

Submission to support ongoing access to Clinical psychologists through the Medicare Better Access Scheme

As a recent consumer of the Medicare Better Access to Clinical Psychologists, I wish to support the role of Clinical Psychologists as experts in the treatment of mental health issues. I believe the quality of treatment offered by Clinical psychologists is better-quality than general counselling and based on my own experience I would say Clinical Psychologists can provide swifter resolution of problems and distress than a general counsellors with only undergraduate level training. Therefore Clinical Psychologists are more cost effective in the long run.

12 years ago I experienced increasing problems with stress, anxiety and depression following the completion of my university degree. I sought help from a counsellor with an undergraduate degree and attended 12 sessions of counselling or psychotherapy as it was termed. There were no Medicare rebates available at this time and the cost to me was \$50 per session, therefore a total cost of \$600 for the treatment. As a partially employed graduate, I could not have afforded treatment of higher cost. I believe now the fee would be closer to \$90-\$120 and that Better Access would probably rebate about \$90 a session at a total cost of \$1080 to the government over 12 sessions.

This year, I again sought help for increasing problems with stress, anxiety and depressive symptoms and also migraine and sleep problems. I would say my distress was more severe than in the previous example. My GP referred me to a Clinical psychologist through the better access program. I attended 3 sessions at a cost of \$160 with a rebate of \$119.80. My symptoms resolved following the third session and I did not need any further treatment. I think this is due to Clinical Psychologist being more able to identify the core problem and provide treatment strategies from that point. Total cost to the government for my treatment was \$359.40. When compared to the estimated cost of \$1080 for my previous treatment for a similar but less severe problem (as discussed in the previous paragraph) when I saw a generalist psychologist / counsellor, there is a difference in estimated costing of \$720.60. The Clinical psychology intervention was much more cost effective.

I strongly support continued access to Clinical Psychologists as I believe they offer their clients a higher standard of knowledge, skills and training. The rebate allows people on low to middle incomes to access high quality treatment – it is truly better access. Given the cost calculations above, I believe Clinical psychologists can save the government money by providing timely, tailored and appropriate treatment to the community.