

29 July 2011

To: The Senate Community Affairs Reference Committee inquiry into Commonwealth Funding and Administration of Mental Health Services.

I am writing in response to the proposed changes to the government funding of psychological services outlined in the 2011 budget. It is my understanding that the 2011 budget proposes reducing the number of sessions per calendar year from 18 to 10 sessions. Please note that this is my second letter. On careful consideration I realized that my previous letter did not adequately express my concerns with the issue.

How cost effective is treatment

In terms of cost effectiveness : 1.do treatment benefits warrant the cost of treatments in management of mild symptoms?

2. Do treatment benefits warrant the cost of treatments in management of moderate symptoms?

From what I can view in the media, the costing is purely looking at payment to GP's and Psychologists and is not considering the impact of this on the overall economy. The extension of medicare to psychologists appears to have led to an increase in psychologists working in private practice as opposed to public health. What impact does having 1000 extra small business in the community have on the economy? 1000 people occupying commercial real estate. 1000 small businesses paying for printing and website design through other small businesses. How much would it cost the health service to employ all these psychologists in public health, upkeep of buildings, provision of stationery, payment of annual leave, sick leave and superannuation.? I don't know the answer to this question but believe it needs to be factored in.

I believe the Senate needs to consider the purpose of government funding of psychological services. The purpose of the system will define how it should be best managed

1. Is the purpose to treat people with mild symptoms
2. Is the purpose to treat people with moderate to severe symptoms
3. Is the purpose to find the most cost effective way to treat people with mild symptoms
4. Is the purpose to find the most cost effective way to treat people with moderate symptoms

Research indicates that :10 sessions is sufficient to adequately treat mild symptoms
10 sessions is not sufficient to adequately treat moderate symptoms

I also want to withdraw the comment in my previous letter about the 2 tiered medicare system. I got a general email with suggestions of how to address concerns to the senate and cut and pasted a section which I didn't read and realized did not reflect by thinking on the topic. This section argued for keeping the 2 tier system however in my view there is not sufficient evidence to suggest that Clinical Psychologists have a better outcome than Generalist Psychologist. In economic terms it makes sense to have similar payment structure if the same skills are being used and there is no difference in outcome.

Yours Sincerely,

Anne Devlin
Clinical Psychologist