

Commonwealth Funding and Administration of Mental Health Services

I am a Clinical Psychologist with over 20 year's experience. I manage a large private practice in a regional area employing contract psychologists.

I note that the "The Senate Community Affairs Committee has concluded that there are no grounds for the two-tiered Medicare rebate system for psychologists and recommends the single lower rate for all psychologists including clinical psychologists."

Clinical psychologists are unlikely to remain working within the medicare rebated system if their working conditions are eroded (that is, the rebate is reduced to the single lower rate for all psychologists) given the inherent lack of recognition and re-numeration for the knowledge, skills and expertise of the specialist clinical psychologists. Clients will be disadvantaged as their access to clinical psychology services will be significantly reduced. This has occurred with Workcover when they reduced the fee paid to psychologists.

The proposed changes also reduce the incentive for psychologists to enhance their skills and expertise via specialist qualifications. It is also complete contradiction with the standards adopted internationally (USA and UK require post graduate qualifications).

The National Committee acknowledges that Clinical Psychology is one of nine Psychology specialisations; specialisations created for to acknowledge and easily distinguish the differences within the profession; thereby providing a pathway for professionals and clients to determine whether to refer to a generalist or specialist depending on the evidence base for the presenting problem.

In summary, it is abundantly clear that there are significant gaps in mental health service provision for people presenting with the most complex and severe presentations. Clinical Psychologists are well equipped to treat this section of the population, and have been doing so for many years. Continued recognition and remuneration is essential to ensure that this population retain access to accredited professionals trained specifically to treat their conditions.

The current proposed changes will severely erode the treatment options available to the most disenfranchised section of the population and discourage psychologists from undertaking post-graduate training designed specifically to build assessment and treatment skills for this population. As this population is not expected to decline in numbers over the ensuing years, the current proposed changes are clearly a backward step and demonstrate a lack of care, concern and commitment to the people from the government.