

To whom it may concern,

I am writing in response to changes and possible changes to the Medicare mental health care plan rebates.

I have been working in private practice for the past four years with the majority of my patients being referred to me on mental health care plans. I work with a range of clients differing in age, level of impairment and conditions.

We have recently been informed about possible changes in the two tier Medicare system. I started as a generalist psychologist with a Masters in Educational and Developmental Psychology (6 years of university training), however, I then upgraded via a bridging plan to meet the requirements of a Clinical Psychologist. I felt that this additional training was very beneficial to the quality of care I am able to offer patients and furthered my knowledge significantly. I would therefore suggest that this two tier system should be retained with the option of upgrading by furthering knowledge and skills. This will continue to encourage generalist psychologists to further their knowledge and skills thereby allowing for better quality of treatment.

In addition, I feel that the cut of exceptional circumstances from the new budget is a great shame. While it is probably correct that the majority of mild cases will only require 10 or less sessions, the vast majority of more serious cases require ongoing assistance and monitoring to maintain progress and reduce the risk of relapse. The cut to 10 sessions does not take into account the potential for relapse at a later stage in the year and does not even allow for a session a month for those with chronic mental health problems. The argument is that these patients will be seen through other systems, however, over the years I have witnessed that these other systems also have limited funds and are only available for a select few.

I would like to take this opportunity to praise the government for initially bringing in this generous mental health budget (12 to 18 sessions per calendar year). I truly believe that many patients have benefited from the accessibility in mental health care that this has provided. In addition, I feel it has reduced the chance of many patients' conditions becoming worse and has therefore acted as a really important early intervention. In addition, the number of sessions that have been available have allowed for us as professionals, along with GP's, to tailor our treatment to the patients' needs and provide high quality care and in most cases without being restricted by session limits.

I hope that you will take my thoughts into consideration.

Yours truly,