

SAMPLE PETITIONERS' "VOICES" REGARDING BETTER ACCESS CUTS

A sample of petitioners' comments is included here as an Appendix to the senate submission into Commonwealth funding for mental health services.

The petition, introduced by Ben Mullings on May 20, 2011, states:

"We call on the Federal Minister for Mental Health to re-instate a fair policy for mental health care, namely 12-18 sessions with a psychologist, social worker, occupational therapist, or GP specialising in mental health care in the 'Better Access to Mental Health Care' initiative."

Petitioners' comments, in a reader-friendly format follows:

Unless you live with someone who requires this kind of help you won't appreciate the life changing results. Please don't take this away from families who would not be able to afford this care otherwise.

I can not understand the rationale for this given the fanfare by the Government in the recent budget promoting their initiatives to increase support for mental health services.

- 1) Psychology services (even way beyond the 20 session mark) are extremely cost effective in the long run, saving sick days, increase productivity, reduce doctor visits.
- 2) Have a look at the allowances for evidence based psychological services in Germany: up to 80 sessions for CBT. 45 sessions are considered standard long term therapy

If my access to treatment had been restricted to 10 sessions, I would not be alive today.

From my experience trying to see a pschycologist can be a harrowing experience let alone limits put on seeing them

18 sessions of Medicate Better Access Initiative over several years has changed my mental health illness into not only a mentally well person but I now work in the mental health field in an NGO and I am studying for a psychology degree.

At a time when stress-related mental disorders are at epidemic proportions, costing the economy tens of billions of dollars, it makes no sense to gut the one program designed to ensure that all Australians have access to psychological health care services. By contrast, there is no limit on psychiatric services, which are primarily drug-based and very often not as effective in the long term as therapies delivered by trained psychologists.

We have 3 friends who have lost sons aged around 19 to 20 and one recently aged 42. These people are slipping through the system and we must have available the resources to assist them at all times

I accessed the service of a psychologist through the scheme three years ago when I was going through an incredibly difficult time. The sessions assisted me to get through this period, and to become strong again. It is such an important service and recognizes the prevalence of mental health issues within our society and the importance of being able to receive assistance. Reducing session numbers trivializes the importance of dealing with these issues and indicates that the government is not serious

I am a psychiatric nurse and at the hospital where I work, we see more than 75% of people with mental illnesses that would benefit more from 'talk therapies' than medication alone. It is vital for the mental health of our Australians to assist them with more funding to see psychologists. It is stressful enough that they have depression, anxiety or eating disorders but to then have to find money to get quality help is making the stress burden ten times worse...

This is a ridiculous change to what was an amazing benefit for those that can't afford to get help. I bet you wouldn't change this if your sister, brother, daughter or son had a mental disorder and couldn't afford the help without this.

As a sufferer of long-term depression, I am shocked that the number of medicare visits to my psychologist have been slashed. This action is I believe irresponsible and lacks foresight. Dropping the number of visits makes bad economic sense - how many patients will not seek treatment and therefore end up on some sort of welfare payment because their 'normal' functionality is impaired through lack/reduction of health care entitlements? Please keep the system as it is now - 12 plus 6

visits.

The Hon Mark Butler MP - listen up. Too many people had little or no access to assistance for mental health in the past. There were too many cracks to slip through for mental health patients and those suffering from psychological problems. Reinstate what was working.

I know someone who who has benefited from going to his local psychologist and has been able to, as a result, start work for the first time in years. For this guy his GP was simply able to refer him to a psychologist near by and he took it up. He stuck it out even though had to pay full price for a couple of sessions after the 12 ran out. But he said it was worth it because he was back working so could afford to. In my opinion The government cannot afford this cut to funding.

This is such an important campaign. One of the key problems in programs that aim to help disadvantaged people in our society today is the lack of continuity of care. In addition, this program assists those who often are not eligible for other forms of mental health assistance because their symptoms are not deemed "severe" enough. Without this type of support these people could become less functional/unemployed members of our society. Then they will be even harder to lift up again!

