

Submission to the Commonwealth Funding and Administration of Mental Health Services

Senate Inquiry: Community Affairs References Committee

I strongly recommend maintaining the two-tier system of payment for Clinical Psychologists. Clinical Psychology is one of nine specialised areas within Psychology, and it is an integration of science, theory and clinical knowledge designed to understand, prevent, and relieve psychologically-based distress or dysfunction and promote well-being and personal development.

Clinical Psychology is an internationally recognised specialty of psychology in its body of knowledge and practice. In 1965 Western Australia recognized Clinical Psychologists and Clinical Neuropsychologists as specialists, and this state's model formed the basis for the 2010 National Registration and Accreditation Scheme. A Clinical Psychologist is a specialisation that requires six years of full-time university study and training. Clinical Psychologists specialise in assessment, diagnosis, evidence-based treatment, and treatment outcome evaluation of mental health disorders across the lifespan at all levels of complexity and severity. Along with Psychiatry, Clinical Psychology is the only specialist training in which the entire post-graduate program is in the area of mental health. This is to ensure that Clinical Psychologists have experience and knowledge in the specialist area of diagnosis, treatment and prevention of all Mental Health Disorders, identified in DSM-IV (Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, American Psychiatric Association). Treatment interventions are drawn specifically from the scientist-practitioner model, ensuring evidence based strategies are applied. Clinical Psychologists, via an ongoing and rigorous Continuing Professional Development (CPD) process, are required to ensure up to date professional development to support ongoing knowledge and competence in this specialist area.

Clinical Psychologists are considered the “therapeutic experts” of Mental Health. Whilst Psychiatrists are trained to prescribe medication for mood disorders, Clinical Psychologists are specifically trained to diagnose psychopathology, provide psychological assessment, testing, case-formulation and evidenced based psychotherapy interventions and to assess when to refer to a Medical Practitioner for assessment and psychopharmacological intervention.

Clinical Psychologists' two year postgraduate training is rigorous! It ensures the highest levels of expertise and competence both in theory and best practice. Entry into the training requires a high level Honours degree, and it is extremely competitive. In addition, most universities require an interview process before entry into the program. Of great concern is the understanding that the fourth year graduate and other specialisations in Psychology lack appropriate training and skill in assessing and treating mental illness as specified in the better access scheme. After graduating as a fourth year honours student (Psychologist as opposed to Clinical Psychologist), my colleagues and I are acutely aware that we had absolutely no clinical skills whatsoever. To this end, any private or public health service treating mental health issues would generally consider us inadequately trained, hence ultimately unemployable. Those who undergo intensive 2 year post graduate clinical training,

graduating with a Masters in Clinical Psychology (Clinical Psychologist), having invested much time and expense doing so, enter the field of mental health as leaders and experts in the mental health profession. With respect to the discrepancy between a Clinical Psychologist and a Psychologist who lacks comprehensive training in providing specialised interventions under the Better Access initiative, it is astonishing and concerning that the two-tier system of payment for Clinical Psychologists is being questioned! If anything, with our level of expertise in evidence based best practice, it would be appropriate and recommended that clients are able to receive a higher rebate than that currently being offered.

Kind regards

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