

**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 specialized areas within Psychology. Clinical psychology is an integration of science, theory and clinical knowledge for the purpose of understanding, preventing, and relieving psychologically-based distress or dysfunction and to promote subjective well-being and personal development.

Clinical psychology is an internationally recognized 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 specialization that requires six years of full-time university study and training. Clinical psychologists specialize in the 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 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 dispense 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. 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 specializations in psychology lack appropriate training and skill in assessing and treating mental illness as specified in the better access scheme. Reflections from my own personal experience, which are shared by my colleagues, from when we all graduated as fourth year honours students, we now recognize that we had absolutely no clinical skills whatsoever, such that any private or public health setting addressing mental health issues would generally not consider us for internship or employment. Those who underwent the intensive 2 year post graduate clinical training and graduated with Masters in Clinical Psychology, having invested much time and expense doing so, entered the field of mental health as leaders and experts in the mental health profession. In view of the discrepancy between a clinical psychologist and a psychologist who lacks comprehensive training in providing specialized interventions under the Better Access initiative, it is astonishing and concerning that the two-tier system of payment for clinical psychologists is being questioned!

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