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SEO for Therapists

Where a private practice can still win page one, from a study of 16 Google results pages.

A guide for private and group practices | 2026 edition

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SECTION 01

The short answer

01

Most SEO advice for therapists says claim your Business Profile, pick some keywords and start a blog. It skips the question every private practice owner asks: can a small practice still get found when Psychology Today sits at the top of Google? We pulled the top 10 Google results for 16 therapist searches across 6 US metros. The answer depends on the search, and good SEO for therapists picks the searches a practice can realistically win.

What to do about it:

1

Stop chasing #1 for "therapist" plus your city.

Psychology Today held it in every city we checked. Aim for the top three under it, and make your directory profiles as strong as your site.

2

Make your homepage say "counseling" and your city.

On "counseling" searches, local practices held all 9 top-three spots, almost all with homepages.

3

Build one page per specialty.

On condition searches like "anxiety therapist chicago," a practice held #1 in all 3, mostly with a page built for that condition.

4

Follow your ethics code on reviews.

Don't solicit testimonials from clients, and never confirm in a review reply that the reviewer is a client.

WHAT THE STUDY FOUND

Across 16 therapist searches, local practices and counseling centers held 55% of the top 10 results and 26 of the 48 top-three spots. Directories held 23%, led by Psychology Today and Zocdoc, and took #1 in 8 searches. Headway and Alma did not rank in any of the 16.

Who this guide is for

Solo therapists and counselors who want to know whether their own site can bring in clients, owners of group practices deciding which pages to build for each clinician and specialty, and psychologists and counselors who need to know what their ethics code says about reviews and testimonials.

SECTION 02

The Therapist Page-One Map

02

On October 24, 2026, we read the top 10 organic results from Semrush for 16 searches: "therapist" plus the city in Los Angeles, Chicago, Houston, Denver, Atlanta and Seattle, plus "psychologist seattle"; "counseling" plus the city in Denver, Houston and Atlanta; three condition or specialty searches; and three national questions. Every result went into one of eight groups. The map pack, ads and AI Overview citations are not counted.

Search type	Who holds page one	What it means for you
Therapist plus city	Local practices 54%, directories 39%. Psychology Today held #1 in all 7. Zocdoc ranked in all 6 "therapist" searches. A practice still reached the top three in all 7.	→ You won't take #1 from the directory. Aim for the top three under it. Semrush difficulty 24 to 48.
Counseling plus city	Local practices 90%. All 9 top-three spots and #1 in all 3 cities. 26 of 27 practice results were homepages.	→ Your best lane for a general practice. A homepage that says "counseling" and your city wins it.
Condition or specialty plus city	Local practices 70%. A practice held #1 in all 3. 17 of 21 practice results were a page built for that condition or a practice named for it.	→ The lane for specialists, and the easiest: difficulty 17 to 29. One strong page per specialty.
National questions	Publishers 38%, platforms 17%, directories 14%. Two practices ranked with local cost articles.	→ Mostly closed. A sourced local cost page is the one opening.

31 of 38

practice results on "therapist" searches were homepages. Google ranks the front door for the broad search.

4 of 21

practice results on condition searches were homepages with no condition in the web address. Google wants a page about the condition.

Source: Brown Bear therapist SERP study, Semrush top 10 organic results, US, October 24, 2026. 159 results across 16 searches.

SECTION 03

Psychology Today, Zocdoc and the platforms

03

Psychology Today showed up in 15 of our 16 searches, 13 of them with its directory. It held #1 for "therapist" plus the city in all 6 metros, for "psychologist seattle" and for "how to find a therapist," a search Semrush puts at 14,800 a month. Zocdoc ranked in all 6 "therapist" searches.

> **GOOGLE SHOWS THE LIST, NOT YOUR PROFILE**
>
> Only one individual therapist's directory profile ranked anywhere in our 159 results: an Open Path Collective profile at #7 for "therapist houston." Searchers pick you from inside the directory's city list, so your profile is the second page a client judges you on, after your Business Profile. The NBCC lists Psychology Today at $29.95 a month after a six-month free trial for its members. At the reference values on the payback worksheet, one new client covers a year of it.

How to work the directories:

1. **Keep your name, practice name, address, phone and website identical** on every directory, and match your Business Profile exactly.
2. **Write the profile for the person reading it:** who you help, how you work, what a first session looks like, and whether you take their insurance.
3. **Link the profile to the matching specialty page** on your site, not only your homepage.
4. **Search "therapist" plus your city once a quarter** and note which directories rank, so you know where your profile has to be complete.

