

Submission to the Commonwealth Funding and Administration of Mental Health Services Committee Inquiry

1 August 2011

I am a postgraduate student currently completing my Doctorate of Psychology (Clinical Psychology) degree. I would like to express my concerns for the proposed changes to funding for mental health services.

Throughout my degree I have seen the profound impact that mental illness can have on an individual, a family, and society as a whole. I believe that all Australians have a right to access affordable and effective mental health care, and that this can be achieved by fostering a strong workforce of well-trained, competent psychologists whose services are available to all Australians at a reasonable cost.

Unfortunately, the proposed changes to cut Medicare rebates for psychology consultations will create a number of barriers for everyday Australians to access quality mental health services. Psychologists who have gained registration with the Clinical College have completed between 6 and 8 years of university training and demonstrated their professional competence through strict registration criteria. The current recommended hourly fee for a consultation with a psychologist is \$218.00, and accurately reflects the skill and training that these professionals possess. The cut in Medicare rebates to as low as \$81.60 represents less than half of this recommended fee; the difference of which mental health care consumers will be asked to pay for independently.

I oppose this cut to Medicare rebates for psychologists for two reasons. Firstly, I feel that the cut fails to acknowledge the great amount of skill and competence that many psychologists in our community possess, and for the significant contributions they make to improve the welfare and quality of life of so many community members through the provision of high quality mental health services. Secondly, the rebate cut will place access to psychologists out of the reach of a significant number of everyday Australians who may be suffering from mental illness. I do not believe that psychological treatments should be reserved for those of higher income; access to quality mental health care is a right of all Australians and should be provided accordingly.

I appreciate the need for our government to make intelligent, economically viable decisions about healthcare funding that will provide the best outcomes for our society. I believe that a cut to Medicare rebates for psychologists would be a shortsighted decision that fails to appreciate the qualifications and skill of Australian psychologists. I encourage the Australian government to ensure that quality mental health treatment remains accessible and affordable to all Australians by retaining current Medicare rebates for psychologists.