

Ailsa Lord

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

Tuesday 2<sup>nd</sup> August, 2011

Dear Committee Secretary,

I am writing this submission to convey my opinion about the processes relating to the Senate Inquiry into Commonwealth Funding and Administration of Mental Health Services. I also write on behalf of the client group that I work with who may not be able to make a submission. I am currently completing my last year of Masters in Counselling Psychology, and have worked in the past in Drug and Alcohol Clinics. I have worked with a range of client groups including severe mental health disorders relating to substance use, and mild to moderate presentations within a university counselling setting.

I am concerned about a number of recent and proposed changes to the Better Access Initiative. Firstly, I am saddened by the decision to reduce the number of available sessions per year from 18 to 10. I believe that this scheme helps to allow people who would not otherwise be accessing psychological services, but capping sessions decreases the effectiveness of the scheme and may encourage an on/off approach to treatment for many clients. Ten sessions per year does not go very far across the 52 weeks of the year. Thus, I urge the Inquiry to think about the impact that this reduction will have on real people in the community.

Secondly, I am hurt by the fact that Counselling Psychologists are deemed to have inferior skills as manifested in the two-tier rebate structure. Counselling Psychologists receive advanced training in psychopathology and treatment for mild, moderate and severe mental health disorders, and complete a minimum of 6 years of university training and 2 years of supervision, and therefore, should not be excluded from the top tier. Counselling Psychologists are deemed to be experts in the provision of treatment, while Clinical Psychologists are deemed to be experts in assessment, diagnosis and treatment. I do not believe the idea that Clinical Psychologists are superior to Counselling Psychologists. I believe that both types of Psychologist offer more expertise than the other in one area, whether it be assessment and diagnosis, or treatment. Given that assessment, diagnosis and treatment are all integral aspects of psychological support, why is it that only one type of Psychologist is deemed to be better than another? I believe that Counselling Psychologists should be seen as equal contributors to the psychological Health of Australians.

Yours sincerely,  
Ailsa Lord