

Minority Report

Australian Labor Party

It is the view of Labor Senators that while Better Access is a good program for those it is reaching, it is still not servicing hard to reach groups like young people, men, people living in rural and remote regions, Indigenous Australians and people living in areas of high socio economic disadvantage.

The Better Access evaluation showed that people on lower incomes received both significantly less services and funding under Better Access than those on higher incomes. The evaluation also showed that almost three-quarters of people who access services used between one and six sessions a year meaning that the vast majority (87 per cent) of people will therefore be unaffected by this change.

The Better Access initiative was introduced to address low treatment rates for high prevalence mental disorders such as depression and anxiety – particularly presentations of mild to moderate severity where short term evidence based support is most likely to be useful.

While some people with more complex or intensive care needs may benefit from psychological interventions under Better Access, the initiative was not designed to provide intensive, ongoing therapy for people with severe, ongoing illness.

It is important that people get the right care for their needs. People who currently receive more than ten allied mental health services under Better Access are likely to be patients with more complex needs and would be better suited for referral to more appropriate mental health services. GPs can continue to refer those people with more severe ongoing mental disorders to Medicare subsidised consultant psychiatrist services, where 50 sessions can be provided per year, or state/territory specialised mental health services.

It is also important to note that Better Access will continue to be a growth program with more than \$4 billion projected to be spent over the next five years.

The changes being implemented by the Government will achieve a better balance between the Medicare fee based model provided through Better Access and the low to no cost services directly targeted to hard to reach groups through ATAPS.

This measure will see funding shifted from Better Access to ensure a doubling of the services currently provided through ATAPS and to a range of other mental health services including those provided online, for young people and for people with severe and debilitating mental illness.

Every dollar redirected from Better Access, as part of these measures, will be re-invested into other and new mental health services targeting some of the most disadvantaged people in our community.

Senator Claire Moore

Queensland

Senator Carol Brown

Tasmania

Senator Mark Furner

Queensland