

Submission

Commonwealth Funding and Administration of Mental Health Services

July 2011

I would like to comment on the impact of changes to the Medicare rebates concerning visits to a psychologist.

I do not support the legislation as proposed by the government. The new changes proposed seemingly discriminate against people on low incomes.

In September 2009, I had a break down. It happened in a Centrelink office, and a staff member offered me a box of tissues. I felt like I was a broken man who was on full display in front of dozens of people. It was the lowest pint of my life to date. My partner suggested we leave and seek medical attention. We did that.

The sheer magnitude of grief I was feeling completely overwhelmed me. I felt like a failure because I could no longer support myself financially. I had always been self-employed, my life circumstances changed, and I did not handle it well. I did not know how to. I was not mentally equipped for the change.

Since September 2009, I have experienced two relapses and had 27 sessions of Cognitive Behaviour Therapy (CBT). I am currently experiencing my second relapse as I write this submission. My general practitioner has prescribed for me an anti-depressant for the second time, and I am again undertaking more CBT with my psychologist.

I am calling on all my skills, experience and strength to write these words, which I would hope can make an impact. As a depression and anxiety sufferer, it is not easy for me writing these words due to the emotions I feel. However, I feel a need to relate my story because my anxiety levels have risen due to learning of the changes proposed.

I do not know what the future holds for me concerning my mental health. It is just a simple case of taking one day at a time. I am still learning about my condition and do the best I can each day. My future probably requires ongoing therapy and medication, and if so, I need affordable treatment to help me live a reasonable life. I want to be a valuable contributor to the community in the workforce and as a volunteer.

I am concerned about the cutbacks regarding rebates, because based on the therapy I have had to date, I would be worse off to the amount of \$1680.00. For someone like me who is currently receiving a government payment due to being eligible, that is a lot of money.

I do fear for my future concerning affordable treatment. I am 44 years of age and my savings are falling. I am trying my utmost to keep my head above water.

I have developed an excellent rapport with my general practitioner and psychologist. They are compassionate towards me and that means a great deal to me. They listen to me and help me. I would not want to go without therapy due to not being able to pay for it. I do not know how I would handle it.

It saddens me to think that people such as me who are currently experiencing a major depressive illness have to ponder writing submissions to a Senate committee to make a point. What is our country coming to? People suffering mental illness are real people, not a number.