

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

25 July 2011

Dear Committee Members

RE: COMMONWEALTH FUNDING OF MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

As a psychologist in regional Australia, I have over 20 years experience working with a diverse group of clients (including CALD), who with acute and chronic psychiatric disorder; not just high prevalence disorder. My clinical skills are of a very high standard. I have presented my work at conference level to peers, I am contracted by local health services to provide clinical supervision to staff and I have 'endorsement' from the PBA as a counselling psychologist.

I wish to draw the attention of the Committee to the discriminatory two-tiered funding of Medicare rebates for registered psychologists under the Better Access scheme. In effect, the tax payer is funding one group of registered psychologists (clinical) at a higher level *for the same work* that is being done by the majority of registered psychologists (generalist). If the public was aware of this arrangement, I suggest the situation would not be tolerated.

Post the 2011-2012 Federal Budget, the situation continues despite the results of a recent evaluation of the Better Access scheme, by Medicare Australia which found; there were *no differences* in outcomes for consumers who had received a service from either clinical or generalist psychologists.

My clients have to pay more for the service they receive from me, than they would if they received exactly the same service from a 'clinical' psychologist. The tax payer is not getting value for money especially in regional/rural areas where there are fewer 'clinical' psychologists.

I respectfully recommend the Committee address this inequity, which has been made on the basis of advice to the government from *one* stakeholder, The Australian Psychological Society. Other associations, with memberships of registered psychologists, were not consulted by government in the period preceding the rollout of the Better Access Scheme.

It is not too late to ensure equity and access for all Australians wishing to receive a mental health service. It is not too late to redress the two-tiered Medicare funding system.

Yours sincerely,

