

**Senate Community Affairs Committee**

**ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE**

**HEALTH PORTFOLIO**

**Budget Estimates 2017 - 2018, 29 & 30 May 2017**

**Ref No:** SQ17-000695

**OUTCOME:** 4 - Individual Health Benefits

**Topic:** Medicare Better Access

**Type of Question:** Written Question on Notice

**Senator:** Reynolds, Linda

**Question:**

- a) Could you please explain the Medicare Better Access to Psychiatrists, Psychologists and GPs through the MBS (Better Access) Initiative and the 'stepped care model', particular in relation to the online aspect of the initiative?
- b) What process did the Department undertake in implementing this process?

**Answer:**

- a) The *Better Access to Psychiatrists, Psychologists and General Practitioners through the Medicare Benefits Schedule MBS* (Better Access) initiative aims to improve outcomes for people with a clinically-diagnosed mental disorder through evidence-based treatment. Under this initiative, Medicare rebates are available to patients for selected mental health services provided by general practitioners (GPs), psychiatrists, psychologists (clinical and registered) and eligible social workers and occupational therapists.

Medicare rebates are available for up to ten individual and ten group allied mental health services per calendar year to patients with an assessed mental disorder who are referred by:

- A GP managing the patient under a GP Mental Health Treatment Plan;
- Under a referred psychiatrist assessment and management plan; or
- A psychiatrist or paediatrician.

A key element of the Australian Government's Mental Health Reform is moving from the 'one size fits all', coarsely targeted approach to mental health service delivery in primary care to a new stepped care arrangement that will retarget the continuum of services to match consumer need and make optimal use of workforce and technology. Please refer to SQ17-000696 for a full description of the stepped care model.

In terms of the online or telehealth measure of the Better Access initiative, the Australian Government has announced funding of \$9 million over four years from 2017-18 to improve access to mental health treatment services for people in rural, remote and very remote locations. From 1 November 2017, eligible patients with a

Mental Health Treatment Plan will be able to claim rebates for video consultations through the Better Access initiative. The changes announced would allow up to seven of ten Better Access mental health consultations to be provided through online channels, with one of the first four sessions required to be delivered through a face-to-face consultation to facilitate a personal connection with the mental health professional. Relevant services can be delivered by clinical psychologists, registered psychologists, occupational therapists and social workers.

- b) The online telehealth component of the Better Access initiative was a 2017-18 Budget measure and will be implemented by 1 November 2017. The Department of Health will conduct targeted consultation with identified stakeholders prior to implementation.