

Thursday 28th July 2011

Committee Secretary  
Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600  
Australia  
[web.senate@aph.gov.au](mailto:web.senate@aph.gov.au)

Dear Secretary,

**Re: Commonwealth Funding and Administration of Mental Health Services**

We are writing to express our concern regarding the reduction in number of rebatable sessions for those with chronic or severe mental illness. There is a significant gap in mental health service provision for those in the community presenting with the most complex and severe psychopathology. Those presenting with only mild presentations are unlikely to be affected by the cuts to session numbers. Reducing from eighteen to ten is significant and is likely to have an adverse effect on a group that are often already marginalised and disadvantaged.

The treatment of the moderate to severe range is the unique specialised training of the Clinical Psychologist. Specialist clinical psychologists are trained in the full span of psychopathological disorders and conditions, etiologies, environments, degrees of severity, developmental levels, and the appropriate assessments, evidence based interventions, and treatments that are associated with these conditions. Understanding of ethical principles, of diversity and of cultural context are also integral components of the knowledge base of all aspects of Clinical Psychology. Clinical Psychologists have undertaken training in excess of the basic registration requirements. This additional training is specifically designed to target assessment, formulation and treatment of psychopathology, using evidenced based practice. This training makes clinical psychologists those best prepared to treat patients with chronic mental illness but the reduction in session numbers means this population group will be often be unable to complete treatment.

We respectfully request that the decision to cut session numbers for those in 'exceptional circumstances' be immediately reversed, to ensure this group are able to access adequate services. Should further restriction be necessary, perhaps it would be appropriate to allow additional sessions for treatment by clinical psychologist specialist providers only.

This would recognise the additional and specialist skills of this group in treating in treating chronic mental illness.

I trust this information is useful to the inquiry.

Yours sincerely,

Vanessa Hamilton  
Clinical Psychologist

Monika Castleman  
Clinical Psychologist