

I would like to make the following points with regard to the proposed reduction in the number of sessions provided by the *Better Access to Mental Health Care* (Better Access) program.

1. The proposed maximum number of sessions has been reduced to 6 with an additional 4 sessions in exceptional circumstances in any given 12 month period from the current 12 sessions an additional 6 sessions in exceptional circumstances in any given 12 month period.
2. The proposed reduction will result in an ineffectual program that will not deliver the results it currently achieves.
3. Forcing the consumer to be reviewed by their GP after 6 sessions is unrealistic and will result in the death of some sufferers of acute mental health conditions because they will discontinue their treatment rather than go through this process again.
4. The implicit assumption in the proposed changes is that sufferers of acute mental health conditions will act rationally and in their own best interests. This is a false assumption. Sufferers of mental health conditions, by definition, are not thinking and acting rationally.
5. I attempted suicide in 2009 and received the full 18 sessions. After the initial 6 sessions I was not capable of thinking and acting rationally. If I had been required to comply with the proposed GP review after the 6<sup>th</sup> session I would not be alive today.
6. A critical element in the success of the *Better Access* program is the counselling and behaviour therapy that consumers receive. To be effective, this treatment requires a minimum 12 treatments.
7. Research conducted by the Department of Health and Aging states that 15 to 20 sessions are required to achieve significant reductions in the severity of high incidence mental health conditions.
8. Treatment of mental health conditions with medication prescribed by a GP will only treat the acute symptoms. It does nothing to treat the lifetime of conditioned self destructive behaviours and thought processes that cause the acute symptoms. Only counselling and behaviour therapy treats these underlying causes.
9. To be effective the counselling and behaviour therapy needs a minimum 15 to 20 sessions.
10. The Department of Health's own audit and analysis of the *Better Access* program clearly states that the program in its current format has been overwhelmingly successful in delivering cost effective improvements in mental health.

I submit that the *Better Access* program should be maintained at its current level of 12 sessions with an additional 6 sessions in a 12 month period so that its effectiveness in successfully treating high incidence mental health conditions continues.

Yours sincerely