

**To: The Community Affairs Reference Committee inquiry into Commonwealth
Funding and Administration of Mental Health Services.**

Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs,
PO Box 6100,
Parliament House,
CANBERRA,
ACT 2600



Submission from Professor Susan J Paxton, School of Psychological Science, La
Trobe University, Melbourne

I am writing particularly to address a number of mental health workforce issues.

Workforce Qualifications and Training of Psychologists

Although it would be convenient to produce highly skilled professional psychologists in a brief space of time, this is not a realistic goal. Professional psychology, including clinical psychology, clinical neuropsychology and health psychology, build on knowledge about normal human behaviour, cognition, development, social interaction and biology. Without a firm understanding of these areas and the scientific basis of psychology, it is very difficult indeed to gain a thorough understanding of the psychopathology addressed in professional training programs or to gain the skills for effective intervention with clients. Consequently, a teaching model in which a firm foundation for understanding the wide range of psychological concepts in an undergraduate and honours degree, followed by postgraduate training in professional areas is a highly practical, effective and efficient approach.

Workforce Shortages

The expenses associated with providing meaningful professional training have seldom been recognised by governments. Whilst increasing Commonwealth Supported Places for students undergoing professional training helps students, it does not assist the Academic Unit to provide the training and consequently has very little genuine impact on workforce shortages. When Academic Units can fully cover costs for professional training without cross-subsidisation from income derived from undergraduate programs, they will be able to make much stronger arguments to their Universities for extending students places in postgraduate professional programs and will be more motivated to do so themselves.

Yours sincerely,