

27 July 2011

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

Dear Committee Members,

Re: The two-tiered Medicare rebate system for psychologists

I work as a clinical psychologist in private practice, in addition to being a Lecturer in Clinical Psychology, where I teach doctoral level students in this field. The views expressed in this submission are my own and not necessarily those of any affiliated institution in which I work. I would like to express my unqualified support for maintaining the two-tiered Medicare rebate system for psychologists based on the following reasons.

First, the profession of Clinical Psychology is a recognised distinct specialist branch of the general practice of psychology. This is the case in most developed countries, including the United Kingdom, Canada, and The United States. In the UK, for example, the National Health Service makes a clear differentiation between basic psychological activities and specialist complex psychological intervention, the latter of which require the extensive training that only Clinical Psychologists receive. The Australian Psychological Society, the peak body promoting the practice of psychology in Australia with over 20,000 members, in addition to the Psychology Board of Australia, also recognise and govern the specialist field of Clinical Psychology. As you will no doubt read in other submissions, apart from Psychiatry, Clinical Psychologists are the only professionals whose entire accredited and integrated postgraduate training is specifically in the field of lifespan and advanced evidence-based and scientifically-informed psychopathology, assessment, diagnosis, case formulation, psychotherapy, psychopharmacology, clinical evaluation and research across the full range of severity and complexity.

Second, the education, training and professional development requirements for Clinical Psychologists are considerably more demanding compared from those required to practice general psychology. Clinical Psychologists are required to complete a minimum four-year honours degree in psychology, a further two-year masters program specific to Clinical Psychology, in addition to a further two years of supervised practice. Most Australian universities have now converted their masters programs to three to four year postgraduate doctoral training programs in Clinical Psychology, which is consistent with standards in the UK, USA and Canada. Following completion of a Doctorate in Clinical Psychology, candidates in Australia are required to undertake a further 12 months of supervised practice before being able to practice as Clinical Psychologists. Thus, it is becoming standard for Clinical Psychologists in Australia to be trained for a minimum of eight to nine years. By contrast, a Generalist Psychologist in Australia is able to be registered following 4 years of undergraduate training, and an additional two years of supervised practice. It is notable that Australia is one of the few developed countries where such a nominal level of education and training still allow one to use the title 'Psychologist'. Moreover, Clinical Psychologists are required to undertake 16 hours more of professional development annually than generalist psychologists.

The specialist nature of clinical psychology in addition to the significantly greater education and ongoing training required are of the utmost importance in terms of reducing ineffective and harmful practices and providing the optimal treatment for individuals with mental illness. This is recognised internationally, by reputable professional bodies, and currently by the Australian Government by implementing the two-tiered Medicare rebate system for psychologists.

Sincerely

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