This is ridiculous. Now, instead of getting reasonable value for money by providing a number of sessions that has been shown to be effective, the government is proposing to save half the money and *waste* the rest because much of the treatment given will be insufficient

I have Complex PTSD, which includes DID. I have children who depend on me and excellent career prospects for when I am sufficiently in recovery. I use the Current model of Better Access and use the full 18 possible sessions with my excellent Psychologist. Occasionally my Psychologist also bulk bills me for phone consults when I am particularly dissociated. We are in severe financial distress and can't afford to pay for my counselling. This "initiative" is a massive slap in the face to us!

It is very evident that mental health disorders is one of the biggest issues in Australian Health today, and is additionally the fastest growing. Government support should reflect this, and should definitely not take steps backwards.

would you take 1/2 a doctors prescription, or have half your teeth fixed. Let psychologist Dont' throw patients seeing psychologists out half fixed

much of the additional cost to budget can be offset by abolishing the top tier Medicare payment for clinical psychologists given that research has shown no practical difference in treatment outcomes across different psychology specialisations.

Please do not degrade mental health initiatives. Mental health problems continue to grow in Australia and to reduce the number of psychologist visits with a GP referral is a retrograde step.

Changing the amount of sessions available for people with mental health issues will significantly effect psychologists ability to properly treat the disorder. Often clients come with a life time of suffering depression and anxiety. How do you treat this in 10 sessions? Don't people deserve proper clinical treatment? This system has significantly reduced the amount of people who suffer in silence. The Initiative has reduced mental illness and given the community better access services.

As a 23 year old I would like to remind you that depression and suicide are one of the leading (2nd) causes of morbidity and mortality amongst Australian youth (18-25 years old). The proposed restrictions will be responsible for condemning some of the most vulnerable in our society to receiving sub-standard healthcare.

This service saved my life. It needs to be expanded, not reduced.

I'm an experienced Enrolled Nurse, and I find it appalling and downright offensive that we (mental health 'consumers') are restricted in our access to services. Someone with a heart condition does not have restrictions on how often they see a specialist, why should we?!

The planned changes are a travesty. The planned re-direction of some of the funds into headspace, whilst a worthy initiative in itself, beggars belief. This decision will put us back to where we were prior to when the allied health initiatives were introduced. This is too high a price, paid in lives, for the sake of a balanced budget.

Why has a program that was so effective in helping so many of the people in our society who are suffering from mental health problems been downgraded? I urge the government to reinstate the above criteria of the Better Access to Mental Health Care Initiative.

At the parent of a child with Aspergers this concerns me greatly. There are many people that are in desperate need of ongoing mental health care who will slip through the cracks and not be able to afford or understand the new system. It is way too confusing. The idea of having to start again with a

new psychologist is also ridiculous, and defeats all the progress made in the first place. In areas of mental health trust and an ongoing relationship is very important.

I have received treatment through the better access program and after 14 visits to psychologist I still need further treatment so the government really needs to address this problem as there will be a lot of people not getting the assistance they need and now with less visits available this means there is going to be higher demand on crisis care. Without this program and the psychologist I was assigned I have no doubt I would not be here to write this.

This has been the single most effective measure any government has introduced to deal with mental health and yet the government wants to reduce its efficacy by reducing the no. of sessions to reduce costs. What about reducing the referral costs which are half the cost almost which adds very little if anything to treating the issues.

This cut back of govt funding in accessing psychological services is a very very regressive step and again indicates lack of policy commitment and conviction.

I am a full-time Uni student, and because of the Government's decision to reduce the number of covered sessions with a mental health worker to 10 I will struggle to afford to continue my therapy with a social worker. Without this treatment my recovery will fail! Please listen to all these voices!

The number of patients who actually require the additional number of consultations is minimal however those that do need them need them badly. The cost to the bottom line is minimal but the benefit to the patients can be large. The people who require the extra services are the ones with the greatest need. This is a poor piece of public policy where the benefits of the cut are not worth the pain of them!

I have been suffering PTSD for the last 30 yrs I am an ex NSW Police Officer. It will take me more than the allotted sessions with my psychologist to overcome my illness. The treatment I am receiving is working for me. If the sessions were to be reduced then I would not have had the time to or the finances to rehabilitate me back into society thus being a long term burden on the government. So I do not agree with the government policy to reduce the allotted sessions .

Everyone pays the price when mental health needs are minimised as unworthy of proper care and attention. This cut back is just plain dumb and unworthy of a government that claims to care for people.

