

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Australia

4th August 2011

Dear Committee:

RE: DREAM OR REALITY? ...BETTER ACCESS FOR GOOD MENTAL HEALTH
COMMONWEALTH FUNDING AND ADMINISTRATION OF MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

The Better Access Program is an incredibly valuable government initiative improving the quality of life for many, many Australians experiencing mental health issues. After years of struggle for people requiring effective psychological help who had very limited ability financially to access such support, it was a wonderful relief for them to be able to access therapy under Medicare. This provided them with hope, along with skills and treatment to cope with life.

The 12 to 18 individual sessions of psychological treatment helped those with moderate to severe mental illness to stagger their sessions over the year. Although further sessions would have been beneficial for many of my clients it provided the necessary safety net, support and treatment in order for them to survive (in most cases).

The ability to bulk-bill, which I do for all my clients who are under a Mental Health Treatment Plan, makes therapy readily available. Could I suggest consideration be given to making it a requirement that a percentage of clients, or those who are financially disadvantaged, be bulk-billed by all psychologists? This would mean that those who need the treatment the most are more likely to be able to access therapy.

I have great concern for my clients who have severe mental health problems who can't afford to pay for therapy, even at reduced rates, if there is a reduction from 18 to 10 individual sessions per calendar year. There will, I believe, also be many other costs to the community as a result (increased pressure on psychiatric hospitals, increased domestic violence, relationship breakdown, substance abuse, suicide, etc.).

I humbly request that serious consideration be given to the proposed changes which I believe will have a significantly detrimental effect on the lives of many Australians.

Thank you for all the work you do and your consideration to these important matters.

Yours sincerely,

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Member of the College of Counselling Psychologists

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PS (Deliberately a PS, as I believe it is NOT the important area of discussion)

As a clinical and counselling psychologist, I believe that the two tier system as it stands is not equitable. The quality of the service delivered is dependent not on the area of endorsement but the qualifications, experience and skill of the individual practitioner. This should be appropriately recompensed with a fairer multi-tiered system.

Endorsement in specialist areas makes common sense but the pathway for endorsement has been very difficult for many very experienced, capable psychologists.