

To Senate Community Affairs Committee managing the inquiry into Commonwealth Funding and Administration of mental Health.

Firstly I would like to thank you for following through on the process of improving the mental health of Australians. I applaud what has been done thus far by the Federal Government in relation the mental health crisis facing the community.

However, often even with the best intentions unexpected consequences can result from Government action on important public matters, as such I make this brief submission to you to hopefully lend support to another way of improving mental health in Australia.

From the outset the question that needs to be addressed with some urgency, is how the Government and Parliament can more effectively improve the mental health of all Australians into the 21st Century. In the following paragraphs I hope reinforce the submission made to this inquiry by Dr Clive Jones and Mr Phillip Armstrong, who champion the concept of establishing a National Register of Mental Health Practitioners as means of expanding the pool of mental health practitioners in Australia, to help people who are suffering declining mental health.

Before considering a new approach to improving mental health there are four important points to consider.

1. Despite millions of dollars being poured into funding mental health services, many people, particularly those on low and middle incomes and those living in rural and regional Australia, do not have access to the mental health services they require. It is very difficult to know just how many people are slipping through the system and miss out on early intervention treatment which is crucial in the prevention of a mental disorder from developing.
2. In Australian society, there are many people who experience depression without suffering from a mental disorder. Similarly many are anxious without having an anxiety disorder. However these individuals are at risk of developing a chronic or acute disorder if not given access to early intervention services. Such individuals can be supported through such issues quickly and effectively via a trained and registered health practitioner, whereas those with diagnosable disorders would rightly be seen by their GP and psychologist/psychiatrist.
3. Since the introduction of the Better Access Initiative (BAI) in 2006, large sums of taxpayers' money have been spent on mental health services which funnel people into a

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particular pathway of treatment- this treatment may not be the most appropriate for their needs. In many cases the treatment that is provided is at a level far higher than necessary which has led to over servicing, cost blow outs and waiting lists. Appropriately one of the key points identified in the Fourth National Mental Health Plan, released in November 2009 by the Australian Health Minister's Conference, is the focus on the need for mental health policy to support "**Prevention and early intervention**".

4. There is clear evidence to show Therapy or Counselling Works. In the United Kingdom the National Health Service (NHS) has been delivering counselling services by registered counsellors or therapists to deliver counselling services in Primary Care for over 8 years. Such practitioners are able to offer 6 sessions against the NHS with over 50% of medical practices in Britain having a counselling service attached to them. These services are delivered by counsellors as opposed to psychologists and social workers with comparable registration requirements to ARCAP.

Accordingly I believe these points set the scene by what Jones and Armstrong allude to, that is more practitioners are needed to help tackle mental health issues in Australia. As they succinctly put it "primary mental care is not a one size fit all service" and data indicates there is evidence to suggest there is no difference in the success rate of treatment of mental health issues being offered by mental health practitioners groups (Counsellors, Social Workers, Psychotherapists, Psychologists) across society.

As Jones and Armstrong recommend forming a new register of mental health practitioners who possess a tired range of nationally recognised qualifications, who can provide appropriate services to a wide range of mental health issues will go along to ensuring Australians get the mental health support they need.

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission.

Yours Sincerely,

Grahame Smith