

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs
PO Box 1600
Parliament House, Canberra ACT 2600

2 August 2011

Dear Committee

RE: COMMONWEALTH FUNDING AND ADMINISTRATION OF MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

The Psychologists Richmond (TPR) is staffed by **Specialist Counselling Psychologists**, all registered with the Australian Health Practitioners Regulation Agency (AHPRA). We would like to thank the Senate for initiating this inquiry into mental health funding.

As Counselling Psychologists we are all trained as experts in the provision of evidence based psychological therapy to treat a wide range of psychological problems and mental health disorders.

Our response to the Senate inquiry is outlined below:

1. CHANGES TO BETTER ACCESS - NUMBER OF SESSIONS

We are extremely concerned about the proposed change to the number of sessions available for Better Access clients. Currently clients are able to access up to 18 sessions, and while most clients do not use this many sessions (87% of clients use less than 10 sessions), it is vital for the proper treatment that further sessions are available. For the few who need these extra sessions, they should be available. Reducing the number of sessions available will make some treatment less efficacious.

Example:

A client who came to TPR was treated by a Specialist Counselling Psychologist for severe anxiety and depression. She was homeless, unemployed and isolated and at serious risk of suicide or chronic illness. After 18 sessions with a Counselling Psychologist she is now employed in the public service, studying part time at university and in share accommodation.

2. THE TWO-TIERED MEDICARE REBATE SYSTEM FOR PSYCHOLOGISTS

The Australian Health Practitioners Agency (AHPRA) recognises Specialist Counselling Psychologists. Currently these psychologists and their clients are discriminated against by the two tiered rebate system, where Clinical psychologists are able to offer a higher rebate to their clients. This distinction is unrelated to skill, qualification level or competence. Current evidence shows no distinction in the population being treated by Clinical and Counselling psychologists (Giese, Lindner, Forsyth & Lovelock, 2008), nor in the efficacy of treatment provided.

At The Psychologists Richmond we all have postgraduate qualifications and have been registered as Psychologists for over 15 years. We have all worked with clients with complex mental health issues in close consultation with GP's, psychiatrists and other mental health professionals.

In the US and the UK both Counselling and Clinical psychologists are recognised as equal mental health providers. Why is this highly discriminatory distinction made in only Australia?

We thank you for reading our response and welcome further questions should you have any.

Yours Sincerely

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