

To the Senate Committee:

Hi, I am a Registered Psychologist with a Master of Psychology (Counselling) soon to finish my registration as a Counselling Psychologist. I just wanted to write a quick letter airing my serious concerns with the state of the mental health system at current. For the past few years I have been working as a Psychologist with a number of different populations and a large proportion of my work has been with clients with complex and enduring mental health conditions. My concern is that our current system suggests that Clinical Psychologists are the only Psychologists who are specialists in mental health and are the only group who both work with and have the skills to deal with complex mental health issues. The recent Medicare review has shown strong evidence that this is not the case. That not only do general Psychologists and other specialist Psychologists with Masters degrees work with the same population of clients with complex mental health issues, but it was also found that there is NO difference in the outcomes of Clinical Psychologists versus other Psychologists in relation to working with these type of clients.

Despite this we currently have a huge inequity in our Medicare system which means that only Clinical Psychologists get specialist rebates for working with clients. This inequity means that vulnerable clients are less likely to be able to access specialist trained Psychologists (such as Counselling Psychologists) who have been shown to have the same level of skills in working with clients with mental health disorders. This is absolutely abhorrent, considering the fact that the Master of Psychology (Counselling) course has as much of a focus on assessment, diagnosis and treatment of mental health conditions as the Clinical Psychology course. There is in fact no evidence to suggest that the specialist course (Master of Psychology – counselling) is not equivalent to the Master of Psychology (Clinical) course. This biased notion that Clinical Psychologists are the only Psychologists who have these specialist skills is based on ideas of prejudice and not on any facts.

Another clear example of this unacceptable prejudice is that in the ‘Department of Child Protection’ and the ‘Department of Justice’ Counselling Psychologists work alongside Clinical Psychologists with the exact same population of clients and yet within the ‘Department of Health’ Counselling Psychologists are not even employed as Counselling Psychologists (they are hired as counsellors or general psychologists). What a ridiculous waste of specialist skills which are much needed within the mental health field. How is it that on one hand they are recognised as being ‘equal’ and on the other they are blatantly discriminated against.

I have worked in a number of different areas as a Psychologist [with a Master of Psychology (counselling)], particularly in relation to working with clients with a complex trauma background, often with co-morbid and enduring mental health disorders such as PTSD, personality disorders, depression, anxiety disorders, substance use disorders and so on. I urge that the government take a serious look at the inequities within the current Medicare and mental health system and seek to make the system one that links closely with the current research (recent Medicare review) on what WORKS for clients rather than what is the status quo. All specialist Psychologists (Neuropsychologists, Counselling Psychologists, Clinical Psychologists etc.) should receive the same rebate from within the Medicare system. Lets work together with the training and resources we have rather than encouraging the current split within the mental health system with the idea that only one ‘elitist’ group of Psychologists can work with this population when the research says that this is just NOT the case. Ignoring research conducted by the government itself is unethical and will have a significant detrimental effect on this field and on the vulnerable clients who access these services.

I thank you for reading and considering this important issue that effects a huge population of disadvantaged clients.