

## Senate Community Affairs Committee

### ANSWERS TO ESTIMATES QUESTIONS ON NOTICE

#### HEALTH PORTFOLIO

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

Ref No: SQ17-000881

**OUTCOME:** 2 - Health Access and Support Services

**Topic:** 2017 - 18 Budget Initiatives

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

**Senator:** O'Neill, Deborah

**Question:**

Medicare rebate freeze

In relation to the Medicare rebate freeze specifically delivered by psychologists under Better Access and the GP rebate for a mental health plan can the Department confirm they are both part of the Government's rebate freeze? If yes, when will the current rebate freeze be lifted for these item numbers? How many people a year access services under these Medicare services? How many people a year are currently bulk-billed under these Medicare services?

**Answer:**

- Mental health service items on the Medicare Benefits Schedule will be indexed from:
  - 1 July 2018 for mental health services as part of a standard GP consultation;
  - 1 July 2018 for a mental health service from a consultant psychiatrist;
  - 1 July 2019 for a mental health service from an allied health professional, such as a psychologist, occupational therapist or social worker; and
  - 1 July 2020 for a GP service to establish or review a mental health treatment plan or a GP mental health consultation.
- Mental health patients will also benefit from the increased GP bulk-billing incentive from 1 July 2017, which encourages GPs to bulk-bill non-referred attendances.

**Table1: Number of people accessing Better Access in 2015-16**

Financial Year / Better Access service type	Patients
<b>Allied Mental Health including GP Focused Psychological Strategies</b> (Clinical Psychologists, General Psychologists, Occupational Therapists, Social Workers)	1,101,643
<b>GP services</b> (Mental Health Treatment Plans, MHTP Reviews and mental health Consultations)	1,840,341
<b>Psychiatry</b> (Referred patient assessment and Management, Review of referred patient, consultation of new patient)	158,808
<b>Total</b>	2,117,485

- The bulk-billing rate is based on the percentage of services, not the number of patients bulk-billed.
- The Department of Health does not routinely compile statistics showing patient bulk billing patterns. National bulk-billing patterns for patients accessing GP non-referred attendances have been generated and were provided under SQ16-000691 and SQ17-000322.
- The Department is unable to provide patient bulk billing patterns for Better Access services as the considerable work involved would require a significant diversion of resources from other departmental operations.