

Brief Submission to the Senate Inquiry into COVID-19:

Mental health consumers urgently need additional psychology sessions during the COVID-19 pandemic

As a clinical psychologist I want to raise the urgent need for an increase in the number of Medicare-funded psychology sessions per year from 10 to 20. We are finding that some psychology clients are spacing out their sessions, as they know they will not be able to afford to pay for session privately, even at a reduced fee, after they have completed their 10 psychology sessions. For the clients who had already used up many of those rebated sessions before the impact of COVID-19 hit, the situation is even more problematic.

The increased need for social and emotional support is likely to see a significant change in the trends around the number of sessions used by mental health consumers under the Medicare system, and the government needs to acknowledge and prepare for this. **The approval of more sessions at this early stage of the game would assist in reducing anxiety about continuity of care, and would mean that treatment can continue at a therapeutic “dose”, rather than practitioners and patients needing to ration services when only 10 sessions are allowed.**

One of the biggest issues is increased risk of suicide, particularly in people with a history of complex trauma. I understand that there has been a significant reduction in mental health presentations in Emergency Departments. We need to level up in-the-home care and treatment for this group by increasing access and availability of care, or we will see an increase in suicide risk.

It is imperative that the annual session limit for psychology services be increased from 10 to 20 sessions and we are hopeful that the government will take decisive action in this regard, particularly given that the recommendation to increase the number of available psychology sessions per year has been made many times before, including as part of the MBS review that was conducted prior to the pandemic.

I will provide a more in-depth submission in future regarding the mental health impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, but I am providing this brief submission now as I want to ensure that this item is addressed as a matter of absolute urgency.



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