

4th August 2011

RE: Commonwealth Funding and Administration of Mental Health Services

I am a psychology postgraduate student completing a PhD in Clinical Psychology at a Government University. My submission is to urge for the following:

- Retain the two tier Medicare system in which the specialisation of Clinical Psychology is to be clearly recognised.
- The annual number of rebated sessions to be retained or increased.

The Two Tier Rebate System:

To be called a Clinical Psychologist requires at least 2 years of extra specialised training. The extra knowledge, skills and training of clinical psychologist deserves to be recognised by the two-tier rebate system. To remove the two-tier system would be to the detriment of current postgraduate training courses.

The Number of Rebated Sessions to be Retained or Increased:

I am concerned about the proposal to reduce the number of sessions that are able to claimed through the Medicare rebate system. To reduce the number of sessions from an already restricted 12 sessions (with a maximum of 18) to a maximum of 10 sessions throughout the course of a year would not benefit those at need. Research has shown that for 50% of clients, improvement starts after 10 sessions and clinically significant changes are only observed for 50% after 14 sessions.

Approximately 70% of patients with moderate to severe symptoms only gain clinically significant results after 20+ sessions (Harnett, O'Donovan, & Lambert, 2010). Restricting the number of sessions accessible to a client, would not be of benefit in a significant number of cases. Psychologists should be given the flexibility and responsibility to determine how many sessions are needed for any client case. Just as we trust medical professionals to determine the appropriate amount and type of care given to a patient, we should trust psychologists to do the same. Thus I would argue that the current number of rebated sessions be retained to even increased as this would be of most benefit to patients in need of mental health services.

I hope the Senate Inquiry takes the above points into consideration before making the proposed changes to Mental Health in Australia.