

Information on claims about the Australian Psychological Society made by the Australian Association of Psychologists inc.

Prepared for the Senate Inquiry into the administration of health practitioner registration by the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency – May 2011

The Australian Psychological Society (APS) notes that the Australian Association of Psychologists inc. (AAPi) has published inaccurate and misleading statements about the APS in its submission to the Senate Inquiry, and anticipates that this organisation will use its presentation to the Senate Inquiry to repeat the inaccurate claims about the APS. The APS therefore seeks the opportunity to rectify any misleading claims presented by tabling this brief document.

“Alliance” between the APS and the Psychology Board of Australia

The AAPi has persisted in claiming that there is an “alliance” between the Psychology Board of Australia and the APS.

- The APS does not have an alliance nor any formal relationship with the Psychology Board of Australia. In devising ‘grandfathering’ arrangements under transition to the new national registration scheme, the Psychology Board recognised the existing long-established protocols for recognition of specialist skills within the Australian psychology profession, identified as eligibility for membership of the specialist Colleges of the APS.
- As the result of this long-standing and profession-wide recognition of the APS Colleges, the APS was in a position to negotiate some of the details of how this recognition would be operationalised by the Psychology Board under the ‘grandfather’ arrangements.
- Far from being in an alliance, the APS has been very critical of a number of the requirements that have been stipulated by the Psychology Board and of the manner in which the national registration scheme has been implemented, and will continue to advocate for fair conditions for psychology practitioners under the scheme.

“Unendorsed” practitioners

The AAPi claims that, as the result of national registration, psychology practitioners have become “unendorsed” – this suggests that all practitioners registered prior to the new scheme were operating as specialist psychologists and should be recognised as such by endorsement. Again, the APS is implicated in this arrangements in an “unseemly alliance” with the Psychology Board to enable psychologists to obtain endorsement by meeting postgraduate academic qualifications.

- This claim discounts any recognition that postgraduate qualifications provide the additional skills, knowledge and training to qualify as a specialist psychologist.
- The claim also discounts the long-established mechanism for recognition of specialists within the Australian psychology profession according to membership of APS specialist Colleges, a practice similar to that undertaken by the Medical Board to recognise medical specialist according to College membership.

Professional development requirements for psychologists providing Medicare services under the Better Access initiative

The AAPi claims that the requirement for practitioners who provide Focused Psychological Strategies (FPS) Medicare items under Better Access to undertake mandatory continuing professional development (CPD) is an APS requirement, rather than one stipulated by Medicare, and that somehow this has created a “closed shop” arrangement.

- The Australian Government announced in the 2009 Federal Budget that CPD requirements would be introduced for FPS providers, as per the following extract from the Expense Measures for the 2009-2010 Federal Budget.

Medicare Benefits Schedule - Better Access Initiative - continuing professional development

The Government will introduce additional mandatory mental health training requirements for general psychologists, social workers and occupational therapists, under the Better Access to Psychiatrists, Psychologists and GPs through the MBS initiative. In addition, one-off support payments of \$200 will be provided to allied health professionals providing mental health services in rural areas to assist them in undertaking the new training requirements.

Allied mental health professionals who do not undertake the required professional development will not be able to access Medicare items after 30 June 2011. This will help ensure high-quality services to patients as providers will be required to maintain their skills in order to continue to provide services eligible for the Medicare rebate. It is estimated that 80 per cent of all allied health professionals who currently access these items have already completed the required training.

- No further details on the exact requirements were provided in the Budget at the time, but details of CPD requirements were finalised by the Department of Health and Ageing in late 2010. The APS provided its members with this information as soon as it was available. It has not been possible for the APS to alert non-APS psychologists (nor is it the APS' responsibility), as Medicare Australia will not release contact details of Medicare providers due to privacy constraints – Medicare Australia is the only organisation that can communicate directly with Medicare providers.

Conflicts of interest in relation to clinical psychology Medicare provider accreditation

The AAPi claims that the APS has a conflict of interest in administering the accreditation of clinical psychology Medicare providers, warranting investigation by the Productivity Commission.

- In 2006 when the Better Access initiative was introduced by the Australian Government, eligibility for the higher Medicare rebate was defined and enshrined in legislation as being eligible for membership of the APS College of Clinical Psychologists.
- At that time, the APS was contracted by the Australian Government to assess eligibility of applicants for membership of the APS Clinical College, as no organisation other than the APS could be in a position to assess the membership requirements of an APS College.
- Since the introduction of the national registration scheme and arrangements for recognition of specialist psychologists through area of practice endorsement, the Psychology Board has been able to provide clinical psychology Medicare accreditation of psychologists who are eligible for area of practice endorsement in clinical psychology.

Senate F&PA Committee

Tabled Document

Inquiry: Administration of health practitioner registration by AHPRA

Date/Time: 4/5/11 3.20pm

Witness Name: Professor Lyn Littlefield, Executive Director

Organisation: The Australian Psychological Society