

4 August 2011

Dear Members of the Senate Community Affairs Committee,

I would like to outline my concerns for the Government's 2011-12 Budget changes relating to mental health, in particular the changes to the Better Access Initiative. My concerns relate to the reduction of sessions and the possible removal of the two-tiered Medicare rebate system for psychologists.

I have been in private practice for 3 years in West Ryde, Sydney and have been working for most of that time in a bulk billing practice. Many of the clients I have helped over this time have had life-long struggles with mental illness. They have never been able to afford to see a Clinical Psychologist before. These clients have responded so well to having some practical strategies and skills to deal with their depression, anxiety or other mental health issue.

Without Medicare-funded treatment, people from middle and lower socioeconomic groups will not be able to afford treatment. It is no surprise that there has been a huge uptake of the Medicare funded psychological treatments as we are playing catch up for those people who have gone a lifetime with no treatment. This spike in service use should therefore ease over time as people access treatment and their conditions improve. Cutting treatment short from 12 to 10 sessions is not going to help clients achieve better outcomes.

Clinical psychologists have specialised training and experience in the assessment and treatment of mental health disorders, across the spectrum of mild, moderate and severe presentations. They complete a period of training similar to that of psychiatrists, with a comprehensive focus on the assessment, diagnosis and treatment of mental health problems from a psychological perspective. I have serious concerns about budget changes that reduce patient access to treatment by clinical psychologists and reduce the overall quality of service provision, particularly for those patients with moderate to severe mental disorders and/or significant co-morbidity

Thank you for your consideration.

Yours sincerely,

Amanda Hall

Clinical Psychologist

BScPsych MPsychol (Clin) MAPS MAACBT