I work with clients with a disability. The Better Access to Mental Health Care Initiative is a god send for the clients and families. The 12 - 18 sessions per year enables people to access a good level of psychological services, when they may not otherwise be able to afford it.

Research consistently shows that when spending on preventative health care is cut, this ALWAYS ends in costing the public more \$\$\$ in the long term. Preventative health care should be seen to be an investment that pays dividends.

I think reducing the number of sessions with a psychologist is utterly preposterous. As a man who has suffered from severe mental health problems in the past; my recovery process took 9 years, countless psychologist sessions and daily intensive psychotherapy at a rehabilitation centre. You are basically taking away the essential tools a psychologists works with, and that is time. Good luck keeping people off the streets with limiting access, and rising awareness of mental health problems today.

I have bipolar and it is essential that this service continue with the 18 sessions and not be cut to 10 if the government cuts this vital service it will cost them more in the long run through more admissions to the acute service and mental health outpatients

I am a GP and strongly believe the system has been very beneficial as it is.

Accessing these services can make a difference for the rest of a persons life

I work with public MH services. We often refer people to private psychologists if public services are stretched or presentation does not involve risk. These people would suffer without these alternative services and the pressure on public services would be increased.

The government clearly does not understand the issues of mental health and the care and support that is needed.

For clients impaired seriously enough for a GP referral, it is important that their recovery is assisted without concerns about having treatments cut short. If we recognise they need support, then we should also recognise their vulnerabilities: being told to wait for another billing year may not be efficacious. For those of us who bulk bill (lose income trying to support the community) we cannot hold open client spaces whilst waiting for the GP to approve the 4 extra sessions.

As the mother of a ten year old boy who suffers from severe obsessive compulsive disorder, I was stunned and deeply saddened to hear the government plans to limit the amount of visits my son has with his psychologist. These appointments are vital to my sons overall health and mental well-being. I would strongly urge the government to reconsider reducing the amount of appointments he is able to attend. It seems very unjust to limit assistance to those most in need such as my son.

Some people need time to learn to trust before dealing with trauma and other issues. People who muster the courage to seek help for longstanding traumatic issues don't need the process broken by an arbitrary limit of 10 sessions per year.

I have an eating disorder, I've been sick for 8 years and have spent thousands of dollars on therapy. Anorexia is not an illness that is 'fixed' in 12-20 sessions, if I wasn't supported by my parents I would not be able to receive the treatment I needed. Therapy should not be something only the wealthy can afford

Strange that a programme that has been proven to be of benefit should be cut. Individuals with mental health issues need and value ongoing support. They often cannot afford private assistance because their mental health issues restrict their employment options. The state mental health system is grossly underfunded. I worked in vocational rehabilitation for some 20 years with individuals with mental health issues and understand the difficulties in obtaining and maintaining employment.

I find it difficult enough to find a GP who'll refer me to this program as it is, and I've been hospitalised 4 times in the last 2 years for depression/psychosis related illnesses. The mentally ill need more support, not less.

We all deserve access to trained mental health care workers and doctors - though useful and necessary - aren't trained to assist patients in recovery beyond drug prescribing. It's our psychologists who know us best and can give individual and ongoing support, so we can recover.

Please reconsider cutting back access to psychologists. I have no doubt that these cut backs will cost the public purse MORE than what it saves.

My child needs access to this service and not be limited to a reduced number of sessions. The sessions will become rushed and this is no way to treat a patient and the outcome will be that the patient will shut down and go backwards instead of getting help to move forward. The aim is to help the patient to work in the work force as some patients have been unable to even enter the workforce. We need to value, respect and trust the dedicated Psychologist, so the patient can still have trust.

Without these sessions people with mental health have nothing else! All other options severely lack funding and are already overburdened. People who have the courage and initiative to see a mental health professional about their own mental health issues deserve to have their plea for help answered.

I implore the federal minister to recognise the scientific basis for 12-18 sessions of psychotherapy recommended, and the benefits a policy that includes this as baseline, to both individuals and Australian society in general. This policy must be re-instated in order for the Federal Government to fulfill its commitments to the mental health of Australians.

Better access to psychological services will improve employment outcomes and create a healthier economy.

