

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600
Australia

August 5, 2011

Dear Committee Members,

Re: Submission to the Commonwealth Funding and Administration of Mental Health Services Committee Inquiry, (e)(i) - mental health workforce issues, including the two-tiered Medicare rebate system for psychologists.

I have recently completed a PhD in Clinical Psychology, and am currently in the midst of completing the additional training required in order to attain endorsement as a Clinical Psychologist. Although it seems that the difference between Clinical Psychologists and other psychologist is not broadly understood by the general public, there are clear differences in training and skill bases.

In addition to requiring postgraduate university training, psychologists are also required to complete a further 12-24 months of practical training involving a minimum of 40 hours of supervision, and 40 hours of targeted professional development activities in order to be considered eligible for endorsement as a Clinical Psychologist. Once the endorsement has been successfully obtained, Clinical Psychologists are then subject to different professional development requirements, as stipulated by the Psychologist's Board of Australia.

It concerns me greatly that the significant personal and financial investment this training and ongoing professional development constitutes, would no longer be recognised or compensated. This would effectively remove one of the most powerful incentives to reach this level of expertise. I am also concerned that it would not be viable for Clinical Psychologists to provide bulk billing services for disadvantaged members of the community at the lowest rebate fee (the lowest rebate tier constitutes a mere 35% of the current national recommended fee for psychological services – this is not consistent with the services Clinical Psychologists provide, and does not reflect the qualifications of such professionals) .

As a result of their training, Clinical Psychologists have a thorough understanding of varied and complex psychological theories and have the ability to formulate and respond to both complex disorders and to novel problems, generating interventions based on this solid knowledge base. The very high level of specialist competence and scientist-practitioner training of Clinical Psychologists has seen these professionals taking increasing responsibility in the following areas:

- the treatment of less prevalent mental disorders within the psychotic spectrum, bipolar disorder and the more intractable personality disorders
- teaching and informing other professions of evidence-based development in treatment for mental health disorders
- bringing research and empiricism to human service delivery and thus increasing accountability

Clinical Psychologists are professionals who:

- are trained in scientific research and statistical analysis
- are trained in a scientist-practitioner approach to changing human behaviour and thereby use techniques with proven scientific effectiveness
- are skilled in the use of psychological tests, behavioural observations and clinical and diagnostic interviewing. These skills are used to assess psychiatric disorders, specific aptitudes and cognitive deficits, personality, social functioning, adaptive behaviours and psychological issues pertaining to physical illnesses.
- are acknowledged experts in personality assessment
- have expert skills in piecing together the complex relationships between biological, social and psychological systems and transforming this analysis into effective treatments
- supervise the Clinical Psychologists in training programmes whilst on field placements (an essential component of university training) and Clinical Psychologist registrars (graduates in their first two years in the field)
- are skilled in conducting research, planning service delivery systems, performing accurate evaluation, deciding on clinical indicators and implementing systems of accountability.

I hope that you are able to carefully consider the importance of recognising the unique specialist expertise brought to the private sector by Clinical Psychologists, and the unique training experiences that allow these professionals to offer such expertise. It is important that we work to ensure that such services can continue to be accessed by people who need them.

Thank you for your allowing invitations for submission regarding the review.