

4 August 2011

RE: THE BETTER ACCESS INITIATIVE

Dear Senator,

This letter is written with regards to people with a recognised mental health disorder and the Government's proposal to cap the number of sessions available to ten per year. At present the amount is twelve. I can understand that a plan to introduce a ten-session cap may not seem like any great change. However, this is a numbers game, as around half the people that have a mental health disorder also qualify for 'exceptional circumstances,' using the maximum of 18 visits per year. When it is seen in this light, treatments for the *Better Access* initiative will have been almost halved.

The new proposal released in the budget seems to ignore evidence from psychological research as well as ignoring the needs of people with mental health disorders.

I have been seeing a psychologist for the last couple of years. For me it is a vital element that contributes towards a healthy life. I am grateful that the current scheme exists, as is my partner, as are some of my friends. We are all intelligent people who contribute to society and to our community. Many people with mental health disorders usually find it much harder to integrate and will find it even more difficult mentally (and particularly financially) should their rebated visits be reduced. In extreme cases I could only imagine that it would be life changing in a very negative way.

Taking a hard line on mental health consumers is not a practical action. Many people who receive services via the *Better Access* initiative are consulting with a mental health professional for the very first time. It is unrealistic to expect that people who are in a vulnerable psychological state are to achieve the following in under 10 sessions:

- To develop confidence
- To trust in a mental health professional immediately
- To work through their difficulties
- To take a new approach towards life

The new proposals also create obstacles for people with a mental health disorder, obstructing them from receiving what is usually 'time-critical' care. Consumers should not have the added pressure and stigma associated with needing to recover quickly, then be at risk of being referred on and having to start again with a new practitioner.

Australia is changing quickly, becoming a multicultural nation now more than ever. New arrivals will have their fair share of problems too, especially people from third world and/or war-torn areas that have been fighting for generations.

Senator, I urge you to reconsider these proposals immediately, leaving the length of treatment for the *Better Access* initiative at 12 sessions, with an additional 6 for exceptional circumstances.

Yours Sincerely,