

8 September 2011

Dear Senator

Re: Terms of reference: the two-tiered Medicare rebate system for psychologists

I work as a psychologist in private practice and I would like to express my unqualified support for the two-tiered Medicare to be retained based on the following reasons.

The profession of clinical psychology is a distinct specialist branch of the general practice of psychology. Other than Psychiatry, Clinical Psychology is the only other mental health profession whose complete post-graduate training is in the area of mental health. Clinical Psychologists are the only mental health profession that has the depth of psychometric and empirical training, and consequently, the responsibility to reliably and validly apply and interpret tests essential to effective and ethical mental health practice. Clinical Psychologists as a result of their training have the specialist expertise to evaluate and determine whether these new assessment tools may be correctly and ethically applied to mental health problems and whether one can trust the outcome of studies using these instruments.

Clinical Psychologists are trained as scientist-practitioners. This added emphasis on the scientific in university training enables the profession of Clinical Psychologist to bring research and empiricism to human service delivery and thus increase accountability. Empirical training equips the Clinical Psychologist with the skills to understand and contribute to new research, evaluate interventions and apply these empirical skills to their own treatment of patients and that of the mental health services themselves. This formal training also carries with it the obligation to provide to the betterment of the wider society within which the Clinical Psychologist works.

The distinctiveness of clinical psychology from other branches of psychology is recognised internationally in most developed countries, for examples, the British Psychological Society, American Psychological Association, and Australian Psychological Society.

Education, training and professional development requirements for clinical psychologists are more demanding compared from those required to practice general psychology. Clinical Psychologists requires a 4-year honours degree in psychology, a further two year masters program specific to clinical psychology, in addition to a further two years of supervised practice following postgraduate training. Most Australian universities now are converting their masters programs to 3-4 year postgraduate doctoral training programs in clinical psychology, which is more in line with the level of training in the UK, USA and Canada. Following completion of a doctoral program, clinical psychology graduates are required to obtain an additional 12 months of professional supervision. Thus, Clinical Psychologists are increasingly being trained for a minimum of eight to nine years in this profession. By contrast, a generalist psychologist in Australia is able to be registered following 4 years of undergraduate training, and an additional two years of supervised practice. In addition,

clinical psychologists are required to undergo an additional 16 hours of professional development activities per year than generally registered psychologists. Maintaining a high level of education and practice by is ultimately better in terms of protecting the public and producing better outcomes for individuals with mental illness.

In summary, the distinctive specialist nature of clinical psychology, which is recognized internationally, in addition to the significantly greater education and ongoing training required, are strong reasons to maintain a two-tiered Medicare rebate system for generalist psychologists and Clinical Psychologists. To presuppose that a 4+2 has the same level of service is incorrect. Our training includes ethics, more advanced psychological testing, rehabilitation, diagnostic procedures and intervention skills.

Pease consider the impact of this proposal not only to individual professionals, but students, the profession in general, and most of all, the wellbeing of the public, who are often not aware of the various levels of training and expertise in Psychology.

Sincerely

Marcus Squirrell