

4 August 2011

Dear Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs,

RE: Commonwealth Funding and Administration of Mental Health Services

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the Commonwealth Funding and Administration of Mental Health Services. Overall, it was encouraging to see the Government's 2011-12 Budget changes relating to mental health. However, I am concerned about the proposal:-

1. that from 1 November, 2011, the yearly maximum allowance of sessions of psychological treatment available to people with a recognised mental health disorder will be reduced from 18 to 10 sessions.
2. to abolish the difference in the Medicare rebate between those having generalist qualifications and those having advanced clinical training in the delivery of mental health interventions, i.e., Clinical Psychologists.

1. Reduction in the yearly maximum allowance of sessions of psychological treatment

In my opinion *The Better Access to Mental Health Care Initiative* has enabled clients with diagnosed mental health disorders to access affordable psychological intervention within appropriate time frames not previously met under the public mental health system. It is with strong concern that there is a proposal to reduce the number of available sessions for psychological treatment. My primary work is with children and youth with diagnosed mental health disorders which significantly impact on their engagement in education, and disrupt peer and family relationships. The nature of this work often requires more than ten sessions for assessment and intervention involving the child/youth, the parent/caregiver, and educational staff in order to achieve effective treatment outcomes. It is unrealistic to expect that children/youth (and their caregivers) presenting for psychological treatment can immediately establish rapport within the current 12-18 sessions, let alone achieve treatment gains within 10 sessions. Many of these young clients would not be able to engage in further psychological treatment due to the financial cost on their families, and given the already stretched public resources available for children and youth with mental health disorders.

2. The two-tiered Medicare rebate system

The current two-tiered system reflects the vast difference in training, knowledge and specialisation between Clinical Psychologists and Psychologists. Clinical Psychologists have a minimum of six years full time University training with two additional years of mandatory professional supervision. Clinical Psychologists are highly trained to provide specialised evidence-based practice of mental health services to clients presenting with complex presentations. Clinical Psychology is the only profession, apart from Psychiatry, whose entire accredited and integrated postgraduate training is specifically in the field of lifespan and advanced evidence-based psychopathology, assessment, diagnosis, case formulation, psychotherapy, evaluation and research across the full range of severity and complexity.

I strongly urge you to at the minimum maintain the maximum allowance of eighteen sessions of psychological treatment, and to continue to recognise the specialised training and knowledge that Clinical Psychologists bring to the treatment of clients with mental health disorders.