MENTAL HEALTH HAS ALWAYS BEEN THE POOR COUSIN IN THE HEALTH BUDGET. TAKING EARLY INTERVENTION ACCESS FROM PEOPLE WHO NEED IT SHOWS SHORTSIGHTEDNESS, IN AN ALREADY OVERBURDENED HEALTH SYSTEM

Although I commend the intention to put more money into mental health care for the young, stripping funding from the public mental health care system (to which the young currently also has access) in order to achieve this goal makes no sense. It seems to be more about politics (in its most cynical sense) than about responsible social policy. Please reconsider this proposed change which will adversely affect so many.

Those in our communities who struggle to live with a mental illness need more support, not less.

Most psychologists take at least two sessions to complete a thorough assessment of the client. This only leaves 8 sessions for treatment under the new scheme. Most clients who are referred under this plan in the first place are in need of more than 8 sessions of treatment. 10 sessions in total is simply not adequate to ensure positive outcomes in the community.

Because the cost to society of hospital, gaol, crime, welfare will increase and inturn cost more than 18 session a year ever could.

So instead build bigger police stations, hospitals, gaols, work for the dole programs. It's not rocket

science, is it?

Because 10 sessions is not enough time to deal with my background of trauma. please keep the sessions as they are or I won't be able to access therapy anymore.

I urge the government not to take this backward step. It will be those most in need who suffer

The Better Access program is invaluable and in the long term a cost saving measure for the government. Trying to curtail visits in the mistaken belief that it achieve the same results is naive.

I am mostly referred clients with severe mental health issues including personality disorders, adult survivors of severe childhood sexual, emotional and physical abuse, and trauma and dissociation, and long-standing depression and suicide attempts, OCD, PTSD etc. These clients struggle to manage everyday functioning and sadly this has serious adverse effects on their children, partners and other family and community members. After sufficient treatment, their lives are significantly changed.

I urge you to reconsider.

This service should be increasing not decreasing. It has taken two years for my psychologist to peel back the layers of a problem that I have been burying for over two decades. This can not possibly occur even in 18 sessions. If it had not been for her, I hate to think of where I may be now. Why should she not be paid for bringing quality back into my life. With her help, I am a contributing member of society and not a burden. DON'T DO THIS it is wrong. INCREASE DON'T DECREASE.

As a person who has received intensive therapy from a psychologist for the past 2 years I can testify from first hand experience how vital the early treatment is.

I am a psychologist and am seriously concerned about the repercussions these changes may have on the mental health of my clients - many who don't meet the criteria for treatment in the public mental health system.

Please don't take away this most fundamental and crucial service, we can't afford to let our country's growing mental health problem become even more of a crisis. our neediest people need this incredibly important help.

In my role as an employment consultant, I see that so many people are affected by mental health problems and find resources to be heavily weighed down so the more funding and more chance people have of accessing mental health support, the better.

I wholeheartedly agree that this has to be a huge step backwards and will be much more costly in the long run, especially to the well being of those who cannot afford private treatment, I work in a field where I have seen this service make a massive difference to the quality of so many people's lives, it is a travesty that the government should cut this service to 10 sessions.

With our current ageing demographic the need for better access to Mental Health professionals can only help support our already stretched and stressed hospital system. We know anecdotally that people have better mental health outcomes if supported within the community as opposed to acute hospital settings especially in the ageing sector whereby the stigmas and attitudes compromise people seeking advice and support.

It is about time the government, who is supposed to be elected by the people, actually listen to not only the people but the experts in the field and not try and hide behind smoke screens if they are really serious and committed to addressing the ever growing Mental Health Issues of this country!

Obviously the government is not taking mental health as seriously as physical ailments. It was because of such ignorance that more than half of the number of soldiers who died in Vietnam, died back in Australia from suicide. Mental illness kills so deserves to be treated properly.

The scheme should be expanded not reduced.

As a mental health social worker of almost 20 years I am amazed and appalled at the proposal to reduce the number of sessions. "Better Access" should also mean a better outcome and practice and evidence-based research shows that 12-18 sessions are required to achieve this

Psychological intervention can reduce the incidence of mental health problems becoming major mental health issues leading to long term problems, expensive hospitalisation and even death. Reducing the number of sessions funded by Better Health Outcomes is short sighted and false economising.

The Policy is discriminatory against people with Mental Illness (which is a serious Medical problem), who are already stigmatised and have to hide their illness.

