

To whom it may concern,

Thank you for considering this submission to the Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Inquiry.

I am a registered and endorsed Health Psychologist. My expertise is in helping clients living with chronic health conditions to better self-manage their physical and mental health. A significant proportion of my clients are on low incomes, including disability or other Centrelink payments, due to their chronic health conditions. These clients are those most in need of mental health services, yet are also the least able to afford such services.

The current Medicare rebate of \$87.45 per 50 minute session does not allow me to bulk bill. Doing so would make the cost of running a practice unsustainable. The Medicare rebate must be raised to \$150 per 50 minute session in order to allow more mental health practitioners to bulk bill and to improve access to mental health services for more Australians.

Further, the current two-tier Medicare rebate system has created a false narrative that clinically endorsed psychologists are somehow "superior" to all other psychologists. There is no evidence to suggest this is the case. We all receive the same base-level of training. We must all meet the same professional competencies. We must all complete the same level of professional development each year. The current two-tier Medicare system has split the psychology profession in two.

The two-tier system is translating into an increasingly uniform psychology workforce. While there were once many university programs across all states of Australia offering training across the range of psychology specialities – including health, counselling, forensic, community, education and developmental, and sport and exercise psychology – the majority of programs are now clinical psychology only. Thus, the psychology workforce in Australia is rapidly losing the necessary diversity to adequately service the wide range of psychology-related issues among the Australian community.

The two-tier Medicare system is also severely limiting job opportunities for non-clinically endorsed psychologists. I have been specifically trained in health psychology, and yet in most cases, I am unable to apply for hospital-based health psychology jobs as these are only available to clinically endorsed psychologists. I fail to see how my specialist health training disqualifies me from working in the Australian health system.

Further, my training has been of the exact same duration (8 years) and intensity as a clinically endorsed psychologist and yet my clients are not eligible for the higher Medicare rebate. I have skills and experience that many clinically endorsed psychologists do not and yet my clients are not able to benefit from these skills and experience with the same level of Medicare support as a client of a clinically endorsed psychologist.

The two-tier Medicare system must be replaced by a single tier system that applies to all psychologists.

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