motivated and interested in improving systems of care and mental health services in the public sector you will likely be accepted into one of the programs.

Is there a research/scholarly activity requirement or completed suggested rotations to get my desired fellowship spot?

Some fellowships like UCSF have a more emphasized focus on research, therefore the completion of a previous scholarly activity and/ or publication will serve as an advantage for prospective applicants.

Having completed electives in public/ community psychiatry settings, addictions, child, forensics, global health make applicants more competitive. Programs also look for applicants who have experience/volunteered in social service settings.

However, there are no specific requirements for either research or electives in order to be considered for a fellowship position.

Are there any eligibility requirements or things I must complete before applying/starting?

Successful completion of a psychiatric residency training is required for application. Some fellowships accept PGY 3 applicants (who will complete the fellowship year during their elective PGY 4 rotations) on a case by case basis. Foreign graduates requiring a visa are also accepted on a case by case basis- please check with the specific program.

PUBLIC PSYCHIATRY FELLOWSHIP: HOW AND WHY TO APPLY

Successful passing of USMLE Step 3 and a full or partial license by July 1st of the academic year in the state where you are applying for the fellowship is usually required.

What does the application typically entail, and how many interviews should I go to?

Most applications consist of a questionnaire and/ or a personal statement/ letter of interest and a CV.

As described above the fellowships are different in their focus and structure, therefore you should apply according to your interests in settings, geographical area etc.

Is there a difference between ACGME accredited and non-accredited fellowships?

Yes. The Public Psychiatry Fellowships are not ACGME accredited. Non-accredited programs have much more flexibility in terms of compensation and structure, so that programs can make many adjustments to meet the individual needs and interests of the fellow.

While ABPN subspecialties do have their advantages, they are limited by the ACGME accreditation and therefore standardized. The fellows in these subspecialties are still considered to be in training (i.e. PGY 5) and usually do not have competitive salaries. Graduates from an ACGME-accredited fellowship will be eligible to sit for one of the American Board of Medical Specialties (ABMS) subspecialty board exams.

AACP also offers a board certification in Public and Community Psychiatry, outside of the ABMS system. More details here: [AACP - AACP Board Certification](#).

The Fellowship Year

How long is the fellowship?

This is a 1 year long fellowship.

What would I learn during the fellowship year?

Each fellowship has a slightly different curriculum, however, most use a systems based practice, recovery oriented care approach. Most fellowships cover the structure of the mental health system, mental health policy, social determinants of mental health/structural competency, mental health inequities, including special populations; trauma, advocacy, housing and homelessness, treatment of co-occurring disorders, technology, program evaluation, management and leadership.

In what settings would I work during fellowship?

Depending on the funding structure of the fellowship, positions might be available at the home agency/ university or in the community and mental health administration offices.

Are there major differences between the fellowship programs, and if so, how do I choose the right program for me?

Yes, the field of public psychiatry is wide and each program offers unique clinical, administrative and scholarly opportunities. The best approach is to choose a program that will allow you opportunities to work with the populations and community you enjoy the most. It is also helpful to speak with alumni of the programs. You can get this information from the program directors.

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