I think this is going back wards, mental health is so underfunded and this is not going to help!

this is just plain ridiculous. Already there is not enough access for individuals on low income to access mental health services. this will only create further bruden on an already strained public health system

On behalf of my clients and those who cannot advocate for themselves... I concur with this petition and ask the bureaucrats and the politicians to show compassion, empathy and courage in maintaining this fledgeling program. And indeed to enhance it by improving service delivery and not reducing service delivery.

10 sessions per year is not enough, and by reducing the amount of sessions available, it will in my opinion increase the amt of people that go from having "managable" mental health issues to "unmanagable" issues, which is not a good place to be.
help those who need help by increasing not decreasing sessions per year.

Considering the widespread epidemic of mental health issues in our society today, it is paramount that the 12-18 sessions be re-instated.

My clients are generally on benefits. Some are highly suicidal. 6 sessions will save their life this month, but what about next month? For some clients there MUST be exemptions to the rule for their welfare and safety, especially with complex, dual diagnoses clients. PLEASE reconsider.

You need reconsider these proposals, leaving the length of treatment for the Better Access initiative at 12 sessions, with an additional 6 for exceptional circumstances. I also urge you to abolish the unnecessary two tiered rebate for psychologist.

I had over 40 clients last year (out of 150 odd that I saw) that fit into the category of 'severe trauma-fires/assaults/childhood sexual-physical abuse, suicidal depression or debilitating anxiety/helplessness following family breakdown. These clients require a minimum of 18 sessions after initial presentation and often continuing for more than 1 year.

It is laughable that you assume these most severe clients can manage with 10 sessions per year.

Regards
Dr Dan Riddle
Counselling Psyc

Psychologists are being asked to deliver evidence-based treatment without enough sessions with the client to carry out even the most basic forms of intervention. Research has repeatedly shown that 15-20 sessions of treatment is needed for common psychological conditions, like depression and anxiety. Last year Australian research showed that half the people accessing this program will need more care after 10 sessions. These cuts ignore the research and will set many people for failure.

As a psychologist I know how important it is for people to have access to mental health services and 10 sessions is certainly not enough for those with chronic illnesses. A change like this would be a disaster for so many Australian families.

The Government should be increasing the number of sessions not decreasing them. Decreasing them is false economy which will result in poor outcomes for consumers.

The chance to see a Psych over the current period is limited if someone requires ongoing treatment. What do I do if I can't afford a Psych any more and I need ongoing counselling. The whole shebang should be like seeing a doctor where it is unlimited bulkbilling. You people are just trying to screw me! Get stuffed.

Outpatient psychologists' services are a cost effective means of reducing human distress and increasing productivity. Australia needs more of this not less. Restricting services under Better Access and providing only for the most severely affected under BOiMHC will increase distress and reduce productivity.

This directly affects me. This government's failure to acknowledge the mental health epidemic in this country is detrimental to Australian society as a whole.

Access to quality on going support is vital for people with mental illness. Not only is it often difficult and time consuming with long waiting lists and many hurdles to overcome just to obtain appointments in the first place to then have their support time restricted is counter productive to assisting them to cope with their problems in a positive and timely manner. At a time when people are most vulnerable is the time they need the most help. Do not make this any harder than it already is.

I have had the advantage of receiving help form this service and know form my own experience that 10 sessions is not nearly adequate. Pleasr re-think your decision

please consider allowing the maximum number of sessions for clients in need; some of us are in life-threatening situations without them

This is a very important area and deserves to be looked at. The proposed reductions appear to make the scheme a complete waste of money as 12 sessions has been shown by research to be a minimum for most people to get results.

This cut in the funding for primary health care will only ultimately increase the number of untreated/partially treated mental health in the community.

The reduction to 6 plus 4 appointments with a psychologist will severely compromise the quality of mental health care in Australia and ultimately result in more expense to the public health system.

I work with psychologists on a daily basis and know first hand the importance of continuous treatment for mental health clients and also the hard work that psychologists put in to build a relationship and trust with their clients hence, the importance of seeing one psychologist. Every day we are seeing more and more people requiring our services and to cut funding at sometimes the most critical time(usually 6 sessions, is going to see a lot of people not finishing their treatment.

I support the expansion of mental health services, acute and longer-term, but I value the benefits of having counselling as an option available to clients with trauma, anxiety and depression and other mental health states. Many 'mental health' problems stem from developmental and relationship issues and thus are resolved within a safe therapeutic relationship - not through medication or crisis intervention. Better Access is a great step towards providing these restorative opportunities.

