



19 July, 2011

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

Dear Committee Members,

Re: Senate Community Affairs Reference Committee proposal to abolish the two-tiered Medicare rebate system for psychologists.

I am writing this letter to express my objection about the Committee's proposal to change the two tiered Medicare rebate system for psychologists. I currently access specialist mental health care under the Better Access to Mental Health Care initiative with a clinical psychologist specialising in mental health disorders at a private psychology practice in the Melton area (Northwest Psychological Services).

I have accessed the services of Kylie Clarke for nearly 3 years after the death of my husband 10 years prior. My son now accesses the service as well due to matters relating to his dad's death. If it was not for Kylie and her staff I can tell you I would not be here now, she has been there for me whenever I have needed her. I have been able to access the practice through the healthcare system. If I had to pay even a \$50.00 charge I would not have been able to afford it, I was a single parent with two children and very limited resources.

At the practice the clinical psychologists provide Bulk Billed consultations to all consumers. As Melton is a low socio-economic area with a growing population and a high level of mental health disorders, the service is incredibly important to the community. In this area it is very difficult to access public mental health services. The discontinuation of the two-tiered Medicare rebate for psychologists would mean that bulk billing would no longer be an option at the practice I attend. I cannot afford to pay a gap fee due to the high cost of living, so I would be forced to cease the specialist clinical psychology treatment I require.

In comparison to other psychologists, clinical psychologists have specialist training in the area of complex mental health issues. When providing service they draw upon many psychological therapies to provide strategies to assist me with my mental health issues. The clinical psychologist I see has worked extensively in the public mental health sector and demonstrates a more in depth knowledge of the details of my mental health issues.

Clinical psychologists are able to provide comprehensive clinical assessments and diagnoses

with a strong evidence base for their formulations. They often have good knowledge of medications and they really work to reveal the complex underlying processes of mental health issues. Their specialist knowledge is vast and I feel that the quality of my care would be compromised if I were unable to receive the current level of specialist intervention for my mental health issues.

Eliminating the two-tiered rebate system counteracts the decision-making of mental health consumers, with many people requiring specialist clinical psychology treatment. The proposal ignores the needs of people with more complex mental health disorders and fails to consider important outcome evidence from psychological research. The new proposals to eliminate the two-tiered Medicare rebate for psychologists are not good enough and need to be revised as soon as possible.

The new proposal creates additional barriers for people with complex mental health issues, preventing them from receiving the specialist intervention they require and further cementing the stigma of living with a mental health disorder.

If mental health consumers are prevented from accessing a quality and necessary service; this is not the answer. Consumers are experiencing a vulnerable psychological state when facing a serious mental health issue and they need to feel that they can invest trust in a psychologist who not only has specialist training and skills, but who also draws their interventions from a wide range of experience in the field of mental health. Consumers facing the perils of the rising cost of living in a low socio-economic community greatly value their right to access specialist mental health care under a bulk billing arrangement.

I urge the Senate committee to reconsider the proposal to discontinue the two-tiered Medicare rebate for psychologists immediately. This would enable all consumers to access the specialist mental health service they require with an appropriately qualified specialist clinical psychologist. I also urge the Senate committee to consider the importance of continued access to Bulk Billed services in disadvantaged communities such as Melton, Victoria where there are very limited options for people with mental health issues due to the growing population.

Sincerely,