

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs
P O Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra, ACT 2600, Australia

RE: MENTAL HEALTH *BETTER ACCESS* by Counselling Psychologists

Dear Committee,

Thank you for your inquiry into proposed changes to the number of mental health Medicare Benefit hours allowed for the well-being of Australians under BETTER ACCESS:

Reducing the maximum number of hours from 18 to 10 can potentiate suicidal behaviours; family breakdowns, hospitalizations, increased medication dependence, and loss of work time, or even loss of jobs.

The possibility of 12 + 6 has made a critical difference to most of my clients/patients who are not wealthy people. If you support the reduced number of hours for experienced, highly trained private practice Counselling psychologists, we will have mental health for the wealthy - not for all Australians.

A brief of my professional background:

I have been a registered psychologist since the 1970s under NSW and now under AHPRA. I started in what is now Macquarie Psychiatric Hospital, was then team leader at Chatswood Mental Health. I went overseas to learn new methods and teach at University.

I have a strong interest in trauma so when I returned I worked for the Vietnam Vets Counselling Service, became a provider for the DVA, and taught at university while developing a nonverbal communication tool. Since my children were grown, I also began a private practice.

Furthermore, the Medicare scheme should not discriminate and should pay Counselling and Clinical Psychologists at the same rate. In the 1990s, I could have joined either the APS Counselling College or the Clinical College or both. Like many other Counselling Psychologists, I have equal abilities as do Clinicals. In fact, I have many years of experience that has taught me what new clinical graduates cannot learn in a class room yet I am paid less. Also, I have chosen to learn diverse, evidence-based methods that are not necessarily available in the current clinical courses.

Thank you for reading this and considering my thoughts on the fair go for Australians in need of private practice mental health services and a fair go for all registered psychologists:

Respectfully submitted,
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Beth A Stone

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