

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees of Community Affairs
P.O. Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra. ACT 2600
Australia

Re: Commonwealth Funding and Administration of Mental Health Services

As a Psychologist with fifteen years of experience I am writing to express my views regarding changes to the funding and administration of mental health services. I have completed six years of training including a three year undergraduate degree, a post-graduate diploma and a Master of Psychology (Counselling) followed by two years of supervised practice. I am a member of the Australian Psychological Society (APS) College of Counselling Psychologists and in recent times have had my qualifications and experience recognised by the College of Clinical Psychologists via an Independent Bridging Program.

I have worked as a Psychologist in Australia, the United Kingdom and in Canada and my work has been with clients with a range of mental health disorders from mild through to moderate and severe disorders. I have worked in community health settings, community mental health settings, hospital environments and most recently in private practice.

I am concerned about the changes to the number of sessions available to individuals under the Better Access initiative. Clients with more significant mental health issues often require at least twelve sessions of therapy, and for a number the extra six sessions for exceptional circumstances has been invaluable. To provide adequate support and treatment for those with more severe mental health disorders within ten sessions is often impossible and can impact negatively on outcomes for the individual. For these people, the extra sessions really do make a difference.

With regard to the two-tier system I would like to advocate for clients of both Counselling and Clinical Psychologists to receive the same higher Medicare rebate. Contrary to the position often presented, Counselling Psychologists are trained to the same academic level as Clinical Psychologists (six years of university training and two years of supervision). Counselling Psychologists are acknowledged by the Australian Psychological Society as being "specialists in the provision of psychological therapy" (Australian Psychological Society, 2011) and are trained to treat high prevalence and serious mental health disorders. There appears to be little evidence to demonstrate differences in outcomes for Clinical and Counselling Psychologists. In the meantime, members of the community are being disadvantaged by having to pay more to see Counselling Psychologists when there is no evidence to indicate that they are any less competent at delivering effective evidence-based services. This is likely to be even more of an issue in rural and regional areas where Clinical Psychologists may be harder to access. I urge the government to change the Psychological therapies MBS item to a 'specialist psychological therapies' item based on specialist areas of endorsement under the Psychology Board of Australia.

Yours sincerely,

Gabrielle Wynne

Psychologist
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