

Community Affairs, Committee (SEN)

Regarding the Senate Enquiry into the Funding of Mental Health

To those involved in the Senate Enquiry into the Funding of Mental Health,

I am writing to increase your awareness of the central role that Educational and Developmental Psychologists play in providing mental health services particularly to children, adolescents and their parents through the school network. This is a cost effective and pre-existing means of providing mental health services. I believe that our role is vastly under-recognised compared to the role of clinical psychologists in the community, and I believe that this is partly our fault as we have not been as coordinated/ persistent in representing ourselves politically. Therefore by writing to you I am taking a small step in promoting the very important role that Educational and Developmental Psychologists play in the community. I believe that Educational and Developmental Psychologists conduct excellent work in caring for the mental health of community members, and our positive, strengths-based focus (rather than the deficits-focus that is so prevalent amongst many mental health professionals) is crucial. I refer you to our website describing our role and areas of specialty:

http://www.groups.psychology.org.au/cedp/about_us/#specialisation

I am writing primarily to express my disagreement with the two-tiered rebate system for psychologists. The majority of psychologists are not "clinical" psychologists, and being a "clinical" psychologist does not mean that you are more experienced or effective. As a provisional psychologist in the final semester of the Master of Educational and Developmental Psychology program at the Queensland University of Technology, I intend to become an Educational and Developmental Psychologist - this is my area of passion. To achieve this title, I must complete a four-year undergraduate degree in psychology and a two-year Master's degree specialising in Educational and Developmental Psychology. Post-graduation, I must also complete a further year of supervised practice in this specialty area. By the end of my degree I will have obtained at least 1000 hours (with at least 400 hours consisting of direct contact) of working practically with children, adolescents, families and school staff to promote the wellbeing of students and their families. I am taught to work in a rigorously evidence-based manner, using pre- and post-assessments to identify difficulties and evaluate positive change in the students that I work with. I use evidence-based strategies for my interventions. Using these methods, I have observed great successes in the work that I do with students and families. I believe that my training has been invaluable in ensuring that I am a competent and effective mental health professional. In terms of workload and practicum work, **my training is equivalent to that of students completing a Master of Clinical Psychology degree** (who will eventually be known as "clinical psychologists"). Through choosing a supervisor who is a "clinical psychologist" once I graduate, I could easily meet the requirements to be titled a "clinical psychologist", but I believe that this is an unnecessary "hoop" to jump through in order to be eligible for a higher Medicare rebate. **Educational and developmental psychologists are better qualified than other psychologists and professionals at dealing with psychological matters pertaining to schools, education, students, and developmental issues of all ages, and should be recognised as such** through employment options and the Medicare rebate. The two-tiered rebate system implies to the general public that "clinical psychologists" are best equipped to deal with all psychological problems, and this is false. The two-tiered Medicare rebate system is a major disincentive to

become an Educational and Developmental Psychologist, which requires the same amount of training as clinical psychology.

I am also writing to express my concern about the lack of Educational and Developmental Psychologists in schools, especially Queensland state schools. Brisbane Catholic Education is a strong supporter of psychologists working in schools; unfortunately in the state school system, it appears that the emphasis on strong qualifications for assisting students with mental health/ circumstantial difficulties is comparatively lacking. These services are primarily provided by chaplains, who as far as I am aware require no qualifications for their position, and guidance officers, who are qualified teachers with two years of training in mental health issues (compared to at least six years of training for psychologists). I am not surprised that state schools are reporting increased difficulties in managing students' difficult behaviours and social-emotional wellbeing (e.g., an overview of current difficulties was reported by Tanya Chilcott in the Courier Mail in a front-page article entitled "SAVE OUR SCHOOLS - Principals plead for help over disturbed students").

Educational and developmental psychologists are capable of providing excellent frontline services to students, parents and school staff across a range of mental health, welfare, psycho-educational and developmental areas within schools. Increasingly, responsibility for managing students' difficult behaviour/ social and emotional wellbeing has defaulted to schools, and schools need to have adequately qualified professionals to competently and effectively handle these responsibilities. I believe that including more Educational and Developmental Psychologists in Australian state schools would be an excellent strategy to address the difficulties that state schools are now facing, rather than employing less experienced and less qualified individuals such as school chaplains and Guidance Officers, who do not have the specialised knowledge in assessment, intervention and behavioural management that psychologists possess. Effective early intervention will also reduce the number of older individuals suffering from mental health difficulties, which often become entrenched by adulthood.

I hope that these issues are considered and addressed in your enquiry into the funding of mental health.

Thank you and best wishes,