

27th July 2011.

Dear Members of the Senate Community Affairs Committee,

Re: The Government's funding and administration of the 2011-12 Budget changes relating to mental health and changes to the Better Access Initiative

I would like to outline my concerns for the Government's 2011-12 proposed changes to the Better Access Initiative. My concerns relate to the reduction of sessions and the possible removal of the two-tiered Medicare rebate system for psychologists.

I completed my training as a clinical psychologist in 1997. I have been in private practice for the last 3 years in Melbourne and see a good proportion of postnatal mental health difficulties referred because criteria is met for an Axis 1 diagnosis under the DSM IV. I see 11 clients a week and am currently booked until September.

I would treat the majority of my clients within 10 sessions. I utilise evidence based short term psychological therapies including Cognitive Behavioural Treatment. However, a small proportion of my clients require further sessions. These clients mostly meet criteria for a moderate to severe mental health illness such as Major Depressive Disorder and usually have a complex background and risks that affect the entire family's well-being including mother, baby, other children and the father. Due to my clinical training, I complete a psychological assessment and undertake psychometric testing to demonstrate clinical improvement. I am able to communicate these changes to the referring doctor over the course of therapy via my clinical review and based on the therapeutic goals the client and i set in the second session.

I have been often told by my clients they would not be able to attend the sessions they need or therapy at all if it weren't for the rebate. Given my specialist clinical skills and 15 years of experience, the two tier system is critical to run my practice and be able to see clients from a range of socio-demographic backgrounds that would be otherwise unable to afford my service. My fee incidentally is substantially less than that recommended by the Australian Psychological Society.

Access to treatment is unlikely to be advocated by my clients themselves in particular their children and it is those families in mind that I write this letter. I would strongly recommend you consider maintaining the current status of the Better Access Initiative and the 2 tiered rebate structure system given the evident benefits it provides to patients.

Thank you for your consideration.

Yours sincerely,

Lucy O'Neill

Clinical Psychologist

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