

1st August 2011

The Hon Mark Butler MP
PO Box 2038
Port Adelaide SA 5015

Re: Government proposal to limit 'Better Access' to 10 sessions.

Dear Minister,

I am writing this letter to express my objection about the Government's proposal to cap the number of sessions available to people with a recognised mental health disorder at a maximum of 10 sessions. New investments in the area of mental health care are important, however, this should not be to the detriment of our existing programs in mental health care that have been shown to work effectively. The new proposals for the *Better Access to Mental Health Care* initiative revealed in the budget are not good enough, they put peoples health at risk and need to be revised as soon as possible.

As a person who relies on Centrelink benefits I depend on the Better Access initiative to be able to afford ongoing treatment from a psychologist. Even this has been difficult for me to approach as I have often felt too unworthy for treatment due to the massive stigma still prevalent amongst the general public. I have medication reviews approximately every 6 months through a psychiatrist at a NSW Mental Health Centre in my area and then this is further monitored through my GP. My psychologist is essential in helping me manage my bipolar and is vital to keeping me stable and out of mental health units. Through my psychologist I have been educated more as to how my brain works re having bipolar 1. I am also better equipped to know the warning signs that I am becoming 'sick'. I see these sessions as effective treatment not only for my current mental health issues, but to be able to recover from childhood sexual assault and the result that has had on my mental health. These are not things that can easily be 'solved' in 10 sessions and I feel that the government is mocking me and others who use this service as not having valid medical concerns.

Previously, as a consumer of mental health care services I could receive a maximum of 18 sessions, so the proposal that the same treatment can be achieve with half the amount of sessions is not just unrealistic but completely insulting to me as if my medical concerns have no real value. These new proposals released in the budget ignore not only evidence from psychological research but also the needs of people like myself with mental health disorders.

Consumers like myself do not need the added pressure and stigma associated with needing to recover quickly at risk of being referred on and having to start again with a new practitioner. The new proposals create obstacles for people with a mental health disorder, obstructing them from receiving timely care.

Minister, I urge you to reconsider these proposals immediately, leaving the length of treatment for the *Better Access* initiative at 12 sessions, with an additional 6 for exceptional circumstances. Other medical conditions that require ongoing treatment are not handled in this way so why is this happening in mental health?