

Submission to the Senate Community Affairs Committee

Commonwealth Funding and Administration of Mental Health Services

Item (h). The impact of online services for people with a mental illness, with particular regard to those living in rural and remote locations and other hard to reach groups.

The recent introduction of new Medicare items allowing a range of existing consultation items to be provided via video conferencing is a very welcome initiative to people suffering health problems in rural areas.

However as the new initiative currently stands the Telehealth MBS items are only available for consultations provided by specialists, consultant physicians and consultant psychiatrists.

Since the introduction of the Better Access Initiative there has been considerable uptake of treatment sessions provided by psychologists and allied health professionals. The availability of these MBS items have been of particular value in rural areas both to the general population requiring mental health treatment and to local general practitioners seeking psychological and allied health assistance for their patients.

Publicly funded mental health services recognise the need for external providers to provide additional mental health support to the high incidence of the population affected by less complex but high prevalence mental health disorders.

An extension of the Telehealth initiative to include treatment services provided by psychologists and allied health professionals under the Better Access Initiative would be an important further development in improving access to both assessment and comprehensive treatment services for mental health disorders.