This would be cost effective in the long run. Improving access to mental health has outcomes for the nation as well as for those who really need treatment. Let's give them an easier way in.

Better mental health services are necessary and this reduction in services will only result in more people being untreated. While not all people with mental illness end up in the criminal justice system, many do and so there could be an increase in crime due to this foolish cut back.

The less money spent on mental health the more money will need to be spent on social services later on. Prevent the big problems by acting when they are smaller problems.

Please consider the strong evidence suggesting 12-18 sessions are required as a minimum to treat mental health conditions.

Additionally working in therapy with goals decided on the assumption of "the possibility" of more than 10 sessions without the accurate prediction of more sessions runs the significant risk of leaving the client emotionally very exposed should they not be able to procure more sessions under better access.

With the numbers of people, young or mature to the aged increasing alarmingly, what the government are planning to do is sheer daylight robbery! It takes trust first and foremost for a person afflicted with mental health, welfare or independence (disability related) issues to be able to talk with a psychologist, social worker or a occupational therapist then it takes time to get to know the person and their issues are before a plan can be drawn up! Five to six sessions won't achieve anything!

It's not enough to extend the "number" of people who can access mental health services each year. If these services are ineffective or insufficient to help them with their problems, we're not really making any positive changes by having "Better access".

I needed more than 6 appointments. people who can least afford a psychologist need them most.

Successful treatment of one person with a mental illness has a significant positive impact on the people in their immediate and extended social networks. Evidence-based research often doesn't measure these flow-on effects. Please consider these positive impacts when you determine the number of sessions that should be available through the initiative: reducing the number of sessions will directly reduce treatment effectiveness and the associated positive impacts on the wider community.

It is the people coping less well, whom other agencies under-support, who are most hurt by this cut.

If the Government is serious about suicide prevention in young people, then adequate funding and access to Mental Health professionals is of urgent priority.

Clearly having the 18 available sessions has NOT be abused according to your own statistics. Only people who NEED those sessions will pay the gap and spend that time in with their psychologist.

Don't penalise the most needy people!!! LITERALLY there will be deaths on your hands..

Mental health is an important factor in the well being and stability of any community. To reduce a cost effective and productive means of supporting people when at their most vulnerable is an unethical and unprincipled attack on the fabric of society and at the cost of the security and happiness of all Australians.

Why is the government proposing to cut back these sessions to levels below evidence based guidelines for psychotherapy?

why put more pressure onto the already stressed health system and patients while the fat polities who don't know or seem to care that without these psychologists, social workers etc there would be a great number of people who wouldn't be here now

I deplore the cut in funding for access to Psychological Services and demand that the Government reverses its decision.

Mental health is extremely important in maintaining physical health and it takes time to deal with psychological issues which may have been ascertained over many years of neglect. In the treatment of mental health problems medication is not always necessary and can in some cases be provided with co-operation with a G.P. A psychologist provides a cost effective means of support and treatment which contributes enormously to the prevention of suicides and other psychological issues.

This initiative is clearly a cost-cutting measure, as psychological counseling is generally an expensive therapy and out of the reach of many. However, to cut the therapy sessions on the basis of cost is to put the mental health of a significant portion of the populace at risk. Further, there is no thought in this as to the impact trauma and resulting stress has on work, family life and integration within the community. I strongly suggest this action be reconsidered in light of scientific data.

Please leave the sessions as 12 to 18 as I see my psychologist every month and more if need be. To cut sessions down to 6 and 4 to be re-approved by my GP is outrageous. I cannot survive without seeing her every month and need the extra appointments as I have on-going mental issues. My psychologist has saved me from suicide, when other Government places have not. I need my sessions as they are and to cut them back would not help with my recovery. Don't punish the patients this initiative helps!

I am 23 years old and have attempted suicide 6 times so far in my life. Since seeing my psychologist, although I have still felt suicidal, I have not made another attempt. My psychologist literally saves/has saved my life!

Psychologists are the ones who really work long-term with those with various mental illnesses. There is plenty of research supporting the need for more than just 6+4 sessions. We don't need more prescriptions and drugs - we need better access to mental health professionals who are trained to provide support and provide tools for us to deal with mental illness.

