

Dear Senate Committee member,

I am a registered Clinical Psychologist and member of the APS. I have worked in Private Practice for 17 years, and in the field of Psychology for 34 years.

My name is: Ean James: (...)

I am surprised and dismayed at the Government's response to shortening the available medicare sessions for people with mental health challenges. I am also dismayed at the plan to not differentiate between highly specialised practitioners working with people, from practitioners who have between 2 to 4 years less training, when some of the 4 years of initial training was in non psychological subjects. When I graduated with a B.Applied Psych. I hardly felt I could call myself a "Psychologist". At the end of my Postgraduate training I felt completely different! There is no doubt that there are counsellors and 4 year trained Psychologists who are excellent in their own personal qualities and hunger for further relevant training. This argument is not about individual calibre. If that were the case then many Psychiatrists, and medical specialists should be individually discriminated against in medicare fee rebates and allowable sessions.

If these same planned changes were applied to physical health care then there would be a public outcry. The Government seems to be only mouthing an appreciation for the huge needs in mental health care. This whole move is based on an economic saving, and not based on philosophy of approach or on reliable evidence. Economics drives it, and all other arguments in support are contorted to seem plausible and to fit. This is a huge step backwards. The Government would not consider increasing the rebate to all Psychologists to the higher level! That says it all. Yet in the same field of Mental Health, Psychiatrists who might provide no therapy except to prescribe medications, can charge what they want and for as long as they want. This is not a vent at Psychiatrists who provide an essential service. But it is illustrating a profound contradiction.

It seems incredible to me that in 2011 on the back of all the advanced research illustrating the mind-body connection in development and health, that people in the Government are so uneducated as to miss the benefits and wellbeing of mental and emotional intervention, simply by being biased towards economic principles. The literature and the media provide ongoing figures of increasing mental health in the Community. It is absurd to measure that the depth and complexity of mental and emotional needs can be "cured" in 10 sessions. Ask politicians brave enough to answer whether they received effective help for depression, anxiety, trauma and burnout in 10 sessions. Psychiatrists see patients for years to simply prescribe dexamphetamine and ritalin. How much does that cost Medicare. Again I am not criticising specialists so much as underlying the anomalies.

We should be asking the Government to be braver and more committed to the mental health and wellbeing of the current and future community, rather than shaving back for no legitimate reason. Don't differentiate between professionals arbitrarily, or quantify session numbers at such an unrealistic level. That IS wasted money!

Ean James.