

28 July 2011

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

I am a psychologist who works both in a community health centre in Melbourne's Western suburbs (ISIS Primary Care) and in private practice in Carlton in Melbourne. This letter does not represent ISIS in any way but is a personal, heart felt, entreaty.

I am very concerned about the proposed changes to the funding of the Mental Health Care Plan subsidy. To decrease funding from 18 sessions to 10 makes a huge difference in the support offered to clients. My particular concern is for some of my clients who are on health care cards and have serious mental illness (including someone with paranoid schizophrenia) and more moderate mental illness (including Generalized Anxiety Disorder, PTSD with depression and addictions). These clients are often very distressed and without frequent enough support their well being will deteriorate. Having benefitted from our therapy they will have to relinquish the sense of often fortnightly support which they have enjoyed for some time. Once a month or less is inadequate to attend to such distress on an ongoing basis. To leave such people without adequate support is unjust. The stakes here are very high for people who are often distressed and marginalised. I would hate to see a Labour Government take such steps in the name of mental health reform.

I would also like to say that our community health centre frequently struggles with waiting lists and referral to private psychologist practitioners in the area is often used to enable more responsive or targeted service. A maximum of ten sessions per year means that referral to private practitioners will often not be worthwhile. Effective or ongoing therapy for more complex conditions is no longer an option for those with little money seeking help in the private sector. The psychiatrists in our area can have huge numbers of patients and can often only provide extremely brief contact with reviews of medication. There is a powerful need for competent therapists to provide support, empowerment and healing.

Please reconsider the proposed changes in the interests of those that are both distressed and marginalised.

Yours sincerely

Dr Anne Woodward