Almost 90% of my clients are from low SES backgrounds and are on welfare and are unable to afford private health insurance or to pay for psychology services themselves and so rely on Medicare. If the number of sessions is reduced they are the ones who will not be able to complete treatment. Also their inability to extricate themselves from their poor economic circumstances is related to their psychological problems as these problems reduce their employability.

This is another typical example of policy being changed without full understanding of the interventions used to treat mental health conditions. When it can be shown that a single treatment program for any mental disorder is efficacious after just 6 sessions then this new policy can be implemented - but this has not been shown, and is unlikely to be shown in the near future! Six sessions only - how arbitrary!

I have used the services of a psychologist at different times of life crisis and found this invaluable, saving myself and my family so much unnecessary trauma and grief. I know many people who have similarly benefited and would suffer terribly if such services were curtailed. Surely the costs of prevention is so much more cost effective than the costs of trying to cure.

The current policy for mental health care - which as it stands is barely adequate - has been demonstrated to be hugely successful in terms of better outcomes for Australians suffering from mental illness. To cut this policy flies in the face of the evidence, discriminates against the many Australians who suffer from mental illness, and could very possibly lead to an increase in Australia's already high suicide rates as severely depressed or troubled people are unable to access meaningful help.

Investment in mental health care is an investment in the well-being of Australian society. Please don't cut back!

It's really interesting that while there is lip-service to there being a biopsychosocial perspective on mental health there remains an implicit emphasis on a medical approach. This is clearly illustrated by the fact that mental health nurses can see clients under a 2710 for up to 2 years without any restriction on the number of sessions within that period. So as well as monitoring meds (v. important) they can also administer the psych. interventions allocated to allied health workers under Medicare

The reshuffling of funds will not benefit mental health consumers. Policy should follow the many studies that found that 15-20 psychological treatment sessions are the bare minimum for treating moderate-to-severe mental illness, and the many clinical studies that show that psychological treatment is in many cases superior to medication, or that the two work together synergistically. What's the point of commissioning a report that shows the value of a scheme, right before you slash its funds?

Research shows that a huge proportion of people experiencing mental health problems have a history of acute/chronic trauma, abuse and/or neglect. Their histories are complex and successful psychological intervention takes time and skilled therapists who understand the impact trauma has on the brain. If the government was serious about bettering mental health care, sessions should be increased not decreased. As a consumer, and worker in mental health services I see a huge need for more sessions.

It shouldn't be made more difficult to get help with any mental health professional, schemes like these benefit so many people who otherwise simply couldn't afford it and it just becomes another obstacle that they won't overcome. How does cutting a scheme like this help anyone?

re-instate a fair policy for mental health care.

So many are affected by Mental health issues and realising you have a problem is hard enough, getting help then becomes another hurdle that is ill needed. I believe that proper healthcare would ease the pressure on the justice system also as many matters could be avoided if adequate mental health care was available

It is astounding that the funding of primary (mental) health care is cut, whilst the tertiary health system continues to be the 'black hole' of health funding. What are the ramifications for inadequate, incomplete or lack of primary health care??? More pressure on tertiary health, inadequately resourced GPs, the judicial system. Along with increases in co-morbidity (problematic alcohol & drug use - self medication) & mortality.

All so much more easily addressed with investment in Primary Care.

I have been attending sessions with my psychologist for the last few years and because my mental health diagnosis is complex I am very happy to have found a psychologist who can understand and help me. If my sessions were reduced I do not know if my mental health would stay as stable as I am at present. However last year was a bad year and I ended up using 18 sessions before the end of the year and this put me into financial difficulty.

This change will penalise those people with moderate to severe psychological difficulties, including personality difficulties, eating disorders, post traumatic stress disorder etc. The very people who need help the most.

Consumers of the mental health system deserve the best evidence-based practice. Providers can't give this with one arm tied behind their back.

This is a ludicrous change being proposed. It was a fantastic scheme & should continue as is currently operating.

My husband committed suicide in front of me. I get six sessions with a trauma psych.... I don't want my children to lose me too. Something needs to be done.

We all put money into Medicare and mental health is just as important as physical health. I couldn't afford to see a therapist if I didn't have the rebate.

