

Senate Inquiry – Commonwealth Mental Health Funds.

I have been in practice for 20 years. I have seen many distressed people of all ages and from all walks of life. People who were severely depressed, suicidal, cutting themselves, abusing drugs and alcohol and just felt lost and utterly confused. It is a terrible psychological state to be in. I have seen how absence of the Medicare scheme prevented them from continuing their psychological treatment. I remember how extremely frustrating it was for me as a professional, to see someone slipping down and deteriorating, when he / she could be saved. These individuals could become useful members of the society, but we lost them due to lack of appropriate support.

As a Clinical Psychologist, Medicare scheme was one of the best developments I have seen in my professional life. It has allowed general members of the community to get some help. It is not a lot (as people get only 12 sessions), but the system has established a life line for millions of people who otherwise would never used psychological services. With the Medicare support, I can take care of these lost souls. I am able to direct them to the right path. I can save lives. I can prevent deaths or self harm. I can assist people to overcome their maladaptive coping like drugs or alcohol. I am able to give these lost individual some hope that there is light at the end of the tunnel. The scheme has allowed GPs and allied and mental health professional to work together. There is now a massive improvement in the multidisciplinary approach. Professionals are taking a holistic approach. Isn't that what we wanted?

I would like to emphasise the needs of the individuals from culturally and diverse backgrounds. These individuals have an extra layer of adjustments and issues along with what we all encounter. Considering the globalisation, we have no choice but to be ready for diversity. We cannot ignore the 25% of our population that needs some extra care. I request the Senate to not forget this section of the society. We need funds and facilities for this section of the population.

Any budget cut or change will take us back to the period of professional frustration and dissatisfaction. In fact we need more funds. Otherwise, I fear the mental health will decline. The challenges of 21<sup>st</sup> century have stressed and strained human beings. We all feel being in a pressure cooker. Most of the individuals do not know how to take care of these pressures. We have seen incidents in the society at large where mentally ill individuals have endangered the lives of others. It is vital to continue and improve the Commonwealth funds for mental health schemes. I hope that our politicians will think carefully and NOT damage the Medicare system. Like any profession we have specialisations and expertise. It will be vital to continue to acknowledge the expertise of the Clinical Psychologists, by continuing to allow a higher fee for this group.

I thank the Senate for providing me this opportunity to express my point of view.

A Clinical Psychologist in private practice and academia.