

Inquiry into Commonwealth funding and administration of mental health services

Submission to: The Senate Community Affairs References Committee

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Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the very important issue of Commonwealth funding and administration of mental health services.

I have been a registered Psychologist since 1984, some 27 years, and have seen some wonderful growth and progress in the profession of Psychology over that time. Research into the various domains of our science and practice has continued to improve the knowledge and application of Psychological interventions across all important areas of people's lives.

I believe there is no doubt that the model of the medical profession provides our profession with a great benchmark in terms of the way forward, especially the aspect of generalist (GP) and Specialist. It is, and has been for some time, necessary for the Psychological profession to take that important step for a number of critical reasons:

- Mental health issues presenting to Psychologists are often very complex in their aetiology (Cause/s) and difficult to treat
- These issues are often having a very profound and prolonged negative effect for the person, family, friends or workmates (workplace) and community at large.
- The cost of these issues not being treated in the most efficacious manner can be an enormous resource drain from both a monetary, health and time perspective on many different parts of our society and institutions.

Therefore there does need to be a differentiation shown between Psychologists (Generalists) and Clinical Psychologists (Specialists) in the Medicare rebates scheme available as a result of the Commonwealth Funding and Administration of Mental Health Services. That is, the two-tiered rebate system must continue under this scheme.

Clinical Psychologists have at least 2 more years of specialised study than the Generalist psychologist, having had to achieve at a phenomenally high standard to be accepted into a Masters or Doctorate program in any of the major Universities throughout Australia. They are then required to continue to undertake a higher and far more specialised professional development program than the generalist as well.

I feel the following 'medical' example is just as applicable to Psychology and just as important as both a person's physical and mental health are **crucial** to their wellbeing and costly to our community when not treated in the most appropriate and astute manner.

Example: If a person is suffering from what they believe to be symptoms of a virus then consultation and treatment with a General Practitioner is appropriate. The person may need rest or a course of medication and perhaps some blood tests to ensure it is only a virus. However if a person has a serious heart condition and needs an operation, then it is only appropriate that treatment is carried out by a properly trained and experienced cardiologist (Specialist). I believe the same must apply to the Psychological profession where people who have specific mental health disorders get to see and are treated by 'specialist' professionals with the appropriate training and experience. The general public must be protected in this manner as the ramification of a number of mental health disorders can be self harm and unfortunately death if not treated efficaciously. The need for specialisation will become even more necessary as research continues to uncover new and improved treatments and interventions for specific and often debilitating mental health disorders.

Unfortunately the arguments being put forward for a one tier model is regrettable and self serving on the part of people who do not meet the need for specialist status and Clinical College memberships. This is the same as arguing for a one tier model suits all in the physical health model containing GP's and Specialists, which of course is utterly ridiculous.

Mental Health services inclusive of assessment and treatment must continue to evolve for the benefit of society generally by adopting the two tier model now in place as part of the Commonwealth funding program for mental health services.

Yours Sincerely,

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