

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

4th August 2011

Dear Sir/Madam,

RE: Better Health Initiative

I completed a Master of Applied Psychology from Murdoch University in 1988. Six years of training was followed by two years of supervision which I completed while working for the Department for Child Protection. I have been in private practice since 1992 in the Midland area and also in Northam (both in Western Australia).

The local mental health clinics have consistently been unable to meet the demands of the local community. In Midland it is commonly the case that all but the most serious cases are not provided with mental health services. The waiting lists are regularly over three months for children, adolescents and adults.

When I started in private practice in this area limited private services were available. With the advent of Medicare funding the number of practitioners has increased significantly. The current Better Access arrangements allow access of specialised services to many individuals in this community. Many clients who may not meet the specific criteria for treatment in mental health clinics are nonetheless highly dysfunctional. I often deal with a range of clinical problems including severe depression, severe anxiety, issues related to childhood sexual and physical abuse and post traumatic stress disorder. In many cases these problems cannot be dealt with in short term therapy and therefore it would be highly beneficial if the current support for twelve sessions could be maintained.

The other matter under consideration is the two tier system. It is generally acknowledged that further (postgraduate) training enhances clinical skills. In Western Australia this has been recognised since the 1980s in the different pay levels in the public service available to clinical psychologists and those who have not undertaken specialised training. To diminish Medicare funding for more highly trained practitioners will lead to clinical psychologists leaving the industry, less psychologists willing to make the sacrifice of two further years of training and a degrading of services over time.

Yours Sincerely,

BILL CHRISTMAN
CLINICAL PSYCHOLOGIST