

Committee Secretary

03/08/2011

Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs

PO Box 6100

Parliament House

CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Senate Standing Committee,

I find it disappointing and rather sad to hear about the proposed cut to reduce Health Care funded counselling sessions to 6 + 4 per year. This will definitely be damaging to those people (clients) who suffer with one or more mental illnesses. I am unsure what the logic is behind such a decision? Many of the clients who have benefited hugely by the current MHCP have created great improvement in their quality of life and participation in society in general as well as learnt how to sustain these changes. Symbolically it is very much like the old saying "Give a man a fish and he'll eat for a day teach him how to fish and he'll live forever".

Learning skills half way without knowing how to maintain them is a temporary band aid approach, rendering people dependent on constantly needing to be taught because they have not been given enough time to learn it properly. Which is why the current MHCP in Australia is so advanced as it shows a true reflection of human behaviour and need for appropriate assistance regarding mental illness. It is sustainable and preventative rather than a quick fix approach which in the long run ends up costly to the individuals involved, their families, their children, employers, friends, supports as well as the welfare system.

It is important to point out that by privileging other services such as headspace many, many people will fall through the gaps as a lot of clients needing support for mental health issues are not always aware the extent to which it is impacting on their lives hence do not actively seek support. Many of our clients have come in through Employment Assistance Programs sponsored by their employer initially (2 or 3 sessions) issues such as anxiety, conflict in the work place or suicidality and then realised the level of impact the illness is having on their and their families life. It is not until then that they seek appropriate support through accessing the MHCP. This offers them a very smooth transition into receiving support and changing their lives. With this proposed reduction a huge amount of suffering and struggle will be missed through an uninformed understanding of Mental Illness and its effects on people lives. This is very sad, expensive and potentially damaging.

I hope these and other important implications are considered in your decision.

Kind Regards,
Marilyn Grogan, Psychologist