

13 July 2011

Dear Sir

I write to object to the Government's proposal to cut funding for clinical psychologist fees under the Better Access Initiative.

I speak from family experience of the benefits of the Medicare allowance for these fees. My adult son has for many years been handicapped by schizophrenia. His condition is severe but fortunately is not so extreme that he has required hospitalization or psychiatric treatment.

Since the start of the scheme in 2006 has received enormous help from a consulting psychologist whom he has attended on a regular basis. He continues that attendance. Under the guidance and with the encouragement of the psychologist has learned to manage the more debilitating aspects of his disability. The measure of self-confidence that he has gained has improved considerably his ability to make and maintain social connections with family members and others.

Originally, and for nearly 20 years, 's schizophrenia was controlled almost entirely with medication. Counseling from a clinical psychologist from 2006 onwards worked a miraculous improvement in the quality of his life.

has no income other than the pension. Prior to 2006 he could not afford to obtain professional help from a clinical psychologist with the frequency that his condition required. I was especially thankful that he was able to consult a clinical psychologist. A general psychologist lacks the skill, training and special expertise of a clinical psychologist and I doubt would have achieved the same success had he attended a psychologist of the former kind.

Although J 's symptoms are now less severe I expect that he will need professional help always.

I urge the Senate Committee to reject the Government's proposed cuts to the allowances for clinical psychology. A reduction from 18 to 10 in the number of sessions with a clinical psychologist that qualify for financial assistance will severely disadvantage my son, as I expect that in any year he will need at least the minimum number. I am aware of the provision for sessions beyond 10 but I doubt 's condition would constitute a serious mental health disorder for the purpose of that extra entitlement.

I made this submission on behalf of my son , and in doing so I speak for all his family, but I imagine that hundreds, if not thousands, of Australians are in a similar situation, and I wish to speak for them also.

Counseling with a clinical psychologist is an effective way of helping people with schizophrenia to manage their symptoms and thus enhance their enjoyment of life. The

result is immensely rewarding both for the individual and for his or her family and friends. It must not be allowed to be jeopardised by the cuts which the government threatens.