

What is Global Appraisal of Individual Needs Short Screener (GAIN-SS)?

What is the GAIN-SS?

It is a 23-item concurrent disorder screening tool developed by Chestnut Health Systems, a nonprofit behavioural health care organization in the United States. It was designed for three main purposes:

1. As a tool to quickly and accurately identify clients who are likely to have substance use mental health disorders or both and who would benefit from further targeted assessment and/or referral
2. As an easy-to-use quality assurance tool that provides a simple needs assessment to guide program development and can be used to compare sites based on which expected diagnoses or referrals turn into actual cases
3. As a periodic measure of change in behavioural health over time

GAIN-SS has four sub-sections:

1. Internalizing disorders (mood, sleep, anxiety, past trauma, suicide, hallucinations, disordered thinking)
2. Externalizing disorders (attention-deficit/hyperactivity, conduct and gambling)
3. Substance use disorders (abuse and/or dependence)
4. Crime/violence issues (interpersonal violence, property crime and drug related crime)

How is the GAIN-SS administered?

The screener can be self-administered or staff-administered with paper and pen. Interviewers can administer the screener in person, over the phone, through an online communication program (like Skype), or with the help of an interpreter for hearing impaired participants (TTP). It can be easily scanned into a form or incorporated into existing instrument batteries or systems.

The screener is available in English and French and takes approximately 10 minutes to administer.

What is the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health (CAMH) modified version?

The CAMH in Toronto wanted more information from clients on some diagnostic categories that were not covered in the original GAIN-SS tool. The CAMH modified version of the screener adds six questions to probe for:

- Problematic eating
- Traumatic stress
- Disordered thinking
- Gambling
- Video game or internet use

Can the GAIN-SS be changed?

No. All versions of the GAIN-SS are under copyright rules and belong to Chestnut Health Systems and CAMH.

Do we need a licence to use the tool?

Yes. The Practice Supports & Provincial Partnerships team maintains the provincial licence and the training subscription. Your manager can email concurrent.disorders@ahs.ca to request to be added to the provincial licence once all clinicians have completed online training.

Is the GAIN-SS mandatory to use?

No. Alberta Health Services (AHS) Addiction and Mental Health (AMH) senior leadership reviewed this tool, and agreed to use a consistent, validated tool where possible and provide a limited menu of other tools where the GAIN-SS is not appropriate. This is consistent with the Health Canada recommendation to standardize screening.

AHS AMH recognizes the need for some flexibility to meet the needs of variable service settings within the system.

However, we can improve patient experience and quality of care if we reduce the variability in clinical practices (such as screening) where possible. The GAIN-SS Version 3.0 is a tool within a menu of options that screens for concurrent disorders and can be used in most settings with most populations.

Is the GAIN-SS the right tool for all settings?

No. While the screener can be used in most settings such as AMH programs, primary care networks, correctional services, and other social agencies, there are situations where this screen is not appropriate.

These exceptions may include:

- Programs that provide services to children under 12
- Settings where time and/or environment may not be conducive to a written screener (such as emergency rooms, mobile services, or remand facilities)
- Situations where client immediate needs take precedence (such as intoxication, severe distress, risk of harm, or refusal)

What training is available to support using the GAIN-SS?

Online: The GAIN-SS online training course is available through Chestnut Health System. Contact concurrent.disorders@ahs.ca.

In-person: After completing the online learning module, a Clinical Consultant can facilitate a two-hour workshop for your team. Participants will practice scoring the tool and interpreting the results using client scenarios to inform treatment planning. Your manager can email concurrent.disorders@ahs.ca to request on-site training or access virtual course via My Learning Link.

Suggested activity

Spend a few moments either alone or with a colleague considering how a short screener like GAIN-SS could help you triage clients' needs and determine next steps.

For example:

A client completes the GAIN-SS form on a clipboard while in the waiting room at a walk-in clinic. You review the GAIN-SS and notice there are high scores in both substance use and mental health (internal/external) areas.

1. What is your next clinical decision with this client?
 - Keep and consult for a more comprehensive assessment
 - Provide a brief intervention for the client
 - Ensure a warm handoff/coordinated referral to _____
 - Other: _____
2. You are ready to meet with this person. How would you share the results?