

To The Committee Secretary

Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs,

As an Australian citizen, I am writing to express my objection to the Government's proposed changes to the Better Access to Mental Health Care Initiative as announced in the recent Federal Budget.

Specifically, I am more than disappointed that from 1<sup>st</sup> November 2011, the maximum annual number of Medicare supported sessions for psychological treatment available to those with a recognised mental health disorder are proposed to be cut from 18 to 10 sessions, and for individuals with less complex issues the number of sessions is proposed to be cut by 50%.

Funding in mental health care as stated in the 2011 federal budget announcement was misleading, as funding was being redirected from existing mental health programs, such as the Better Access to Mental Health Care Initiative. This is hardly an acceptable decision, as it is to the expense of many individuals who cannot afford treatment as it is, and increases the burden for individuals, who like me, struggle with the current, recurring and ongoing costs for regular treatment. I must commit to years of physiological, psychiatric and pharmaceutical treatment for my illness.

I understand that the Government has proposed to redirect funding from the Better Access to Mental Health Care Initiative to team-based community care (ATAPS).

Personally, I do not want to be forced into treatment involving multiple disciplines (i.e., psychiatry registrar, social worker, occupational therapist, mental health nurse) in order to access psychological treatment. When I first started seeking treatment for a long existing mental condition, it felt unfair to have so many people involved, and I had little confidence that I could be helped. There were too many issues of developing trust, as one requires understanding, confidence and rapport.

How can this be achieved in sessions few and far between each year?

You must take into consideration the effect these changes of team based treatment will have to the unwell, as this initial step, acknowledging all your faults, suppressed memories, times of hardship etc, in 45 minute bursts, requires much psychological strength in itself. Far too much. A person with mental illnesses may not have resources to cope with team based treatment. Some, of course could cope, but I believe that many cannot.

Therefore, I am deeply concerned about the impact on treatment and progression if the funding for the 'Better Access Initiative' is effectively halved. How can you expect the mentally vulnerable to get better with half the amount of sessions? It's absurd to believe that there will suddenly be qualified individuals and programs that are twice as effective. I don't believe the recent proposals reflect the various and specific needs of my fellow Australians with mental health disorders.

It is unrealistic to expect individuals in a vulnerable psychological state to immediately establish a rapport with a mental health professional even within the current 12-18 sessions – let alone achieve treatment gains within 10 sessions. I do not need the added pressure or stigma of needing to recover quickly with the threat having to start again with new practitioners.

Another worry for me is the proposal being considered by the Senate Committee looking at this issue, to cut the rebates of clinical psychologists (who are those with specialist clinical training within the psychology profession) from \$120 to \$82. This will mean that I will be no longer able to be bulk billed by my clinical psychologist and I will no longer be able to afford sessions.

I wish for such these proposals to be rejected immediately and to insist upon the maintenance of the current number of treatment sessions available with a Clinical Psychologist under the Better Access to Mental Health Care Initiative (12 per annum), with an additional 6 sessions possible for 'exceptional circumstances'.

I also request that you ensure that the rebates currently available to me are not reduced at this time of economic strain.

I trust that my feedback will be given due consideration.

Yours sincerely,