

Submission to Senate Community Affairs Reference Committee Inquiry into Commonwealth Funding and Administration of Mental Health Services.

I am writing regarding the two-tiered Medicare system for payment of psychologists and the proposed cuts to rebated session numbers. I am a registered clinical psychologist with over 15 years experience in the public mental health system and more recently in the public service. I do not work as a private psychologist, and as such I have no pecuniary interest in the issue. I am currently a supervisor of both clinical psychology post-graduates and provisionally registered psychologists under the “4+2 internship program”, and as such, I feel qualified to comment about the quality and effectiveness of the two training models.

As it now stands, the two-tiered system reflects the vast difference in training, knowledge and specialisation between Clinical Psychologists and psychologists. Initial selection for training in Clinical Psychology at the postgraduate level is rigorous and highly competitive. Preparation for entry into the specialty begins at the postgraduate masters level and serves as a basis for advanced postgraduate training in Clinical Psychology that builds on its knowledge and application bases.

Clinical Psychology requires a minimum of eight years' training and is the only profession, apart from Psychiatry, whose entire accredited and integrated postgraduate training is specifically in the field of lifespan and advanced evidence-based and scientifically-informed psychopathology, assessment, diagnosis, case formulation, psychotherapy, psychopharmacology, clinical evaluation and research across the full range of severity and complexity.

The training of Clinical Psychologists differs in many ways from psychologists. During the minimum of eight years of training, the emphasis of Clinical Psychology is on severe mental health problems. Clinical Psychologists have extensive training in the theoretical and conceptual understanding of mental health problems, the correct diagnosis and clinical evaluation of these problems and on effective management and treatment. The four-year undergraduate degree of psychologists is geared towards general broad-based psychology subjects such as social psychology, organisational psychology and abnormal psychology. Clinical Psychology is the only profession, apart from Psychiatry, whose entire accredited and integrated postgraduate training is specifically in the field of lifespan and advanced evidence-based psychopathology, assessment, diagnosis, case formulation, psychotherapy, evaluation and research across the full range of severity and complexity.

The substantive areas of basic psychology in which Clinical Psychologists must have both theoretical and scientific knowledge include the biological, social, cognitive, and affective bases of behaviour and individual differences. In addition, Clinical Psychology has a special focus on the areas of personality and its development and course, and psychopathology and its prevention and remediation. This emphasis includes the full span of psychopathological disorders and conditions, aetiologies, environments, degrees of severity, developmental levels, and the appropriate assessments, interventions, and treatments that are associated with these conditions.

I therefore respectfully wish to recommend the retention of the two-tiered Medicare system for payment of psychologists and that the proposed cuts to rebated session numbers, at least for Clinical psychologists, not be made by the government.