

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing regarding the proposed changes to the number of sessions provided by the Better Access to Mental Health scheme. Currently, people who have completed a Mental Health Care Plan with their GP are entitled to six sessions, and are able to renew for a further six, totalling 12 sessions in a calendar year. In exceptional circumstances, people are able to access a third lot of six sessions. I understand that the proposal is that in the new scheme, people will only have access to six sessions, and then can renew for four further sessions if required.

I work as a psychologist in a private practice, and most of my clients are children and families. I see children with a range of mental health issues such as general anxiety, school refusal, separation anxiety, obsessive compulsive disorder, depression, and behavioural difficulties. These children are coming for early intervention in order to build their resilience and learn to cope with difficulties such as bullying. I have found that in order for interventions to be most effective and to sustain change long term, that families attend for 12 sessions. This figure is quite standard in treatment plans for various disorders, and I currently work from a model in which all my treatment plans have a minimum of 10 weekly or fortnightly sessions, with an extra two a month or two down the track to ensure that progress is maintained long term. Even in early intervention, it is critical to have the scope for 12 sessions in order to learn the skills and have time to practice and apply them so that they become a part of the child's daily life, which will result in long term change.

In between sessions 10 and 12 of my treatment, I see most children start to use the skills independently and to make a significant recovery. I do not believe that 10 sessions would be adequate for this. Certainly, 6 sessions is not sufficient, as the first session is often used up by gathering background information and formulating a treatment plan; five sessions would not be enough to foster new skills and see the clients through difficulties in applying them to their lives. For other children, such as those with more severe difficulties, or in exceptional circumstances, the further 6 sessions available have been critical. I believe that it is important to invest in early intervention and to give children resilience and coping skills at the early onset of mental health issues. This has been working amazingly well with the Better Access scheme, and I was shocked and disappointed to hear of the changes.

Please consider my submission and those of other psychologists, as we represent many people who are benefiting tremendously from this fantastic scheme.