

Tuesday 2 August 2011

Committee Secretary
State Standing Committees on Community Affairs
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Colleagues

Thank you for making availability to provide information to the inquiry for commonwealth funding and administration of mental health services.

Since January 2008 with the commencement of our not for profit community based practice on the north of Brisbane we have had the opportunity to improve the lives of around 250 clients each calendar year. Around 90% of our patients receive focused psychological support from generalist psychologists and social workers with their treatment bulk billed through the Medicare system. Typically our clinic bulk bills all children and young people as well as those financially stretched. In the current economic climate our bulk billing services provides support for individuals and families in various situations, not just those who qualify for a health care card.

With reference to the inquiry and report please note the following two considerations:

1. Reducing the field of available psychologists who can access Medicare rebates further reduces the availability of psychologists who might be willing to provide low cost support to families in need. As the situation currently stands the availability of Medicare Bulk Billing psychologists are few and far between, particularly throughout South East Queensland, and in the current economic climate any relief in health costing should be encouraged.

It is without a doubt that the removal of Medicare rebates for generalist psychologists who are outside of the clinical category would close our clinic and cease current plans to extend services to other sites which currently includes rural opportunities at Toowoomba and Chinchilla along with the Sunshine Coast.

2. With reference to the number of available psychological consultations each patient has available my comments are drawn from a practice that not only provides treatment to patients with mild or moderate mental illnesses but also those with chronic mental health conditions, possibly as a result of our Medicare bulk billing policies.

The current provision of psychological therapy beyond 12 consultations in exceptional circumstances has not been a consideration that psychologists at our clinic are encouraged to use for the majority of their clients. An estimation of fewer than 5% of our clients would access 18 psychological consultations in a calendar year. However, most of our clients benefit from more than 10 psychological consultations in a calendar

year. In our clinic's experience any fewer than 12 psychological consultations per year would not provide our patients with an appropriate level of mental health care.

In summary any changes in the availability of Medicare rebates for social workers or generalist psychologists outside of the clinical category along with any reduction of Medicare rebateable allied health services fewer than 12 consultations per calendar year is likely to be of significant detriment to lower cost bulk billing services like ours.

Kind regards

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