Where Headway, Alma, Grow Therapy and Talkspace rank

Platform	Where it ranked in our 16 searches
Headway and Alma	Nowhere. Treat a network listing as a billing and referral channel, not your search plan.
Grow Therapy	Twice: #7 for "therapist los angeles" and #3 for "anxiety therapist los angeles"
Talkspace and BetterHelp	Only "online therapy," at #1 and #6

SECTION 04

Counseling searches and specialty pages

04

Across "counseling" in Denver, Houston and Atlanta, local practices held 27 of 30 results, all 9 top-three spots and #1 in every city. Psychology Today ranked only #4 in Denver and #7 in Atlanta, and missed the Houston top 10. The #1 results were Denver Wellness Counseling, Greater Houston Counseling Services and Counseling Services of Atlanta. Each puts the word people search and the city in the practice name or homepage title.

A homepage that wins "counseling" plus your city:

- **A title and opening line that say what you do and where:** "Counseling in Denver," with your neighborhood if you serve one part of town.
- **Who you see, which issues you treat,** in-person or online sessions, and which insurance you take, in plain words near the top.
- **Each clinician's name, license type and photo,** with a short page for each.
- **The same name and address** on your site, your Business Profile and every directory. Semrush flagged a local pack on all 13 of our local searches.

Specialty pages win condition searches

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy Los Angeles held #1 for "anxiety therapist los angeles" with a page about anxiety. Depth Counseling held #1 in Chicago with its anxiety therapy page, while its homepage ranked #5 for "therapist chicago." Heights Couples Therapy held #1 for "couples therapist houston." Semrush rates "anxiety therapist los angeles" at 17 difficulty and 390 searches a month, against 38 for "therapist los angeles."

A specialty page that can rank answers:

1. **Who it's for, in the words people use:** "anxiety," "panic attacks," "couples who keep having the same fight."
2. **How you work with it,** which approaches you use and what the first sessions look like, without promising an outcome or diagnosing the reader.
3. **Which clinicians see it,** with their license type and training.
4. **Location, online options, fees or insurance,** and one clear way to reach out.

SECTION 05

Business Profiles, solo practices and groups

05

The Business Profile drives the map pack, which showed up on every local search we pulled. Google's guidelines describe an individual practitioner as a public-facing professional with their own clients. Therapists aren't named in Google's examples, but a licensed therapist who sees clients fits the definition.

- **A practitioner can have their own profile** if they work in a public-facing role and can be reached at the verified location during stated hours.
- **Several practitioners at one location:** the practice gets its own profile, and each practitioner's profile title holds only their name.
- **A solo practitioner at a branded location** shares one profile with the brand, named "Brand: Practitioner Name."
- **No extra profiles for specialties.** Put specialties in your categories and description instead.

In Bryan's AI visibility audits, odd variations in a business's name, address or phone number across listings are the most common actual error he finds. Therapy practices are prone to it, because the same clinician appears on Google, Psychology Today, Zocdoc and an insurance network, each edited at a different time.

SOLO THERAPISTS

Spend a small site well

WHAT THE DATA SHOWS

drnicolemoshfegh.com, a Los Angeles psychologist's site, held #4 for "anxiety therapist los angeles."

WHAT TO BUILD

- One specialty page you can stand behind
- A clear homepage
- A complete directory profile

Your Business Profile is your name. Keep it consistent everywhere.

GROUP PRACTICES

Rank across several searches

WHAT THE DATA SHOWS

13 practices ranked for two or more local searches. Resilience Center Houston ranked for three.

WHAT TO BUILD

- A page per shared specialty
- A short page per clinician
- A Business Profile per office

Link each clinician page to the specialties they see.

PSYCHOLOGISTS

A slightly different page one

WHAT THE DATA SHOWS

For "psychologist seattle," findapsychologist.org ranked #3 under Psychology Today.

WHAT TO BUILD

- License type and doctoral degree on site and profiles
- Any psychologist-only listing you qualify for

APA Standard 5.05 covers testimonials from current clients.

SECTION 06

Reviews, ethics codes, HIPAA and AI search

06

Some ranking guides tell therapists to ask satisfied clients for Google reviews. Google's own AI Overview says not to, and blames HIPAA. Neither is quite right. The rule against asking comes from your ethics code. HIPAA's problems so far have come from what providers said back. This is not legal advice, and your state board's rules may go further.

Code	What it says about testimonials
APA, Standard 5.05	Psychologists do not solicit testimonials from current therapy clients or patients, or others vulnerable to undue influence.
ACA 2014, Standard C.3.b	Counselors do not solicit testimonials from current clients, former clients or others who may be vulnerable to undue influence, and discuss any testimonial with clients and get permission. The code is under revision.
NASW, Standard 4.07	Social workers should not solicit testimonial endorsements from current clients or others vulnerable to undue influence.

