

28th July 2011

Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

To the Senate Standing Committee,

Re: Government proposal to cut the 'Better Access to Mental Health Initiative' to 10 sessions and removal of the two tiered rebate system

As an Australian citizen, Senior Clinical Psychologist with the Continuing Care Team of Inner West Area Mental Health Service- Royal Melbourne Hospital, and Private Practitioner, I am writing to express my objection to the Government's proposed changes to the *Better Access to Mental Health Care Initiative* ('*Better Access Initiative*') as announced in the 2011 Federal Budget. Specifically, I am deeply concerned by the proposal that from 1 November, 2011, the yearly maximum allowance of sessions of psychological treatment available to people with a recognised mental health disorder will be reduced from 18 to 10 sessions.

Clinical Psychology is one of nine equal specialisations within Psychology. These areas of specialisation are internationally recognised, enshrined within Australian legislation, and are the basis for all industrial awards. They have been recognised since Western Australia commenced its Specialist Title Registration in 1965, and it is the West Australian model which formed the basis for the 2010 National Registration and Accreditation Scheme recognition of specialised Areas of Endorsement. All specialisations require a minimum of eight years training including a further ACPAC accredited postgraduate training in the specialisation leading to an advanced body of psychological competency in that field. No specialisation should be referred to in a manner that creates the appearance of the same level of skill and knowledge as the basic APAC accredited four year training of a generalist psychologist. As is the case with Clinical Psychology currently, each area of specialisation deserves a specialist rebate with its own item number relating to that which is the specialist domain of that area of psychology (e.g. for clinical neuropsychology - neuroanatomy, neuropsychological disorders/assessment/rehabilitation, etc; for health - clinical health psychology, and health promotion; forensic - forensic mental health, etc).

Regarding our specialisation, I wish to re-state that 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. We are well represented in high proportion amongst the innovators of evidence-based therapies, NH&MRC Panels, other mental health research bodies and within mental health clinical leadership positions.

It is abundantly clear that there the obvious significant gap in mental health service provision is for those in the community presenting within the range of the moderate to most complex and severe presentations. Those presenting with only mild presentations are unlikely to be affected by the cuts

to session numbers. The treatment of the moderate to severe range is the unique specialised training of the Clinical Psychologist and, to undertake a comprehensive treatment of these individuals, more than thirty sessions per annum are sometimes required. In this way, Clinical Psychologists should be treated as Psychiatrists are under Medicare as both independently diagnose and treat these client cohorts within the core business of their professional practices. However, this is unlikely to be granted presently given the government imperative to cut costs so I believe that the decision to cut session numbers for the specialist clinical psychologist Medicare items should be reversed immediately.

To the Senate Standing Committee, I urge you to reject these proposals immediately and instead maintain the current amount of treatment sessions available with a Clinical Psychologist under the *Better Access to Mental Health Care Initiative* to be 12, with an additional 6 sessions for 'exceptional circumstances'.

I trust that my concerns will be given due consideration.

Yours sincerely,

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