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Submission to the Commonwealth Funding and Administration of
Mental Health Services Committee Inquiry

Dear senate committee,

I am a psychologist who works in private practice. I would like to give you my opinion on the cuts to psychologists' Medicare.

Cutting Medicare to psychologists is going to cause a lot of problems for my patients. A majority of psychotherapy patients respond to 6 – 10 sessions of therapy. Nevertheless, some of my patients require more than 10 sessions of therapy.

When conducting an initial assessment, it is difficult for a doctor or a psychologist to know which patients require intensive treatment. For example, a GP might assess a patient and diagnose her with a mild alcohol problem. When I start working with this hypothetical patient, I might try to help her stop her drinking. Nevertheless, after a number of sessions, it would be plausible that such a patient might have an underlying PTSD. After using 6 sessions, how would I treat this patient's PTSD with only four more sessions remaining?

I have heard some people suggest that such a patient could then be referred to a psychiatrist or an ATAPS team. Nevertheless, patients really dislike having to repeat their entire story from the beginning with another professional. In addition, psychologists are experts on psychotherapy. PTSD requires a particular form of psychotherapy known as exposure therapy. Psychologists developed such approaches and are uniquely trained to deliver such interventions. Therefore, referral to a psychiatrist does not guarantee that a patient will receive psychotherapy.

I could give you 10,000 reasons why cutting psychologists Medicare is a bad idea. Nevertheless, please believe me that as a psychologist who works on the ground these cuts will lead to worse outcomes for mental health patients. Many of the critics of the Better Access program have never actually stepped foot into a psychology practice. In government, I thought it was unfashionable to dictate ideas from the top down? It really seems that psychologists' opinions have been ignored in this discussion.

I strongly recommend that the committee members visit a private practice psychology clinic during their inquiry. If you do, you will see highly dedicated and caring clinicians delivering effective treatments that reduce the suffering of

everyday Australians. This wonderful model of psychotherapy delivery is in jeopardy with these changes. I urge you to visit one of these sites.

One last thing: GPs are complaining about cuts to their pay. We are complaining about our ability to deliver treatment: a big difference.

Sincerely,

Chris Ludlow – Psychologist