

Submission to Senate Committee:

I have great concerns about proposals to make cuts in psychology services to the “Better Access” program for mental health clients. The success of this program would show rather than it should be expanded, I would have thought.

Clinical psychology is a mental health discipline whose accredited training is specifically focused in the field of evidence-based assessment, case formulation, diagnosis and evaluated treatment over the full spectrum of lifespan mental health disorders and across the full spectrum of complexity and severity. The proposed cuts directly minimise the distinct contribution made by clinical psychologists to specialist mental health care in Australia. Clinical psychologists are highly trained clinicians with either a masters degree or doctorate in clinical psychology. I would have thought that the public deserves increased access to these evidence based services and that this would show a commitment to standards in service delivery in line with other recent government initiatives about raising standards of quality and accountability through the establishment of various information web sites making comparisons about outcomes in Education (Schools), Health (Hospitals) and services to Consumers (Supermarkets). I had assumed these were to indicate that the Government is serious about expecting quality standards of service delivery from service providers. To make cuts in rebates that fall below recognised fee structures based on the levels of training, ongoing education and professionalism would seem to be a retrograde step.

The issue should not be construed as being all about a professional group with a vested interest. Who else knows their client group better than those who spend time with them – a group poorly resourced to lobby for themselves, though not without ability to speak for themselves if asked! They are prone, however, to be allowed to fall into further systemic and structural disadvantage in tough economic times if vigilance and commitment to care with the appropriate levels of expertise is not maintained. The decision to cut services and redirect funding has compromised access and consumer choice of provider and unintentionally introduced inequality to the provision of standard evidence-based therapy wherein the most disadvantaged and vulnerable are unable to afford to complete their course of clinical psychological treatment.

Please revise this cut. There are many people who have benefited much from seeing a highly trained clinician through “Better Access” who would not have pursued treatment if it was not government funded by Medicare which effectively gives choice of provider to the consumer.

Yours Sincerely

Gordon Smith BSw (Social Worker in the field of Mental Health)