This is outrageous to see the cuts to a service that has been benefited so many people in our community. It can mean the big difference in someone's situation to get this assistance before things get worse

Early intervention in mental health issues is the key to better outcomes, reducing the care available can undo a lot of the good that is being done to better understand and address mental health issues before they take over a person's life.

I would not have been able to afford the treatment that I have stuck with for 11 years for anorexia nervosa and I would not have made it to the point in recovery I have. Money should be going INTO mental health support NOT OUT! Look at health, morbidity and mortality statistics before considering pulling this funding.

There are too few resources in the Mental Health field as it is and yet you insist on cuts to this area. Its appalling, you hit on the most vulnerable and an easy target. They need your help not hindrance... give them the necessary care needed now so they get a chance at life.

please don't cut the number of visits. My sessions are my lifeline to some small semblance of sanity

These services are vital for people wanting to help themselves. Cheaper for the government in the long term keeping people out of hospital beds through substance abuse.

I am one of those who accessed this incredibly successful scheme. As a carer of a young woman with Aspergers and Type 1 diabetes who also suffers from chronic depression, there is a real risk of my daughter's health going backwards without access to her counsellor. The subsequent effect that then has on me makes this double barreled. How on earth can this be justified?

Without the full 18 sessions with a registered psychologist I would have ended up in 24 hour care in a hospital. Having access to the help I needed ensured tax payers didn't pay for further care. Cutting corners in mental health doesn't make sense. It doesn't make dollars either

I fought this battle last year for Mental Health Social Workers, this attempt by the bean counters at the DoHA is just another avenue to destroy the very successful better access programme. I don't care which government is in power, this hypocrisy towards mental health service provision must be stopped. The Private Sector is the only ONE that can provide genuine long term help. Yesterday a Community Mental Health Professional told me that what I could provide was more than could. SAVE IT NOW

This new policy is a slap in the face after the increased mental health care funding. You are cutting short a program that will save people's lives, and is just as important as any basic health care for all citizens! Please reconsider the change.

Mental health has long been under funded, but the introduction of the previous policy has made a huge difference to many people previously unable to access the services they need. Shame on you for trying to reduce funding.

FUNNY! You throw money at Mental Health with slick glossy campaigns that keep fatcats employed, by TAKING money away from the people who need it.

I call on the Federal Minister for Mental Health to re-instate a fair policy for mental health care, namely 12-18 sessions with a psychologist, social worker, occupational therapist, or GP specialising in mental health care in the 'Better Access to Mental Health Care' initiative.

I survived horrific child abuse at the hands of my father. Even though social services knew of the abuse when I was 7yo, the abuse continued until I was 14yo. I have a diagnosis of Depression, anxiety and PTSD. I have always required M/H treatment since 15yo. I have been having intense treatment for the last 2 years after being hospitalised. The govt. owes me the continuing therapy as a duty of care as they neglected me as a child. What I will do without continued counselling.

I am a recently retired RN and I cannot understand why the client would have to prove that they would need further help, after establishing a relationship with a professional. Surely changing professionals and/or having to access different programs means that time is lost with assessments and establishing trust

The effect of decreasing the number of sessions allowed for consultations will affect the most vulnerable in the community.

The Commonwealth Government should think about the long term effects, not the short term monetary savings

"Better Access does not mean reduced access"

This is an important social issue and the government should not overlook the importance of appropriate psychological care for all! It saved me last year

I've had a lifetime of depression/anxiety. Seeing a psychologist has been one of the most helpful things I've done to treat my illness (mine is drug resistant). I'm appalled by the government's decision to reduce the number of sessions it will offer rebates for. A very dangerous, ill-informed decision.

Psychologists cannot provide a worthwhile service to individuals with mental health issues in 6-10 sessions, even using evidence based practices. Individuals will lose much of the benefit by needing to start again with another service. The program was working effectively with 12-18 sessions. All psychologists must be paid equally, rebate differences create unfair divisions for highly experienced

professionals who have simply chosen a different but equally valuable pathway in Psychology.

It is very important that people get the support they need - these changes will not help the situation. Mental health is already under resourced and does not need this. People first!

In Australia it has been estimated that mental health symptoms result in a loss of \$AU 2.7 billion p.a.

From an economic perspective, it is clear government funding is essential to enable access to mental health services, and reduce its effects.

From an ethical perspective, it is clear many people need this help, and rely on it.

Why has such a backward step been taken?