THE HIPAA LESSON FROM REVIEW REPLIES

In June 2023, HHS OCR announced a $30,000 settlement with Manasa Health Center, a New Jersey psychiatric practice that disclosed information about four patients, including diagnoses and treatment, in replies to their Google reviews. The safe reply never confirms the reviewer is a client: thank them, invite them to call the office, and say nothing about care.

- **Ads:** Google's health in personalized advertising policy treats counseling for depression, anxiety and addiction as a sensitive interest. You can't target on it, or use Customer Match or your own segments to promote it.
- **Health pages face a stricter quality bar.** Put each clinician's name, license type and license state on the pages they work from, and never write a page that diagnoses the reader.

AI search

Semrush flagged an AI Overview on only 2 of our 16 searches, both national, and on none of the 13 local ones. AI answers lean on the same directories, review sites and Reddit threads that hold page one. Keep profiles consistent, state each clinician's license, specialties, languages and states on your about page, and ask ChatGPT for a therapist for your specialty in your town once a month.

SECTION 07

Cost, timing and hiring help

07

Judge an SEO program in clients. At SimplePractice's 2024 national average of $139.40 a session and 4.3 sessions per client in routine care, from a 2002 review of 6,072 patients, one new client brings in about $599. At the 12.7 sessions the same review found in clinical trials, it is about $1,770.

The payback worksheet

Step	The math	Your number
1. Total investment	Monthly SEO spend times months. 12 is a fair first look.	_____
2. Value per new client	Collected per session times sessions per client, times the share you keep after clinician pay	_____
3. Clients to break even	Step 1 divided by step 2, rounded up, then divided by months	_____
4. Caseload check	Is the monthly figure below the new clients you can take each month?	_____

A WORKED EXAMPLE

A $1,500 monthly program over 12 months is $18,000. At $599 a client, that is 31 new clients, about 2.6 a month. At $1,770, it is 11. The same $18,000 buys about 1,238 clicks on "therapist atlanta" at Semrush's $14.54 cost per click, before one becomes a consultation.

Timing depends on the lane. Your name, the map pack, directory profiles, "counseling" plus your city and a specialty or two can move within a few months. The top three under Psychology Today for "therapist" plus your city takes a year or more.

Ask an agency for 4 things before you sign

1. **A page-one review of your target searches,** sorted by who owns each result.
2. **A Business Profile and directory plan** that follows Google practitioner rules.
3. **Reporting on consultations and booked clients by source,** not just rankings.
4. **How they handle reviews, testimonials and tracking,** in writing.

SECTION 08

Is your practice aimed at searches you can win?

08

Answer for your practice as it stands today. Each "no" is a gap. Start with the lanes the Page-One Map marks as most open: "counseling" plus your city and your specialties.

Question	Yes	Partly	No
SEARCH TARGETING			
Have you checked who holds page one for "therapist" and "counseling" plus your city?	☐	☐	☐
Have you stopped chasing #1 for "therapist" plus your city, and aimed for the top three under the directory?	☐	☐	☐
Does each specialty you want more clients for have its own page?	☐	☐	☐
DIRECTORIES AND LISTINGS			
Are your name, practice name, address, phone and website identical on Google and every directory?	☐	☐	☐
Is each directory profile written for the client, with who you help, how you work and the insurance you take?	☐	☐	☐
Does each directory profile link to the matching specialty page on your site?	☐	☐	☐
PAGES AND PROFILES			
Do your homepage title and opening line say what you do and the city or neighborhood you serve?	☐	☐	☐
Does each clinician have a short page with their name, license type, license state and photo?	☐	☐	☐
Does each public-facing clinician have a Business Profile titled with only their name, alongside the practice profile?	☐	☐	☐
ETHICS, PRIVACY AND TRACKING			
Have you checked your ethics code and state board before asking anyone for a review?	☐	☐	☐
Do your review replies avoid confirming that the reviewer is a client or mentioning any care?	☐	☐	☐
Do you track consultation requests and booked clients by source?	☐	☐	☐

YES	PARTLY	NO
_____	_____	_____

SECTION 09

Next steps

09

1. **Run the self-audit** on the previous page. Be honest.
2. **Search "therapist," "counseling" and your top specialty plus your city,** and note who holds page one for each.
3. **Fix your homepage title and your directory profiles first,** then build your first specialty page.

WORK WITH BROWN BEAR

Brown Bear builds the page-one map for your market first, then does the profile, page and AI search work that follows from it, within your ethics code. brownbear.digital/blog/seo-for-therapists | bryan@brownbear.digital

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Bryan Passanisi is the founder of Brown Bear Digital. He has 15 years of experience across SEO, paid search, and AI search strategy, and received a 2025 Semrush AI Visibility Award with the QuickBooks team. He started Brown Bear to give businesses direct access to senior search expertise without the agency overhead, and runs local SEO and AI search programs for medical practices, another licensed field where trust and privacy shape every page.

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